



Young People, Inequality and Violence during the COVID-19 lockdown in Uganda

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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
List of Tables.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
PART I.....	8
Introduction.....	8
1.1. Chronology of COVID-19 and lockdown measures in Uganda.....	9
2. Gendered Effects of Violence against Children and Young People in epidemics.	11
3. Methodology.....	13
3.1. Context of Luwero	14
PART II.....	16
4. Effects on Livelihoods.....	16
5. Compound Effects of School Closures and Loss of Livelihoods.....	18
5.1. Distance Learning	20
6. Family Relationships	21
7. Young People’s Social Spaces and Social Lives.....	24
7.1. Intimate Partner Relationships.....	25
8. Community Life during Lockdown.....	26
8.1. Effects of Lockdown on Domestic Violence and Crime in Communities.....	27
8.2. Law and Enforcement of Curfew and Lockdown Measures	29
8.3. Support from Government	31
9. Effects on Mobility	32
10. Effects on Health.....	33
Conclusion	36
Recommendations	38
Bibliography.....	39

List of Tables

Table 1: COVID-19 in Uganda	9
Table 2: Sam’s narrative on effects on livelihoods	16
Table 3: Adikini’s narrative on effects on livelihoods	17
Table 4: Tom’s narrative on compound effects of school closures and loss of livelihoods	19
Table 5: Kato’s narrative on family relationships	21
Table 6: Anna’s narrative on family relationships	23
Table 7: Paul on the difficulties of seeing his girlfriend during lockdown	25
Table 8: Sam's account of domestic violence in his community	27
Table 9: Examples of theft in communities.....	28
Table 10: Anna on girls’ confinement at home	28
Table 11: Tom's experience of law and enforcement during the COVID-19 lockdown.....	29
Table 12: Paul's experience of law and enforcement during the COVID-19 lockdown.....	30
Table 13: Kato's experience of law and enforcement during the COVID-19 lockdown	31
Table 14: Reasons for migrating to rural areas	32
Table 15: Adikini's experience of restriction on movement.....	34

Executive Summary

While media reports and anecdotal evidence abound globally on the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and children, including gender-based violence, rigorous, in-depth studies are needed to shed light on young peoples' experiences, particularly in low income settings, to inform policy and practice responses. In March, the Ugandan government introduced stringent lockdown measures, closing schools and businesses, banning public gatherings, restricting road and rail travel, and introducing a night-time curfew.

This working paper reports findings from a qualitative study on **how response measures during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda have affected the lives of adolescent young people**. The study was conducted as part of a broader research project: Contexts of Violence in Adolescence Cohort Study (CoVAC) (Devries *et al.*, 2020), with partners from UCL Institute of Education, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Raising Voices, and the Medical Research Council/Uganda Virus Research Institute and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, funded by the Medical Research Council. Our analysis focuses on data from mobile phone interviews with 34 young Ugandans (mainly aged 16-19 years). This data are contextualized within longitudinal biographical narratives of these young people that have been developed since 2018 and which helped us to illuminate the significance of the crisis in their everyday lives. Data analysis paid attention to the effects on intersecting inequalities, notably in relation to gender and socio-economic status, and on violence. We conceptualise violence as multi-dimensional, meaning not just acts of physical, sexual and emotional force, but also having roots in norms and discourses, and in structural violence of inequitable and unjust socio-economic and political systems and institutions.

The analysis showed how effects on young people of the lockdown varied according to *gender, location, mobility* and *socio-economic* background, amplifying inequalities and creating the conditions for multiple forms of violence. **Key findings** include the following:

1. For many of the young people interviewed, the most significant effects of the lockdown on their lives related to **loss of livelihoods**, leaving many families without financial means to purchase basic goods like sugar, salt or soap. For some, movement of family members to rural or peri-urban communities from the city at the start of lockdown increased pressures on household resources as opportunities for income generation were limited. The effects of loss of income were most marked among those who were most disadvantaged, including young women and men already out of school before the lockdown, demonstrating how the lockdown could amplify existing inequalities.
2. The young people interviewed who were still enrolled in school were feeling the **loss of education**. For many of them, the costs associated with secondary schooling were already hard to bear, and the school closures may lower their chances of completing secondary school. With many of them due to take public examinations later in the year, there was anxiety about payments needed when schools reopen, whether they could afford repeating years if they fail or are unable to retake exams, and whether the loss of family income during the crisis would stop them from being able to return to school. Location and socio-economic background mattered when it came to making use of the online learning resources provided by the government and schools, reinforcing already existing structural inequalities, as only very few had the resources needed to access the materials or had the time to engage with them. Closures of vocational training institutions dashed the hopes of some out of school young people.
3. With households facing multiple stresses under lockdown, some of the young people interviewed spoke of strains on **family relationships**, with occasional outbreaks of violence and abuse. For young people already suffering loss of schooling and income, the psychological burden of breakdowns in relations in the home was considerable. For some of

the other young people interviewed, family members were key sources of support, including extended family members providing practical support in the form of money, food or transport.

4. **Gender** influenced experiences of the lockdown in several ways. Some young people perceived domestic violence to have increased in their communities, particularly affecting women and girls, and aggravated by men's loss of income and employment. With boys more likely to be in paid work, whether or not they are enrolled in school, the lockdown had marked effects on their income generation capacity, affecting masculine identities and relationships. Girls who were already out of school before lockdown also lost their livelihoods, with two young mothers, for example, struggling to support their children. While some reported that economic hardship caused by the lockdown had driven young women in their communities to engage in sex for money or material goods, others felt that men's reduced incomes and restrictions on movement had reduced transactional sex.
5. The lockdown has affected the **social lives** of young people, with fewer opportunities to meet up or stay in touch with friends. This was particularly marked among girls, who remained (more than ever) confined to their homes, and some, who had moved from urban to rural communities during the lockdown, spoke of loneliness and missing the support of friends. Boys were more able to maintain contact with their friends than girls, as they not only had more access to mobile phones, but in some instances still found ways to meet up with their friends in community settings. **Intimate partner relationships** were also affected, with the lockdown constraining opportunities to meet up, and in some cases putting pressure on relationships of the young people that led to break-ups. Some young people interviewed reported instances in their communities of economic pressures and conflict in family homes during the lockdown leading girls to move to live with their boyfriends.
6. Young people interviewed witnessed several forms of **community violence**, including fights and thefts, that they associated with economic shocks and lockdown conditions. Some also spoke of beatings and misconduct by police and public authorities in charge of enforcing lockdown measures, deepening their existing mistrust in public authorities.
7. **Restrictions on movement**, including public transport, affected families' income, at times restricting access to food, and preventing some young people from being able to see close family members. Travel restrictions also hindered access to **health** care services, with additional costs for health care and public transport during lockdown amplifying inequalities in access to much needed services.

Despite the depth of concerns that these findings show, within the narratives of the young people interviewed for this study, there was also a remarkable sense of endurance and self-reliance among families facing multiple pressures under lockdown. However, at the time of the interviews, there were few examples of young people receiving governmental support. This suggests that the diversity of effects of the crisis on young people, which these findings highlight, need much more careful consideration so that the policy and practice implications for government and non-governmental organisations at national, regional and local level are understood and taken forward.

Recommendations

These key findings have a number of implications for policy-makers, NGOs and international development partners/agencies:

- **Tailored approaches are needed**, recognising the diverse effects of lockdowns according to young people's gender, age, socio-economic status, and location (rural, peri-urban and urban).
- **Provide additional economic support:** In low income settings governments could consider some form of immediate cash transfer, renewable if the pandemic persists.
- **Schools as crucial spaces** need additional resources to help young people return when schools reopen. Along with waiving fees/levies, governments could consider reducing drop-out through providing free school meals, and additional subsidies for those who are at a high risk of being unable to continue their studies due to the combined effects of schooling costs and economic insecurity caused by COVID-19.
- **Support learning** during periods of full/partial school closures through partnerships with local agencies and community-based organisations to facilitate radio, TV or internet based learning spaces. Explore the feasibility and safety on in-person gatherings, including engaging teachers to support locally organised, small learning groups of children; and the potential for outdoors teaching/learning.
- **Invest in violence prevention at school, community and household levels:** During lockdowns, existing services for reporting, referral, tracking and response, including free child and domestic violence helplines, and facilities for women and children to move if in danger, need to be strengthened, with additional mechanisms to address possible increases in violence. Once lockdown eases, additional investment is needed to support school and community staff with how to help children who may have experienced violence during school closures, including gender-sensitive, youth- and child-focused spaces for young people to speak out in schools and in communities.
- **Health and welfare services need to be free and accessible:** This includes ensuring the availability of free and safe public transport to health and welfare facilities during lockdowns, and gender-sensitive support for mental health and well-being, including young people's feelings of fear, loneliness, anxiety, distress and loss of self-esteem that may be exacerbated by the compounding effects of lockdown measures. To avoid conflict with public authorities when movement is restricted, additional training for police may be needed to protect people's basic and civic rights during lockdowns.

PART I

Introduction

After the first COVID-19 case was officially confirmed in Uganda on the 22nd of March 2020, the government put in place some of Africa's most stringent nationwide lockdown measures¹. Schools and businesses were closed, public gatherings banned, road and rail travel restricted, and a night-time curfew introduced. The lockdown was slightly eased in May with the reopening of restaurants, shops and factories, but at the time of writing this paper schools remained closed. The long-term impacts of the lockdown measures on people's social and economic status, education, health and general wellbeing remain to be seen. With this working paper we report study findings that shed light on the immediate and often severe effects on young people and their families of the early stages of the pandemic in Uganda (from end of March until end of June 2020); affecting their *livelihoods, education, family relationships, social life, communities, mobility* and at times *health*. These findings form part of a larger collaborative mixed-methods cohort study, CoVAC (Contexts of Violence in Adolescence Cohort Study) that is still ongoing.

Globally, evidence has been emerging from many countries that the costs of the COVID-19 pandemic fall disproportionately on more vulnerable segments of societies, and that the pandemic may be widening levels of income, racial and gender inequality (Nassif-Pires *et al.*, 2020). COVID-19 response measures are widely reported in popular media to have resulted in increases in domestic violence, and telephone helplines in several countries are reporting increased call volumes. However, there is as yet little robust research evidence of the social impacts of the pandemic and associated responses to address it. Evidence is vitally needed on the effects of COVID-19 on young people, inequalities and violence in low income settings.

Already before the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 55.1% of all Ugandans lived in poverty.² For Lubaale (2019), the root causes of poverty in Uganda manifest, to varying degrees, in a complex web of ethical, ecological, historical, social, economic and political factors. An estimated 75.2% of Uganda's entire population (45.7 million) is under the age of 30 (National Population Council, 2018, p. 34-35), out of which 47% are younger than 15 years.³ Uganda has the second youngest population in the world (after Niger), among whom there are very high levels of unemployment and underemployment.⁴ As is the case in a number of African countries, young people's political voice is also often marginalised and under-represented so that they occupy a "disadvantaged status" across the political landscape with a range of consequences for the exercising of their rights as citizens (Ojok and Acol, 2017). The education sector, as well as government and international programmes to reduce youth unemployment have, thus far, struggled and faced many challenges to address the educational needs of youth (Datzberger, 2018). In Uganda, national data shows 58% of women have experienced intimate partner violence, with the majority of first experiences occurring in 15-24 year

¹ See: <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/coronavirus-government-response-tracker>, accessed 08 September 2020

² See: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/UGA>, accessed 08 September 2020.

³ See: <https://www.prb.org/international/geography/uganda>, accessed 08 September 2020.

⁴ For many, employment in Uganda tends to be informal and seasonal with differences urban, peri-urban and rural areas. That is why the exact estimates on youth unemployment rates vary tremendously by source, depending on the definitions of both unemployment and youth, ranging from 4.9% (according to the Government of Uganda) to 63% (Action Aid Uganda 2012) or even 83% (African Development Bank, see: Soucat *et al.* 2013, p. 3). According to the ILO (International Labor Organisation) statistics database the rate of unemployment among youth in Uganda in 2017 was 33.5%. See: https://ilostat.ilo.org/?locale=en&MBI_ID=20&adf_ctrl-state=p0a188ggy_4&_afLoop=3975531474243930&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#!%40%40%3F_afWindowId%3Dnull%26locale%3Den%26_afLoop%3D3975531474243930%26MBI_ID%3D20%26_afWindowMode%3D0%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dssjs4hgjm_21.

olds (Peterman, Bleck and Palermo, 2015). 35% of 18-24 year old girls and 17% of boys report childhood sexual violence nationally (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, 2018).

Against this backdrop, we are interested in **how the emergency measures in the wake of COVID-19 in Uganda have affected female and male adolescents during the first months of the pandemic**. We draw on qualitative data collected through mobile phone interviews with 18 girls and 16 boys, mainly aged 16-19 years, during May-June 2020. Our analysis situates this data within their broader life narratives, which we have been learning about through our qualitative longitudinal study since 2018. Our aim is to shed light on the everyday challenges they have faced since the early stages of the pandemic. More broadly, we hope to contribute to knowledge about the effects of lockdowns on inequalities and violence in the lives of young people in low income settings, and to provide evidence from young people that can inform future policy responses to crises, including COVID-19.

1.1. Chronology of COVID-19 and lockdown measures in Uganda

Table 1: COVID-19 in Uganda	
Date	Chronology of events till early September 2020
20 Jan 2020	- Screening starts of all passengers arriving at Entebbe Airport
30 Jan 2020	- WHO declares COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency
19 Feb 2020	- The Ugandan MoH (Ministry of Health) issues detailed guidelines on how to prevent the virus
21 Feb 2020	- Mandatory screening and testing at Malaba and Busia border points to Kenya
11 Mar 2020	- WHO declares COVID-19 as a pandemic. Ugandan MoH restricts travels and puts quarantine on arrivals from 16 high risk countries including US & UK
13 Mar 2020	- MoH releases guidelines for schools
18 Mar 2020	- Suspension of public gatherings including places of worship, pubs, weddings, music shows, rallies, cultural and political meetings. All incoming and outgoing travel to or through specified highly affected countries is banned – except for Ugandans returning home. All returning Ugandans must undergo mandatory quarantine
20 Mar 2020	- Closure of all education institutions.
22 Mar 2020	- First case of COVID19 in Uganda reported. - All in-coming passengers into Uganda banned, whether by air, land or water. - Closure of Entebbe International Airport
25 Mar 2020	- Suspension of public transport. - Only sale of essential commodities allowed.
30 Mar 2020	- Restrictions on movement – including private vehicles. - Nationwide curfew declared from 7pm to 6:30am - Closure of all shopping malls, arcades, hardware shops, businesses selling non-food items, saloons, lodges and garages. Gatherings of more than 5 people are banned. - Only essential workers are allowed to go to work.

14 Apr 2020	- Lockdown extended for another 21 days
04 May 2020	- Tested a total of 38,845 persons so far. 89 confirmed cases, 55 recovered and no reported deaths. - Wholesalers, hardware shops, garages, metal and wood workshops, insurance providers, law society, restaurants and warehouses, allowed to re-open while observing SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures). All other measures still effective.
18 May 2020	- Shops selling general merchandize allowed to open provided they are not in shopping malls, arcades and food markets. - Public transport permitted again, but only allowed to carry half of capacity and not in the 42 boarder districts. Boda bodas still not allowed to carry passengers. - Food restaurants reopen with SOPs and private vehicles allowed to carry 3 people including the driver.
21 Jul 2020	- Total of 110 arcades to open with SOPs (e.g.: taking records of clients). Salons to open with SOPs. Curfew shifted from 7pm to 9pm up to 5:30am
27 Jul 2020	- Boda bodas allowed to carry passengers again but only with helmet and mask. They have to keep record of clients and stop at 6 pm.
1 Sep 2020	- National COVID-19 Taskforce to consider reopening of schools and other remaining sectors
20 Sep 2020	- The president of Uganda announced that schools will reopen for candidates in Senior 4 (S4) and finalists in Senior 6 (S6) on 15 th October 2020. The Ministry of Education will communicate in January 2021 when schools will reopen for all other students.
<p>Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Republic of Uganda, COVID-19 Response Infor Hub (see: https://covid19.gou.go.ug/, last accessed 1 September 2020) - Uganda Ministry of Health COVID-19 updates (see: https://www.health.go.ug/covid/, last accessed 1 September 2020) - The East African: Uganda orders closure of schools and bans public gatherings. 18 March 2020 (see: https://www.theeastafican.co.ke/news/ea/Museveni-orders-closure-of-schools/4552908-5495920-g6x714/index.html, last accessed 1 September 2020) - The Independent: Entebbe Airport gears up for re-opening, 19 August 2020 (see: https://www.independent.co.ug/entebbe-airport-gears-up-for-re-opening/, last accessed 1 September 2020) - Daily Monitor: Museveni orders taskforce to consider opening schools. 31 August 2020 (see: https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Museveni-orders-taskforce-schools-Nabakooba-candidates-/688334-5616948-9byq8e/index.html, last accessed 1 September 2020). - REUTERS: Uganda starts easing one of Africa's strictest lockdowns. 5 May 2020 (see: https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-uganda/uganda-starts-easing-one-of-africas-strictest-lockdowns-idUSL8N2CN251, last accessed 1 September 2020). - The World: After months without work, Uganda's boda boda drivers hit the road. 3 August 2020 (see: https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-08-03/after-months-without-work-uganda-s-boda-boda-drivers-hit-road, last accessed 1 September 2020) - The Observer, Full Speech from President Museveni (see: https://observer.ug/news/headlines/66652-full-speech-museveni-reopens-airport-schools-for-candidates, last accessed 28 September 2020) 	

2. Gendered Effects of Violence against Children and Young People in epidemics.

There is limited research evidence on the effects of epidemics on young people's lives and how they are gendered. This mainly stems from the fact that collecting data during crises is immensely challenging, with face to face interviewing often prohibited or too dangerous. Violence reporting through official channels sometimes drops, reflecting reduced access to services and ineffective reporting systems, making it difficult to get a clear picture of what is actually happening (UNDP Sierra Leone and Irish Aid, 2015; Onyango *et al.*, 2019). Use of phones or computers for data collection excludes those without access to technology, and poses ethical risks as we discuss further (see section 3). Studies rely on collecting data retrospectively, with evidence dependent on recall (Stark and Ager, 2011; Amnesty International, 2015; Risso-Gill and Finnegan, 2015), and there is a clear need for 'live' studies that engage with young people's perspectives on the current crisis and response measures.

A growing body of evidence indicates that women and adolescent girls in particular face higher risk of sexual abuse, rape or intimate partner violence (IPV) during crises and epidemics (Peterman *et al.*, 2020), though, as one systematic review found, robust evidence on prevalence of gender-based violence in complex emergencies is lacking (Stark and Ager, 2011). Research evidence on the effects of COVID-19 in developing countries is beginning to trickle in, with a multi-country survey of caregivers and children conducted by Save the Children reporting that emergency measures may have exacerbated vulnerability to violence in homes, with poorest households, households with disabilities, female headed-households and girls being the hardest hit (Edwards, 2020)⁵. A study of sexual violence in the wake of COVID-19 in Kenya found that emergency measures have exacerbated vulnerability of children, particularly girls, to sexual violence by non-stranger perpetrators, including neighbours (Flowe *et al.*, 2020).

Much of our current knowledge comes from work conducted in West Africa in the context of the Ebola crisis (2014-2016), which has drawn attention to the gendered effects on women and girls. O'Brien and Tolosa (2016) argue that patriarchal gender regimes in place, which reinforced inequality and discrimination against women, led to women being disproportionately affected during the epidemic by multi-level violence, resulting in physical, psychological, sexual and economic harm (see also Onyango *et al.*, 2019). In Sierra Leone, a study combining desk review, stakeholder interviews and focus groups with young women and men, reported both increases in domestic violence, and reduced service provision for survivors (UNDP Sierra Leone and Irish Aid, 2015). Harman (2016) highlights that the role of women in health systems in West Africa has been by and large invisible in regard to their various responsibilities in formal and informal care. Hence she harshly critiques the lack of 'gender' as an analytical lens in the Ebola emergency. In a study of gendered stigma during the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, Minor (2017) draws attention to global structures of inequality and impoverishment that put pressure on gendered roles of affected women and men, in ways that produced barriers to action to prevent or respond effectively. While non-compliance with control measures at community level was often attributed to cultural norms, and local communities stigmatised in national and international discourse, she argues that the ineffectiveness of control measures in some communities was due to weak, under-resourced public health systems and lack of economic support from national governments and the international community. The gendered effects impacted on men, as well as women, with, according to Minor, frustration, distrust and fear leading sporadically to violence by men unable to fulfil their masculine role as provider.

⁵ For Save the Children's Global Research Series on the impact of Covid-19 on children's lives, see also: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/hidden-impact-covid-19-children-global-research-series>, accessed 13 September 2020.

Several studies drew attention to the effects of extended school closures. A study with children in focus groups in Sierra Leone reported a direct link between school closures and increases of child labour and exploitation, exposure to violence in the home and community, and teenage pregnancy (Risso-Gill and Finnegan, 2015). Moreover, children described taking on new roles and responsibilities to supplement household income, with concerns expressed by girls about risks of assault or rape when they went to collect water, or travelled long distances to trade in other villages. Girls and boys were deeply concerned about the impact school closures could have on their futures. These fears appear to have been well founded as extended school closures because of Ebola propelled early school-work transitions, with children not returning to school when schools reopened because of no longer being able to pay for school fees, fears that the disease may return, being considered too old to go back to school or the inaccessibility of school buildings that had fallen into disrepair during the epidemic (ibid). Studies also reported that extended school closures during the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone were associated in some communities with increases in adolescent pregnancies (UNDP Sierra Leone and Irish Aid, 2015; Bandiera *et al.*, 2018). Minor (2017) points out that young women who became pregnant during school closures were either blamed for getting pregnant out of boredom, or viewed as helpless victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. However, the qualitative data collected during her study suggested that girls also sometimes looked to romantic relationships for financial assistance, and bearing children as a way of gaining support in an unstable situation, and for men's help in payment of school fees. Regulations against pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers returning to their local schools, however, meant that for most young women pregnancy marked the end of their education (Amnesty International, 2015).

These studies on the Ebola crisis tend to stress the vulnerability of girls and women in contexts of crisis, and the need to protect girls from violence in affected families and communities. There is hardly any research and knowledge on whether and to what extent boys were affected by and exposed to various types of violence at home and in their communities during the Ebola pandemic. However, the past Ebola epidemic has also shown instances of girls and boys exercising their agency in important ways during the crisis. For example, INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organisations), such as Plan International, helped young people to create virtual spaces (i.e. youth teams) to support each other in various ways, while at the same time helping youth to reach out to their communities (through videos and blogs) to prevent the Ebola virus from spreading (Aminata, 2015). Similar initiatives, such as youth support networks, were also mentioned by other INGOs in Sierra Leone (van der Veen and Datzberger, 2020, p. 15).

A number of questions emerge from this literature from previous epidemics and crises when considering the effects of COVID-19 on young people in resource constrained settings. The Ebola crisis compounded structural weaknesses and inequalities, creating the conditions for gender-based violence and exploitation of girls and young women (Parkes and Heslop, 2020). We need robust evidence on how COVID-19 affects young people's lives, including the effects on intimate partner and domestic violence, transactional sex, and community violence, and on which young people are most vulnerable. We need to collect 'live' data, that can provide insights into the immediate effects of stringent lockdowns on young people in low-income settings. And we need better understanding of the coping strategies young people use, and of the sources of support they draw on to manage the effects of the crisis.

Our study attempts to address some of these questions drawing on qualitative data from young people in Uganda during the lockdown. Our analysis builds on those studies of the Ebola crisis that show how violence is rooted in multiple dimensions (O'Brien and Tolosa, 2016; Minor, 2017). We conceptualise violence as multi-dimensional, requiring attention, not just to acts of physical, sexual and emotional force, but to their roots in structural violence of inequitable and unjust socio-economic and political systems and institutions, and to the symbolic violence through which oppressive discourses come to be taken for granted as normal (Parkes, 2015). In paying particular attention to

the gendered effects of multi-dimensional violence, we understand gender as relational, shaped within 'gender regimes' of institutions and societies (Connell, 2002) and performed within everyday relationships, through which norms about how to act as a girl or a boy become internalised (Butler, 2011). Physical violence may be deployed to reinforce gender discourses, as in the case of husbands beating wives who flout their domestic duties (Jakobsen, 2014), or it may arise from frustration at the failure to live up to a dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity (Moore, 1994), as in the case above of men during the Ebola crisis when thwarted from performing their identities as protectors and providers (Minor, 2017). Intersecting inequalities, where gender inequalities combine with other inequalities linked to class, poverty, race, ethnicity, location or disability, can amplify risks of violence (Merry, 2011). This multi-dimensional framing of gender and violence offers insights into how it is that people take for granted, and sometimes hold themselves responsible for, the structural constraints they face. Yet, we also view young people not as passive victims, but as actively negotiating their social worlds. Our analysis in this working paper focuses particularly on the effects of the lockdown on inequalities and structural violence, how this creates the conditions for direct forms of violence, and how young people navigate these effects.

3. Methodology

This working paper draws on data collected for a study on how COVID-19 response measures in Uganda have affected the lives of adolescent young people. The study was conducted as part of a broader research project: Contexts of Violence in Adolescence Cohort Study (CoVAC) (Devries *et al.*, 2020). CoVAC is a research collaboration led by LSHTM, UCL Institute of Education and Raising Voices in Uganda, in partnership with Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI), and funded by the UK Medical Research Council. The larger project is a mixed methodology cohort study that aims to build understanding on how family, peer, school and community contexts affect young people's experiences of violence in adolescence and early adulthood. It includes epidemiological data collection at 3 time points (quantitative study), and a qualitative longitudinal component, with fieldwork for 2-3 months each year from 2018 to 2021 in the Luwero District of Uganda. 36 young people (see Annex 1), now mainly aged 16-19 years, are the core participants in the qualitative component of this project and have engaged to date in a range of interviews, focus groups, community walks and unstructured discussions with the research team. Further interviews (on the guidance of the core participants) have also taken place with caregivers, peers, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders at community and national level. The core participants were selected from the project's full cohort of 3431 young people, who participated in our wave 1 epidemiological survey in 2014 and agreed to be contacted again. The qualitative sample includes approximately equal numbers of girls and boys, from rural and urban communities, and with varying experiences of violence (more or less severe) in their lives up to that point (in 2014). Each core participant was assigned a 'key' researcher, who is Ugandan, engages with them in the local language (Luganda), and where possible is of the same sex (and always the same sex for female participants), enabling good research relationships to be sustained over time.

The data discussed in this working paper stem from mobile phone interviews with the core participants, conducted in May-June 2020, lasting usually 30-45 minutes. These were conducted in addition to the annual fieldwork, through expanding the 'staying in touch' calls the research team use to maintain contact with the core participants. The research team were able to reach and speak with 34 of the 36 young people (18 girls and 16 boys). Topics included the effects of COVID-19 on their daily lives, on relationships in families, with friends, on schooling/work, and impacts in their communities, along with discussion about their coping strategies, sources of support, and views on lockdown measures.

This study followed the CoVAC project's ethics protocol⁶ (Devries *et al.*, 2020) with some additional measures to address safety issues relating to collecting data by phone. Current UN interagency ethical guidance on violence data collection during COVID-19 (UN Women, 2020) summarises several important risks: new approaches by unknown persons might place respondents at risk of violence; participants may have difficulty ensuring they can answer in private; and it may be difficult to provide support to those who report violence. They recommend against adding violence questions to rapid population-based surveys for these reasons. Our study mitigated these risks by using the researchers who have been involved in undertaking all the qualitative fieldwork for the CoVAC project up to now. They had therefore been trained and developed experience around researching sensitive topics and had built up a research relationship with each of the core participants through the previous fieldwork. Potential risks were also mitigated by adapting CoVAC's existing safety and referral plan to include provision of telephone counselling support. However, ensuring privacy was a particular challenge for this study during lockdown conditions, with busy households and with some young people needing to speak to researchers on phones owned by other family members. Researchers therefore sought the participants' views on preferred times and locations to speak and asked the participants to alert them if they needed to interrupt the discussions, being careful to also listen out for any signs of distress or discomfort. The researchers also took extra care and caution around probing, asking open-ended questions and avoiding direct questions on personal experiences of violence so that the participants were able to maintain control over any personal disclosures.

Data were translated (from Luganda to English) and transcribed by the research team, and then coded using Nvivo. We make use of pseudonyms to protect their identity and ensure anonymity. The analysis developed through weekly team discussions on emerging findings alongside analysis of the coded data by theme. In addition, and central to our analysis, we read the interview transcript for each young person in conjunction with the biographical narrative data already collected (in 2018 and 2019), enabling us to look closely at how COVID-19 has affected the life trajectories of these young people. In Part II of this paper, we synthesize general findings from all interviews and selectively cite respondents.

In writing this report, a key challenge has been to do justice to the diverse and subjective experiences of each of the core participants while at the same time paying attention to shared grievances and common everyday challenges. We are aware that our analysis is not free from the problematic nature of interpretation, recognizing that we bring our own perspectives when examining the data (Ashby, 2011). As noted by Kincheloe and McLaren (2011), it is not solely our respondents' experience and viewpoints that are being brought to light, but also our own interpretation of their experiences. While giving voice as a research method can be emancipatory, we acknowledge that the researcher often benefits more from the telling than the researched (Ibid). The study is not only of academic interest, but as a research collaboration between research organisations and a local NGO, Raising Voices, we are interested in feeding back insights into public discourse and informing policy decisions.

Before discussing the study findings, we introduce the context of Luwero. Brief demographic information on the young people participating in the research can be found in Annex 1.

3.1. Context of Luwero

All CoVAC core participants are originally from Luwero District in Uganda, which is north of the capital Kampala. However, some have now migrated for work to other parts of the country, especially Kampala. Luwero district is divided into ten sub-counties and three town councils namely Luwero, Wobulenzi and Bombo. The district is composed of 91 parishes and 594 villages and contains urban,

⁶ The project has ethical clearance from UCL Institute of Education, the LSHTM, Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) Ethics committees and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

peri-urban and rural areas. According to the latest 2014 census (UBOS, 2017), Luwero District has 456,958 inhabitants with an annual average growth rate of 1.3 per cent. The majority of the households (66%) depend on subsistence farming as their main source of livelihood, although many people rely on several different sources of income from formal and/or informal employment. It is estimated that only 16% of the population are dependent on employment income, while 7% depend on business enterprises. Agriculture is the mainstay of the district economy with cassava having the largest acreage among all crops. Around 18% of the population is living below the poverty line, that is, they earn less than 1.90 USD a day (UBOS, 2017). In 2017, 59% of households earned their main income from subsistence farming and one 27% had access to electricity (UBOS, 2017)

The majority of the population in Luwero is made up of children (below 18 years) constituting 55%, while youths (18-30 years) make up 21%, and the elderly (aged 60 and above) only 4.2% of the total population. According to the latest data from the UBOS, the District has a total of 227 Government-aided primary schools and 47 secondary schools. Primary School total enrolment has been steadily increasing, from 103,354 in 2013 to 115,258 in 2016. In 2014, 87.1 % females and 85.4 males (aged 6-12 years) were enrolled in primary school and 37.9 % females and 34.9 % males (aged 13-18) in secondary school (UBOS, 2017).

PART II

We turn now to the findings of the study, beginning with the effects on their lives of the COVID-19 lockdown that the young people interviewed alluded to most frequently – these were effects of lockdown on family income and livelihoods, and the effects of school closures. We then consider the effects on family relationships, and young people’s social lives, before discussing the young people’s accounts of how the lockdown, and its enforcement, has affected community life and the constraints on mobility. Throughout, we pay attention to the effects on intersecting inequalities, notably in relation to gender, socio-economic status, and age/generation, and on structural, symbolic and direct forms of violence. We also consider in each section the strategies and sources of support the young people have drawn on to help them cope with the multiple challenges they have faced.

4. Effects on Livelihoods

For many of the young people interviewed, the most significant effects of the lockdown on their lives related to loss of family income. The effects were most marked among those who were most disadvantaged, including those who were already out of school before the lockdown, demonstrating how the lockdown could amplify existing inequalities.

Most of the young people interviewed described the negative effects the lockdown has had on their families’ income and livelihood. Many still have had enough basic food to eat, because they have been able to rely on food from their gardens, with some commenting that the last harvest was a good one, meaning that they still have stores of food they can live on. However, for most, their incomes have been significantly reduced, either because their parents’ work had stopped due to the lockdown, or because the income from their work had reduced. Naka, for example, spoke of how her father’s butchery was affected by having fewer customers to buy the meat they sell. Mugeru generated income from working in his uncle’s painting business and his mother’s shop, but the painting work was hampered by no longer being able to buy supplies; and trading at the shop was reduced by having to close the shop at the start of the curfew (6pm at the time of the interview). This has meant that many of the young people and their families have not had the financial means to purchase basic goods such as sugar, salt or soap. Tom, for example, explained: *“The only way COVID-19 has affected us is the scarcity of money among people, but besides that, we have enough food since our last harvest was very good. But people don’t have money.... I mean we need money for buying other items like soap, sugar, and for health care services when my siblings fall sick”*.

Those most struggling from the loss of their family income were the core participants who had already left school before the pandemic, usually because their families had been unable to cover the costs of their schooling. Sam and Paul, who were attempting to make a living by selling cash crops, were deeply affected because of the loss of their markets.

Table 2: Sam’s narrative on effects on livelihoods

Following the death of his mother and later his father, Sam has spent most of his life living in his aunt’s household. With no money for school fees, he left school at the end of primary school and has been making a living from farming. Asked how COVID-19 has affected him, Sam replied:

It has affected us a lot because now the situation has become really difficult in that even getting something to eat is really hard here in our community, we no longer get work to do but just stay there all day, get into our houses as early as 7pm and we don’t get any earnings at all.

While Sam can still cultivate food from his garden, he is no longer able to sell his food because of the restrictions on transport during the lockdown. Moreover, extended family members moving back to the community from the city means there are more mouths to feed.

At my home, we get some food from the garden and ration it amongst ourselves but we have almost eaten all the food because we have a number of people that joined the family when the lockdown started. Our family grew up to about 10 people yet we were just 5 of us originally and that has really affected us.

Kiprotich, in contrast, was able to continue with subsistence farming and although he felt the impact had been small, he had still lost some income because he could no longer sell bricks. Musisi had to stop his brick laying work and struggled to pay his rent. Linda, along with her mother and sister, had days with nothing to eat as they were unable to find work. Adikini and Tawana, both young mothers, lost their jobs in waitressing and in a business making wedding decorations, with Adikini now sometimes digging in neighbours' gardens to get a little money to sustain her child and herself. When some of the core participants had managed to engage in occasional work, they indicated that they had been exploited by their employer who, because of their own reduced incomes, failed to pay them or paid them less than agreed.

Table 3: Adikini's narrative on effects on livelihoods

Adikini left school when she was 14 years old, as her grandfather and step-grandmother, who she had lived with in Luwero for most of her life, were unable to pay her school fees. At 15 years old she gave birth to her daughter. When the researcher first met her in 2018 she was out of work, having left her job as a housemaid in Kampala, following severe mistreatment and sexual advances by her employer and returned to her grandfather's home. However, she then managed to find work again in a shop and a restaurant and to start to save some money to help with her daughter's schooling. But with lockdown she was no longer able to do this work and returned again to Luwero:

At first I was working in a restaurant and would earn some little money and then I would also earn from working in a shop but since COVID-19 started I couldn't work because shops were closed and I also wasn't able to wait on people in the restaurant because of the disease, so no hand contact, so it become hard for me and that is when I decided to come back to the village. I could no longer stay in town without a job

Although she is uncertain about whether she will be able to recommence her work after lockdown, she considers herself in better circumstances than many, as she has access to food from her family's garden and casual labour in others' gardens. Though many relatives have lost their jobs, her cousins are still occasionally helping her with money and took her child to hospital when she was sick. Adikini describes how other young women in her community, who have not had such forms of help, have been driven to engage in sex for money (transactional sex):

ADIKINI: Some of them used to live in town and came back to the village; they were used to hustling so when life became hard for them they get men to sleep with them and give them money

INT: Have you seen that many girls are getting pregnant during this period or not really?

ADIKINI: Many girls, myself inclusive I can't eliminate myself, many girls are going to get pregnant during this coronavirus because many of them will sleep with men without knowing whether they will get pregnant or not which may result into pregnancy and probably they don't even know the father of the child and things like that.

INT: Have you also been involved in having sex for money during this period of coronavirus?

ADIKINI: No madam I have kept myself and managed the situation prevailing currently because I am not very badly off since we have food at home. I can figure things out I can go and dig in people's

gardens and we have food at home which we don't buy we just go and bring it from the garden, cook and eat it. I can do casual labour and get money and buy what I need.

Adikini's account illustrates how the economic hardship caused by the lockdown can drive young women to engage in transactional sex. She appears to identify closely with these young women, recognizing that it is only because she subsists through family support and occasional casual labour that she is not having to earn money this way. Several of the other young people interviewed also spoke about witnessing young women in their communities engaging in sex for money as a result of the lockdown. However, others felt that transactional sex reduced during lockdown because men who were out of work no longer had money to pay for sex, or because of the constraints on movement and space. Tom explained:

"Before this lock down, girls would meet up with those men to have sex for money during night and late evening hours but this curfew can't allow them to move past 7pm and secondly the places they used to meet up in like the bars and lodges are closed"

In these very difficult circumstances, these young women and men, who had been attempting to be self-reliant, and in some cases care for their own children, found themselves dependent again on others – at a time when others' capacity to support was also constrained by their loss of livelihoods. Though struggling to live independently in his rented accommodation, Musisi spoke of his reluctance to go for meals to his grandmother's home, since her household had expanded during lockdown with an influx of relatives from the city. Tawana explained that she accepted help for her and her baby from her brother and friends, including her abusive ex-husband. Given what she had previously disclosed to the researcher about intimate partner violence within this relationship, the renewed contact and dependence for resources is concerning, perhaps generating a risk of recurrence of the violence.

Some of the young people interviewed who were out of school had recently managed to enrol in vocational courses, in the hope of increasing their skills and employability, but their courses had only just begun when the vocational training institutes closed down. These courses had provided hope for those who had been forced to leave school and had been working in poorly paid, precarious jobs, once again dashing their dreams and the very real benefits such training would have provided. Peter, for example, had been released in November after five months in prison for theft. He managed to enrol in a vocational training institute in January, but was sent home due to the lockdown in March, and has since been unable to work or study. Aisha wanted to reenrol in Senior 4 (S4), as she previously dropped out because of health issues. She had already registered in a secondary school, but she never managed to start her schooling again because of the lockdown. It remains uncertain if she will be able to do this after the lockdown as her father may no longer have the means to pay for her fees. Prior to the lockdown, Atala had gone to Kampala and was working on small jobs while enrolled at a vocational training institute. She had been hoping to take up a nursing course but now, because of the lockdown she was dependent on her mother who walked from Bombo to Kampala (30km, which is around 6 hours by foot) to sell tea to prevent the family from starving.

5. Compound Effects of School Closures and Loss of Livelihoods

Among the young people interviewed who were still enrolled in secondary school, the effects of school closures were multiple and varying. All of them had experienced disruption in their education. While some remained relatively confident that they would return to school once the lockdown lifted, for others, this was a source of considerable anxiety, as the loss of family income strained the already constrained resources needed to support their schooling. In addition, few were able to access the

technological resources to enable them to continue with their studies with the TV or online resources that the government and schools had provided during lockdown. While the 20 core participants whose schooling had been disrupted all intended to return to school once schools reopen, they worried about whether they would have to repeat the school year, whether their families could continue to cover the costs of schooling given the economic shocks, and whether they would fail key examinations – with many of them being in candidate class (S4) and due to take O-levels, which are likely to be postponed⁷. Kalungi, a keen student who had reached S5, spoke of his worries that, with the lockdown, his mother was caring for an expanded household of siblings and cousins, all of whom would need support to return to school once schools reopen. Kato, who was supposed to take part in the UNEB (Ugandan National Examinations Board) explained his worries about the costs that might be charged by schools when they reopen:

INT: Okay, and what about the school fees, do you think the schools will ask for fees again?

KATO: Ha, firstly we cultivate close to our Headmaster's garden and I overhear him converse with my father and he says that the president says he is going to release the children for school and where are the parents going to get the school fees because for us we will demand for the fees at school (laughs)

He went on to explain that there would be fees for registering for the UNEB for the Ministry and for passport photos:

KATO: And for me I realized that if you have not been working, you can't get that money because they want it very soon and you can't say that you will pay in instalments as they even fine for paying in late. They say that if you pay in late, they double the amount and so where are we going to get the money for that? Yet when the president is talking, he doesn't say anything about that, the money for registration, okay some of them may have it but there are some of us that don't have and that's how I see that they don't care about us. And when the president is talking, he minds about the rich people only, and it's so bad.

Those core participants who were most vulnerable to dropping out of school were those whose education had already been disrupted by socio-economic hardship, as illustrated by 18 year old Tom.

Table 4: Tom's narrative on compound effects of school closures and loss of livelihoods

Tom lives with his mother and five siblings, and, when we first met him in 2018 he described his family as poor, with his mother struggling to earn a living through digging for other people. He also engaged in digging to generate income to help his mother pay school fees for his younger siblings and himself. The following year, with difficulties covering schooling costs, his attendance was erratic, he was required to repeat S3, and was planning to reenrol in January this year, but then the lockdown came. Tom perceived his situation as better than some families, as they had food from the last harvest, and initially he was able to continue working at the construction site. But soon the work ceased, as supplies of materials dried up. Money is now short for sugar, salt and other food supplies. Tom has not been able to study during lockdown:

TOM: Schools will reopen with time but considering the period we are staying away from school, it means that we are going to be far behind in our performance.

INT: How is that going to be Tom?

TOM: There are children who are learning on TVs, while others are learning from the radios. But as for me I don't have access to the TV and the radio we have can't tap all FM stations.

⁷ At the time we wrote this paper registration for final exams was not open see: <https://uneb.ac.ug/>, accessed 1 October 2020. School authorities and students were still waiting for communication from the MoES when final exams are supposed to take place.

Although before the lockdown, Tom had managed to earn enough to cover some costs associated with schooling, he is deeply anxious about whether he will be able to return:

TOM: What is worrying me a lot is my schooling; it feels to me like this COVID-19 is snatching away something from me that I liked the most.

Like several boys, Tom had supported his own schooling costs by paid work and feared that his loss of income together with that of his family members could prevent them being able to return to school when they reopen. While several boys spoke of the effects of no longer being able to earn income to support their schooling, girls interviewed did not raise this issue. This is unsurprising when we consider data from the broader CoVAC survey that showed that paid labour outside the home was uncommon for girls, often leaving them without the means to support the costs of their own schooling. Ironically, this could mean that while boys' increased earning capacity in 'normal' times could give them an advantage in resourcing schooling costs, in closing this window the lockdown may have amplified the anxieties for boys struggling to complete their education. For girls, however, the reliance on support from others created other threats to their returning to school, as we discuss further below.

5.1. Distance Learning

The government has made efforts to support learning during school closures through TV, radio or newspapers, and through making available downloadable curricula⁸. In some instances schools also have offered learning content via mobile phones. However, most of the young people interviewed, as in Tom's account, had no or limited access to the resources needed to engage with these materials and supports. Many of those in rural communities and/or with weaker socio-economic backgrounds, had no access to a TV, could not afford to buy newspapers or pamphlets with exercises, and radio signals were usually weak, as explained by Nakinto:

"It being that we are in a rural community, our radio signals are weak and again we don't have a TV set. So as for me I am only relying on notes from school."

To put this into perspective, in the quantitative component of the study, out of 2773 respondents surveyed, 61% indicated that they had electricity in their households (58% male, 64% female). In total 74% reported that they had a radio at home (78% males, 71% females) while only 41% said that their household owns a TV (39% male and 42% female).

Some of the participants from our qualitative cohort who had access to a TV found the programmes difficult to comprehend or felt that they were not pitched correctly for their grade level. Kato, for instance, said that the subjects offered on the radio are not relevant for him (when he finds time to listen). Nankoma and Apio complained that the TV programs were only for those in candidate classes (P.7, S4, and S6). Several of the young people interviewed complained that the TV classes were either too advanced or covered classes they had already passed.

Some young people were attempting to continue studying by revising their school text books, but were frustrated by having no access to teachers or relatives able to help. Nkola, for example, spoke of attempting to revise with friends, but with the extension of school closures she found her friends gradually losing motivation to study or to return to school. Like several others, she spoke of how difficult it was to concentrate on studies when tired from working in the garden or while doing other household chores. In Kayondo's words:

"The other way would be encouraging yourself to do revision. While at school a teacher can come and tell you to use such and such a time to read and do revision or give you

⁸ Downloadable curricula from the MoE can be found here: <http://www.education.go.ug/covid-19-sector-response/>, accessed 23 July 2020.

past papers for UNEB or any other school but now it's impossible because you can't get to them anywhere, all the children were sent home and there are those who were further sent to their villages and they can't get any connection to school. So for that matter the child just sits home, unless you push yourself to revise. But you may go back to school and you won't remember what you read and not read before."

Few of the young people interviewed spoke of support from caregivers for their distance learning. For instance, Otim complained that her brothers' wife (where she resides) asks her to do household chores exactly at the time when TV learning programs take place.

However, for a few of the other young people interviewed, there were more mixed experiences around engaging with these resources, with both positive and negative aspects. Nyanja was able to study by watching TV at her neighbours' house, together with their children. Naka found lessons on TV useful, but Aisha noted that she is not able to grasp and understand everything they teach on TV and finds it frustrating that there is no one with whom she can ask questions or work on a particular exercise. Dan, in S6, said he picked up work from the chairman's home from sub-county headquarters to photocopy, but others told us that they could not afford to pay for the photocopying. Ruth and Juliet both referred to pamphlets with Q&As on examinable subjects being distributed, but they could also not afford them as they cost around 2000-2300/= each (0.55-0.60 USD). Apio, whose grandmother is a school official, was the only participant able to use a computer to access the materials on the internet. Out of the 20 young people interviewed who were still enrolled in school before the COVID-19 pandemic, only two reported to us that they were learning via their mobile phones. Kayondo, whose school is in Kampala, was able to continue some studying via his mother's phone, with his brother covering the costs of data. Thus, for a few, access to materials via technology combined with support from family or neighbours enabled them to continue with some studying. Only one young person, Jane, reported that she feels 'ready' to pass her O-Level exam. Jane told us that she does not have access to a TV but managed to revise together with her older sister and studies at home by making use of her older siblings' exam papers. For most of our school-going participants, however, the challenges they faced in accessing any distance education meant that any engagement with school curricula had ceased.

6. Family Relationships

With households facing multiple stresses under lockdown, some of the young people interviewed spoke of strains on relationships within their families, with occasional outbreaks of violence and abuse. For young people already suffering loss of schooling and income, the psychological burden of breakdowns in relations within the home was considerable. For other core participants, their families adapted to the challenging circumstances in ways that kept young people safe and supported.

A few of the young people we interviewed told us that the lockdown aggravated tense and violent family relationships, creating deep psychological distress. This was most marked in Kato's narrative.

Table 5: Kato's narrative on family relationships

For several years, Kato has been living in an uncle's house with his mother, after she left his physically abusive father. Now aged 16, Kato has reached S4, intending to complete his final school examinations later this year. With lockdown, violent threats erupted in the household, with his uncle threatening to burn down their home:

INT: And again how has this situation affected your day to day life?

KATO: This situation, since you know I have been staying with my mother in a house which was offered to her by my uncle, but as of now, I think it's this COVID-19 situation that brought up all this disagreement.

INT: So you mean COVID-19 brought up some disagreement?

KATO: Yes, since my uncle has not been used to staying home all day and even other people move away from the home during the day, now that they have all been spending all day at home, they had a disagreement which led to our uncle even wanting to burn down the house that we had been staying in. And that's the reason I left my mother's home and now I stay with my father.

Kato offers several reasons for the conflict, which began when his mother criticised his uncle's wife for beating her children, and was further fuelled by the closure of his uncle's butchery during the lockdown: *"due to this COVID-19 pandemic, he has not been working anymore and stayed home all day and I think this should be the reason that sparked off the disagreement"*. Though he is safer living with his father, he fears for the safety of his mother and younger siblings who are still residing in his uncle's home. Living with his father has not been easy, however, with his father not paying him for his work in his carpentry business, and rationing the stocks of maize flour, so that Kato complains he is often hungry. When Kato's shoes and clothes were stolen from his father's home, he was distressed that his father blamed rather than supported him. To escape his father's verbal abuse he listens to music:

"Whenever my father quarrels, I just get my earphones and put on and don't listen to what he says."

He is anxious that he will fail his examinations, as he has no access to TV or newspapers, and his concentration on studying is affected by his worries. For Kato, school is a haven from his worries at home:

"I like school a lot because it saves you from the home troubles and you stay with your peers at school and at home for only a few hours. So I feel I miss school a lot."

The family conflicts, school closures, and economic effects of the lockdown have combined in producing, at times, suicidal thoughts. But the situation has also deepened his relationship with his girlfriend, who listens and empathises with him:

"What I like about her is that we are in the same situation, she comes around and converses how the situation is like at her home, and you end up realising that the situation is the same like you are facing. She can tell you she also had family disagreements at her home and I realised we are in the same situation."

This close, comforting relationship has enabled Kato to cope with a fraught and frightening family situation.

Like Kato, Rose also spoke of strained relationships within her household. Rose has lived with various relatives since her parents' deaths, and during lockdown she has been living with her uncle and his wife with a relationship she describes as *'terrible'*:

"They talk too much against us each day, my uncle's wife plus her children keep discriminating against us and talking ill for us. [...] They keep on reminding us about the non-ownership of the house we are sleeping in, the food for free they give us."

She also spoke of feeling *'trapped'* and unable to escape from this household, and wanting to rather be with her older sisters, who have been sending the family money for sugar and other foodstuffs, even though their own jobs have ceased during lockdown.

While the narratives from Kato and Rose show how the lockdown could contribute to young people being trapped in strained, and sometimes violent and abusive households, Anna's story

presents a more mixed picture of the ways in which her family had navigated the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown.

Table 6: Anna's narrative on family relationships

Having previously lived with her grandmother to attend secondary school, Anna then started a hairdressing course, and moved to the nearby home of her mother and stepfather, but was 'chased away' by her stepfather because of scarcity of funds to pay for her siblings and her. Though her grandmother wanted her to return to school to complete S3, she had taken the opportunity to stay with an aunt who had opened a hair salon and craft making business. During lockdown she has been learning these skills, but also hoping to start school again: "my goal is to complete S4 even though I have learnt these (hairdressing and crafts making) and I can survive on those skills, I want to expand my knowledge more than what I know at the moment". With six school going children staying with the aunt and the hairdressing salon closed, resources are sorely constrained, and there have been food shortages, though "we have never slept hungry". At the same time, unlike at her previous homes there is electricity, with access to a TV, and her cousin, who is in the same school year group, has shared her knowledge and school books enabling her to catch up on some of the work she has missed. So while COVID-19 has "sabotaged" her education, her mother's capacity to support her, and created economic pressures across the extended family, it seems to have also given Anna pause for thought – after a period which she describes as "disorganised" with multiple moves, locked down in her present home she had "thought things through", and made plans to return to school, with financial support from her mother and grandmother. The extended family has been a source of both rejection, and of support. In her present household, Anna described relationships as follows:

ANNA: It has not been good because one may lack let's say food or one can get something to eat and decide to eat it alone because there is not much food. So that can hurt another person to say the other didn't share with them, or someone can get something and say I will use this alone because of the current situation but that was not the case before but people are fed up of the situation.

She went on to explain why, in her view, the lockdown had not increased domestic violence within her own family:

ANNA: There has not been violence because there is no man, okay that often happens when both man and woman are present and there is no food yet children are hungry, but all of us are mature people, most of us are older girls so we can understand the situation and endure it

INT: Have you been yelled at or beaten at home during this period?

ANNA: They get tough on me but I am not beaten. At my age you can just tell me Anna do this and I will do it because I see the situation. At my age what you can do is sit down with me and we discuss the matter but not beating me.

For Anna, as for Kato and Rose, the lockdown has increased economic pressures on households, and generated disputes over resources, including sharing of food. But in her case, the arguments seem quite mild, which she attributes to the absence of men in the household. Anna's own history of her father's violence towards her mother early in her life may have influenced her perspective about the presence of a man exacerbating the potential for violence. What is important, however, is that like a number of the other core participants, Anna drew attention to intimate partner violence, something that several of the other young people interviewed had witnessed in their communities. These findings are discussed in more depth in Section 5.1.

Also notable in Anna's narrative is the way the relatively stable situation she finds herself in during COVID-19 crisis seems to have enabled her to actively reflect on and make plans for her own future. This contrasts with a sense of helplessness in Kato's and Rose's narratives, in which their emotional well-being has been repeatedly undermined by abusive domestic relationships.

Anna seems to view the ways disputes are resolved through discussion rather than beating as both gender and age related. As an 18 year old young woman, she sees herself and the women she co-habits with as able to reason, and to 'understand the situation and endure it'. Other core participants

felt that relationships within their families, and how children were disciplined at home, had not changed since the lockdown. A few core participants even commented that time together had brought family members closer. Juliet, for example, remarked that there was more time to settle disagreements:

“Before we used not to get along because we would hurt each other and not get time to settle it, and so there was no chance to forgive someone. But now when you hurt each other they sit you down and they talk to you, then you get along.”

Adikini, who in previous meetings with the researcher had narrated how she was mistreated by her grandmother, reported that their relationship had improved since COVID-19, partly because of newcomers moving in to the household: *“she doesn’t want to expose her true nature to them so she has not treated me badly, she treats me well”*. She also commented, pragmatically: *“you can’t leave, so you have to get along”*.

Families have, therefore, managed the effects of lockdown in different ways. For many core participants, family members were key sources of support, including those living elsewhere who could provide practical support, like Rose’s sisters sending money, or Ruth’s uncle helping by bringing goods to them in his car. These families showed considerable resilience in the face of adversity. In a few cases, however, the pressures on families have generated abuse and violence, with young people feeling trapped, distressed and unsupported at home.

7. Young People’s Social Spaces and Social Lives

Most of the young people interviewed reported that their interactions with friends had reduced during the lockdown. Closures of schools, workplaces and other meeting places (such as churches, mosques, playgrounds, bars or video halls) and curfews meant that there were fewer opportunities to meet up, and transport restrictions meant they were unable to visit friends living some distance away. This increased social isolation was exacerbated by the fact that fewer than half of the young people owned phones and so the opportunities and mechanisms for communicating with friends were limited for many.

The lockdown has changed the social lives of young people significantly, however, these effects seem to be influenced by gender. In the communities where the CoVAC project has been conducted, girls, by and large, tend to be more confined to the home than boys, with less access to phones. Only 5 of the 18 girls interviewed owned a phone (compared with 8 of the 16 boys interviewed), showing a similar gender disparity as CoVAC’s quantitative survey sample (64% of boys and 39% of 2403 young people surveyed in 2018 owned a mobile phone). The girls interviewed during the lockdown seemed less able to stay in touch with friends. Rose, for instance, who does not own a phone and lives in a remote community, complained that she was feeling lonely as no one could visit her at the moment.

Those who had moved from urban to rural areas during the lockdown (see Section 9 for more detailed discussion) seemed to be especially affected, with the young women interviewed in particular speaking about how they missed meeting up with friends. Atala, for example, who moved from Kampala during lockdown, explained she has no friends, recollecting how before lockdown:

“I used to meet up with them whenever I would come back from my training at the vocational institute, I would pass by their homes and visit. The other friends I have are those I made at the vocational centre, so I would meet up with them so often. But now I can’t meet any of them as we only talk on phone.”

Ruth too left friends in Kampala, and without a phone has not been able to stay in touch:

“I miss my friends; I no longer hear from them so I don’t know how they are doing.”

Nkola reflected on how difficult it was to stay emotionally close when physically distant:

“We are not very close during this period because one can tell you to do something for them and you are willing to do it but when it’s not possible because you are far from them which results in them getting annoyed of you which used not to be the case before. Before they would come with an issue and I would be able to help but now it is not possible”

The boys interviewed, on the other hand, had been more used to moving around in the community and meeting their friends outside their homes prior to the lockdown. Some were frustrated by the restrictions on opportunities for socialising. Mark, who misses going to his church for prayers, explained:

“Some of us feel bored at home and we don’t have subwoofers or TV to take away the boredom, so sometimes we get rid of the loneliness by chatting with our friends in the evening then go home when it’s time for bed, but now there is a curfew and that has affected me because I feel lonely, it makes me worry.”

Kalungi and Kiprotich also stopped seeing their friends, and felt bored having to stay at home. This was not the case for all of our male participants, however. Some boys found creative ways to still gather and meet their friends before curfew or visit them at home. Mugeru, for instance, started to use his mother’s shop as a new social space to meet his friends, who came by to chat with him before curfew. Tom described how (predominantly male) youth in his community still managed to meet and drink alcohol despite strict lockdown rules:

“It being that bars were closed too, they still close the bars and people sit outside the bars and these very bar owners sell them the alcohol. So when police come around to arrest them, they all scatter and run away, so the bar owners are still selling their alcohol though in hiding.”

7.1. Intimate Partner Relationships

Intimate relationships were also affected, with the lockdown mostly constraining opportunities for partners to meet up, to form new relationships or sustain existing ones. The lockdown put pressure on relationships, leading sometimes to conflict, and several young people told the researchers that since the lockdown they had broken up with their girlfriends or boyfriends. There were also a few reports, though not directly involving our core participants, of material pressures and domestic conflict during the lockdown leading girls to leave family homes to live with their boyfriends.

Paul, though continuing a relationship, now saw his girlfriend less frequently.

Table 7: Paul on the difficulties of seeing his girlfriend during lockdown

PAUL: I think it has affected the boys more than it has affected the girls. For instance before these lockdown measures, it would always be so easy to meet up with your girlfriend since her parents were not home much of their time. But now that they are at home, it is really hard for the girls to sneak out to meet their boyfriends. Even us the boys, everyone wonders where you have gone to if they see you leaving home

INT: So how are you able to meet up with your girlfriend during such at time?

PAUL: In a whole month I can try my best and meet her just about 2 times, only 2 days in a whole month. In a week I can look out for a day I don’t have much work to do during the day then I go to visit her even when I get there see her is also very hard. There are times I go there I don’t get to see her.

In our previous CoVAC fieldwork, young people have reported that teenage sexual relationships are frequently hidden from adults, and that getting caught with a girlfriend or boyfriend risks harsh punishments at school or home. With the closure of parents' workplaces, however, Paul suggests that it was more difficult to meet secretly.

Some of the young people interviewed indicated that their relationships had ended because of the difficulties in meeting up during the lockdown. Some of the boys suggested that the break-ups had resulted from their loss of income during the lockdown, leaving them unable to provide the material support expected by their girlfriends. As observed by Tom:

“Some have been dumped by their girlfriends. For some of those boys that have not supported their girlfriends with money during this lockdown have gotten into fights and they have eventually break up.”

Tom views the lockdown as having a bigger impact on boys than girls – reflecting perhaps his own feelings of rejection. Since providing material support to one's girlfriend may be a normative feature of masculine identity, being unable to do so may be shaming for a young man like Tom.

However, there were also narratives where boyfriends were considered more able to provide for girls during the lockdown than their families, as was the case with Otim's friend:

“There is a friend of mine who told me she was going to leave her parents' home if the president extends the lockdown. She said her boyfriend is not able to send her money because she stays very far from his home, so it is better she goes to stay with him. Indeed, she ran away from her home to go and stay with her boyfriend. In simple terms, she is married now.”

Where caregivers were struggling to provide, disputes could erupt within families, leading, in Kato's account, to his friend seeking support from a boyfriend:

“She told me that her father is so rude and he quarrels all the time and he doesn't even give them the necessary needs. So she also improvised by getting a boy to offer some but they ended up getting her pregnant. And in the end she has ended up in marriage.”

These instances show how for some young women, moving to live with boyfriends could be a way of leaving the added stresses that the COVID lockdown has created in the family home, where there could be conflict, prohibition of their relationships, or lack of food. It is difficult to predict the long-term consequences of these kinds of pressures and changes on relationships. While a few young people, like Kato, spoke of pregnancies since the lockdown, the time frame of the study, with data collected two to three months into the start of lockdown, means that it is too early for us to draw conclusions about the long-term effects of the lockdown of intimate relationships, including issues such as pregnancy.

8. Community Life during Lockdown

Accounts on how the lockdown and curfew during the COVID-19 pandemic has affected community life varied among the young people interviewed. While they were consistently concerned about the negative impacts of the sudden economic shocks on people's life circumstances (see Section 4 and 5), their narratives showed considerable variations in their exposure to violence and crime in their communities, and in their accounts of how lockdown measures were enforced in their communities. The sudden lack of income (and at times also food shortages) were associated by some with an increase in domestic violence and fights within and among neighbouring families. Very few indicated that not much has changed in their community during the pandemic, such as Kiprotich or Jane. They both reported that social distancing rules had not been followed in their community as they live in a

remote, rural area, which was fairly removed from the active monitoring of the lockdown measures by the Ugandan police and the LDU (Local Defence Unit). This contrasts with the perspectives of other young people interviewed who live in less remote areas and reported more stringent adherence to the lock down rules, often because of the very strict and at times brutal enforcement of them in the early period of the lockdown, as we discuss further below. Only a few of the core participants reported that they had received help from neighbours or friends living in the community (e.g. food). There also did not appear to be any coherent, organised community support for families in need during the lockdown.

8.1. Effects of Lockdown on Domestic Violence and Crime in Communities

The young people interviewed had mixed perspectives on whether or not domestic and communal violence as well as crime had increased during the first weeks of the lockdown. Their accounts of violence in their communities predominantly referred to incidences related to the sudden lack of income or shortages of food. Mark for instance told us about a neighbour who starved to death in front of a police station. Adikini also recalled:

“It was a married couple then they got into a disagreement in the end the man killed his wife because they didn’t have food or money so the man killed his wife then after he killed himself.”

Others referred to fights caused by family members staying more at home, husbands becoming suspicious about their wives, parents caning children excessively, or more frequent quarrelling within families or among community members, as described by Sam below.

Table 8: Sam's account of domestic violence in his community

INT: Has this situation of COVID19 led to increases in violence or crime in your community?
SAM: It's also here and it's a lot
INT: But what causes those fights mainly?
SAM: It's about feeding at home as you know the man no longer earns anything and they all want to eat and the man stays home all day and sees all the mistakes the wife does and in the process, they get stressed up and start quarrelling which leads to fighting.
INT: Have you seen any that have fought?
SAM: Yes, I have seen a number of them, around 5 couples that have fought.
INT: What about beating of children?
SAM: Yes, they also do that, one beats up the woman and children and orders them to leave his home with their mother.
INT: And do they separate or divorce?
SAM: Yes, they have separated and walked away from their homes.
INT: And apart from them fighting because of food, what else causes those fights?
SAM: Just like, you know I have no wife, I for one and we only get to see the simple causes and not the deep ones. But even alcohol has caused fights a lot. One comes back home when he is drunk and you cross his path, then fighting erupts.
INT: But according to you, what kinds of people have been fighting, there are those that stay in their home because they are farmers and they be home even in normal life, and there are those that leave home to go and work away from home like in town. So which people have been fighting mostly?
SAM: Those that don't stay at home but only come back briefly at home are the one that have been involved mainly.
INT: And what are the reasons that they fight, is it also because of food?
SAM: They are many and since they locked down people from their work, many of them didn't know how life at home is and if anyone sees any small mistake made at home, they come in to correct the situation leading to fights. But in the past it's has been that the man goes to work

and the woman stays at home and does her things without anyone having to interfere in the other's business.

Otim witnessed how violence against children increased in her home community. She told us how parents:

“... beat up the children for every mistake they do, if the mothers have heard some misunderstanding with the fathers in the home say may be over failure of the father to provide for their families during this lockdown, these mothers tend to shift this anger onto the children by beating them up even for simple mistakes.”

Some noted that petty crimes significantly increased in their communities, especially theft or stealing of food and cattle, mainly committed by desperate youth who suddenly lost their sources of income because of the pandemic. Atala or Naki describe these changes in the community.

<p><i>ATALA: Most people have been challenged in finding something to eat, and this is partly why some are even doing the wrong things they are doing.</i></p> <p><i>INT: Which wrong things are you referring to?</i></p> <p><i>ATALA: Some youths have resorted into stealing from people and they later sell these items to be able to get money to buy themselves a meal. There are some boys in this community that stole a mobile phone worth 200,000/= and they were trying to sell it to a certain man at 10,000/=. If only he had that money, he would have taken such an expensive phone cheaply.</i></p>	<p><i>INT: Are there cases of theft in your community?</i></p> <p><i>NAKI: I understand that there a number of thieves now but I don't know them in particular. There is someone whose cow was stolen yet it was 3 months pregnant. As if that wasn't enough, they came back the 2nd and 3rd time to steal from different people but these last 2 attempts were not successful as people stopped them and they ran away for their lives.</i></p> <p><i>INT: Did all this happen in your community?</i></p> <p><i>NAKI: Yes, it all did happen in my community</i></p> <p><i>INT: Are the thieves from within your community still?</i></p> <p><i>NAKI: I don't know but I think they come from other communities but they are given information on which house has what by their teammates who reside in our community.</i></p>
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The boys interviewed were more likely than the girls to speak of witnessing violence in their communities during lockdown, which may be due, as already suggested, to the girls being more confined to their homes than the boys. Anna's narrative below illustrates how caregivers fear for their security and exposure to negative peer influence(see also section 7).

<p><i>INT: From previous disease of this nature like coronavirus, we know that such diseases put people on pressure due to the situation caused by that disease which results in strife, anger, violence, increase in crime. Have you seen such things in your community?</i></p> <p><i>ANNA: I have not heard of such because the person I am staying with doesn't allow us to move in the community, she wants us to be in the house, watching TV, reading books, doing chores but she doesn't like us to loiter around</i></p>

INT: Does that mean you have not had the opportunity to know about what is happening in your community

ANNA: No I haven't but I see them on TV on news; things like people fought due to the current situation, that the husband failed to provide food for the family and the children were starving, but I have not seen such by myself

INT: Even though you haven't seen them, have you even heard of such happening in your community?

ANNA: No I have not heard of it but what I see in my community is hunger, people lack food to eat

Anna's statement is also indicative of how structural violence, rooted in systemic inequalities (who has access to food, who can travel to rural or urban areas, who has savings, who can still generate an income or draw on resources from family members, etc.), has amplified since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although around half of the young people we spoke to did not report any fights or surge of violence in their respective communities, they did refer to such stories they had heard on the radio, watched on TV or had been spoken about among their peers, family members or within the community.

8.2. Law and Enforcement of Curfew and Lockdown Measures

The Ugandan law-enforcement authorities were feared by the majority of young people we spoke to. Some witnessed first-hand how the police and/or LDU had beaten and caned people for incidences such as: not being at home by 7pm; tending to their farms after curfew; or not having closed their shops by 7pm. Tom and Mugeru reported seeing police officers asking for bribes. Tom for instance told us:

"Remember I told you that curfew starts at 7pm, so during the time when this curfew directive was just given we were still working and we would sometimes leave work late. During those times, we used to clash with the police officials and they would only let you go if you bribe them with some money."

Table 11: Tom's experience of law and enforcement during the COVID-19 lockdown

Tom lives in a rural and rather remote community. In previous interviews he told us about drug and alcohol abuse and HIV infections among youth in his community and that many young people earn a living through mango picking or any other harvesting of fruits and vegetables (which is then sold in urban areas). During a community walk Tom described some parts of his community as not safe during the night due to incidences of petty theft and other crimes. Tom narrated how the lockdown was enforced by police in his community:

INT: Who do they cane and why?

TOM: They beat whosoever fails to follow the directives

INT: Which one among those directives are people mostly caned for?

TOM: That one of wearing masks, remember the president said that it is now a must that everyone must wear a mask when moving around in the community. So these police officers usually move along with someone selling these masks and if they don't find you with one, they then ask you to buy it there and then. If you try to refuse, then the police officer beats you up

INT: What happens in cases when you don't have the money with you at that moment?

TOM: Then you have to tighten your bums and they cane you some strokes

INT: How many strokes do they cane such a person?

TOM: They have no standard number; they can cane you until you just run away from them when you feel you can't take it anymore.

INT: Has this happened to you or to someone you know of during this COVID 19 lockdown?

Tom: No, but I see them happen in my community

Previous studies have reported that the police service in Uganda is perceived by the general public as the most corrupt institution in the country (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006; Wambua, 2015). Police misconduct, lack of integrity and distrust were already persistent challenges before the pandemic (Wagner, Hout and Namara, 2020). *Transparency International* lists Uganda as having a significantly corrupt public sector, ranked at 137 out of 180.⁹ Responses from our participants suggest that misconduct by the police and public authorities in charge of enforcing lockdown measures may have intensified during the lockdown in some communities, deepening mistrust in public authorities.

Apio's experience for instance showcases how this general mistrust in public authorities can negatively affect mental and physical well-being. When one of her close family members became sick during lockdown her family was afraid of driving her to a hospital in a private car. In Apio's words:

"Her medicines also got finished after some time but we didn't know what to do. Much as they used to say that if you have a sick person that has medical documents, you can use private cars but we were scared of taking a risk. The people in authority turn against you even when you are right."

In the end Apio's family treated her relative at home, with no doctor or medical supervision and with the little medicine they had left. Otim was also not able to take public transport to a health facility (as boda boda drivers were not allowed to work, faced severe punishment by the police if they did so and no alternative means of transport were available for people who needed medical help. She therefore had to walk a long distance to a clinic despite feeling extremely unwell.

In Ruth's case the violent enforcement of lockdown rules has severely affected her mother, who was arrested but then later released after she was caught selling maize in the street after curfew. Being arrested has triggered severe mental distress for her mother which, according to Ruth, ultimately led to serious health problems. In other words, among some of our participants the way lockdown measures were enforced in their communities invoked feelings of mistrust in and fear of state authorities. A good description of the general environment during the early stages of the lockdown was given by Paul.

Table 12: Paul's experience of law and enforcement during the COVID-19 lockdown

INT: Okay, are you still able to meet up with your friends during this lock down?

PAUL: I can't meet them up like I used to before because the free time I get to go around to visit my friends then it is near curfew time and the moment you are caught moving beyond curfew time then they can either arrest you or they beat you up so bad.

INT: Have you seen some who have been beaten up for moving beyond curfew time?

PAUL: Yes, they have taken some people from our community for moving beyond curfew time.

INT: Who exactly arrests and beat up people in that case?

PAUL: It is these LDU officials, they are so fond of caning people who are caught violating any of the president's directives. They are so tough that they even pull people out of their houses

INT: Why?

PAUL: If you see them passing by and you run inside your house to hide, these LDU officials will still knock at people's doors and pull them out

INT: What do you think about such?

PAUL: I think it is not right. If you find people in their homes and inside their houses, I don't think it is proper to call them out of their homes.

⁹ See: <https://www.transparency.org/country/UGA#chapterInfo>, accessed 11 July 2020.

While Paul appears to be quite critical of how the lockdown has been violently imposed, one young woman, Naka, we interviewed supported the violent enforcement of laws, stating:

“We have police men here but they don’t beat civilians unless you are moving out past curfew time. They deal with you correctly and accordingly through those beatings.”

Similarly, Adikini noted that *“we have to listen to what the president says”*.

Our interviews further indicate that lockdown measures in peri-urban areas have been at times enforced arbitrarily by authorities, as described by Kato.

Table 13: Kato's experience of law and enforcement during the COVID-19 lockdown

INT: What about the curfew, how has it been?

KATO: No, people have not been taking curfew as a big issue here, bars have been operating till midnight, and since the Officer in Charge of police is also a drunkard spending most of his time in bars. They threatened to dismiss him from the post and that’s when they acted a bit and we even heard some gun shots but he was also just living his normal life.

INT: So he fired some gunshots to threaten the people?

KATO: Yes, he fired shots to signal that he was on duty but the people move up to midnight and they have not been affected by the curfew issue.

INT: So that means you have not been affected by curfew at all?

KATO: No, you can walk at any time and no one will reprimand you.

8.3. Support from Government

Several of the young people interviewed noted that they were not receiving any support from an organisation and/or the government. In Paul’s words:

“There isn’t anyone we draw support from, we are by ourselves.”

Only two of our core participants spoke about support (food) they received from the government. While Aisha told us that her family was actually not really in need of the food they had received from the government, Kato’s family, who did struggle during the pandemic, was disappointed by its bad quality and quantity:

“Yes, they gave some food to the elderly and the disabled 2 kilograms only. But sincerely how can you give 2 kilograms to someone who has a family of three people and one kilogram of beans, it’s like mocking them. They just do that as a show off that they gave food but all in all its the people that have managed to go through this situation. Even the flour they gave us had a bitter taste and the beans were so hard to prepare and people first had to put panadol tablets for them to get ready. We even failed to eat that flour.”

Many of the young people interviewed were critical of food distributions by the government, with their complaints being that distribution was scattered, badly organized, reached only a few areas, and frequently left out those who need it the most). Rose, for example, reported that in her community food was only given to boda boda drivers but not to impoverished families. When we asked young people what kind of support they believe the government should provide during the pandemic, the majority referred to provision of food (and/or financial support), followed by easing of the lockdown measures (to reduce the risk of deepened poverty) and the free distribution of face masks (which has not been effectively implemented at the time of writing). A few of the young people interviewed mentioned support related to schooling (free books/papers to support learning for those without access to technology, or the reduction of school fees). A few would like to see improvements in the

provision of health care. Other participants, when asked what advice they would give to the government on how to support young people, did not believe that the government was responsible for their general wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, and viewed this as the main responsibility of parents.

“I don’t think it is the government’s responsibility, it is parents who have to be responsible over their children to prevent them from moving far from home, they have to watch where they go, what they eat, what they drink and things like that.” (Juliet)

Some, like Atala, pointed to self-reliance, drawing on the familiarity of hardship within her community.

“We are used to this kind of life of lacking. It is not our first time to suffer like this but we have lived such a life from way back then.” (Atala)

The young people interviewed clearly articulated a range of grievances, but often tended to locate the responsibility for action locally, within their families, rather than directing their concerns towards the government. This signals both a need to support actions at community level that are responsive to the concerns of young people, and to engage with young people in building their awareness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

9. Effects on Mobility

Before the lockdown, our study participants were living in diverse arrangements with immediate and extended family members, and moves between homes were quite common. In our quantitative study, 59% of 2773 adolescents surveyed had moved between homes over a four year period (2014 to 2018) and 27% of these moved two or more times (CoVAC, Wave 2 survey data). The lockdown seems to have affected these arrangements in different ways, both increasing and constraining movement. For some, mobility increased at the start of the COVID-19 crisis, as people moved from towns and cities to family homes in rural areas, including some of the core participants who were sent to stay with relatives in these communities when their primary caregiver’s work ceased. This movement into rural communities meant that for those core participants who were already living in rural areas, their families expanded or they became part of families under increasing pressure. Some of our participants indicated that they moved to another household shortly before or at the early stages of lockdown. They gave the following reasons for why they had moved to the rural areas:: access to a garden (provision of free food), reunion with close and extended family members, loss of job and income in urban areas, or because living in villages was considered more affordable.

Table 14: Reasons for migrating to rural areas

KATO: It’s because of COVID-19, because they cannot manage the life of the town here since there are many expenses and if you can see here a parent may have to spend close to 3000/- per child every day, yet in the village it may not be that much.

ADIKINI: Yes, so I had saved some little money and I would often send it to my mother because I had taken her [Adikini’s daughter] to live with my mother so I would send her money to pay for her school fees but when the situation became hard and I could no longer work that is when I decided to come back to village. People were no longer allowed to go to work and transportation was stopped so I couldn’t manage and I came back

RUTH: It has indeed affected me, I would be in school, but see am now in the village. I came here with my mother because life was being a little difficult in town, then my mother decided that we go in the village where we could get free food. Our business was put at a standstill yet we needed to feed every day.

PAUL: Due to this COVID 19 lockdown, people in our home increased in number. About 6 more people joined us because where they were staying, they couldn't afford a meal when their jobs were put at a standstill. So they decided to move to the village where food is assured since it comes from the garden

Not all of our participants were able to move to their preferred area or household, however. From late March till late July 2020, public transport was put on hold, private cars were only allowed to drive with permission (e.g. for urgent transport to a health facility) and boda boda drivers were only permitted to transport food and other needed goods, but not people. Young people shared with us how the lack of mobility had a severe impact on their family's income, at times also restricting access to food or healthcare (see section 10), and their ability to see and be with close family members. The business (selling of electronic goods) Mark currently works for was heavily affected as customers could not travel longer distances to buy his products. Cathy's parents could not commute to work and Nyanja reported that people in his community could no longer sell their produce as there was no means of transporting goods.

Some felt so desperate that they walked very long distances in order to work and make an income (such as Mugeru who works as a painter and walked several kilometres to work, or the mother of Atala, who walked all the way from Bombo to Kampala to sell tea as the family was running out of food). Tom reported that in his community youth who suddenly lost their jobs due to lockdown and transport restrictions resorted to taking drugs and alcohol:

"Before the lockdown, most youths used to work in different places but after the lockdown, some customers couldn't come to this side because some cars were not allowed to move. So this left most youths unemployed and they have now resorted to taking drugs and alcohol."

In Cathy's community boda boda drivers who were no longer able to make ends meet started to riot:

"The boda boda men are rioting, they want the government to allow them to carry passengers again. Then people are also rioting because the taxis are charging a lot of money as compared to what they used to pay before the lockdown."

Jane, Aisha and Otim expressed sadness about not being able to see their mothers as there was either no public transport or it was too expensive. Jane told us that a journey that used to cost 1,000/= via public transport has now increased sevenfold to 7,000/=. Naki's aunt had to pay for two instead of just one seat in a car to go to a hospital in Mulago (Kampala). Put differently, travelling via public transport such as a taxi¹⁰ or shared car became a privilege the majority can no longer enjoy, widening the gap further between the rich and the poor.

10. Effects on Health

Uganda was one of the first African countries to grant free access to health care services (Basaza, O'Connell and Chapčáková, 2013). However, already before the pandemic people faced many challenges in accessing medical treatment, as the country's public health care system is reportedly under-resourced and patients have no guarantee of treatment.¹¹ During the pandemic, the young people interviewed faced many additional challenges towards accessing free health care such as hiring a private nurse, paying for medication, or the need to go to a private clinic as public hospitals

¹⁰ A 'taxi' in the context of Uganda refers to a small bus or van that carries a large group of people and drives the same route and distance (similar to a public bus).

¹¹ See for instance: <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/uganda-looking-under-resourced-healthcare-system>, last accessed 3 September 2020.

were either too far or had run out of drugs. In other words, some of the young people we spoke to reported that they ended up paying for health care services, because state services were no longer accessible.

Others felt that new bureaucratic measures put in place because of the lockdown impeded them from getting medical treatment. Due to restriction of movement, a permission letter was needed from the local chairman, authorizing people to travel to a health facility. In Naki's experience this procedure was inefficient and time consuming:

"Take an example of my aunt's condition, my uncle had to first go to the chairmen to get a letter that grants him to carry her on the motorcycle. But someone can lose his/her life in the process."

Building on what was briefly discussed in section 8.2., law enforcement in combination with lack of or extremely high charges for public transport hindered some from travelling to health care facilities or visit sick family members. In Sam's words:

It's all by the grace of God and if you don't die, you just have to improvise ways of getting there [the hospital] because there is no one that can carry you there.

According to Apio even though the health minister had promised ambulances to the hospital will be free of charge, her family still had to pay 400.000/= to get her cousin who had a serious accident to the hospital.

Also Anna had to walk long distances to see her sick mother as no taxi was running and Otim walked to a health facility feeling extremely unwell. Adikini's story is illustrative of the many challenges people with sick family members were facing in accessing free healthcare during lockdown.

Table 15: Adikini's experience of restriction on movement

ADIKINI: Yes, recently my child fell sick and I had to take her to the health facility but it was difficult for me to reach the facility. In the end I reached but I reached there late. Her situation was not good so I had to get to the health facility but transportation was stopped which delayed me to reach the facility and when I reached the health facility they told me to first find a mask to cover my mouth and wash my hands yet my child was really in a bad state but they couldn't help me immediately because of the presence of coronavirus.

INT: How did you get to the health facility; did you walk or find other means of transportation?

ADIKINI: I walked, I went with my brother he has a bicycle so he rode us on his bicycle for some distance but whenever we reached police officers I would get off the bicycle and walk far apart from him and then we would walk with my sick child then when we pass by them he again rides us on his bicycle

INT: How is your daughter doing now

ADIKINI: She is fine now she got better

INT: Was she finally attended to?

ADIKINI: She was attended to but after a long time and some of the treatment we had to give her from home not the health facility

INT: Why did they refuse to give it to her at the health facility

ADIKINI: Because of coronavirus we are not supposed to be in close proximity with other patients at the health facility

INT: ooh that is why they told you to treat her from home?

ADIKINI: Yes

INT: Was it oral medicine or an injection

ADIKINI: They gave us oral medicine accompanied with a drip so I had to get a nurse nearby who helped me and put it on her at home

INT: Did the nurse charge you money or helped you for free

ADIKINI: I paid her, she can't do it for free

INT: And the facility you went to was it free of charge or you paid

ADIKINI: It is a government facility it was free

Conclusion

This study provides a snapshot at a moment in time when young people experienced lockdown measures in Uganda during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing from mobile phone interviews with adolescent core participants from CoVAC's longitudinal study, our analysis brings the voices of young people to the fore and the complex ways in which the lockdown has affected their lives. Our analysis has shown that the effects on young people of the lockdown have varied according to gender, location, mobility and socio-economic background, amplifying inequalities and feeding into multiple forms of violence.

The study demonstrates immense and interlinked costs of lockdown for young people in low income settings. The immediate **economic** costs were considerable, with loss of earnings and employment affecting all families to varying degrees. Access to food crops from gardens meant many families had food supplies, but at times missed basic commodities like sugar, salt or soap. The effects were amplified among some of the poorest families, with young people who had already left school because of poverty, struggling with loss of livelihoods and vocational training opportunities. Almost none of the families of the young people interviewed received economic support from the government or other organisations, putting them at increased risk of deepened poverty and all its associated implications. Young women and men, who had worked hard to lead independent lives, or in some instances as parents themselves or caregivers of younger relatives, suddenly found themselves again in relationships of dependence.

Like children the world over, with **schools closed** in the lockdown, those young people we interviewed who were still enrolled in school were feeling the loss of their education. For many of them, the costs associated with secondary schooling were already hard to bear, and they worried that school closures had reduced their chances of completing secondary school. There was anxiety about the payments needed when schools reopen, whether they could afford repeating years if they fail or are unable to retake exams, and whether the loss of family income during the crisis would stop them from being able to return to school. Any revision or home based work seemed to be piecemeal, with very few able to access relevant curricular materials or to get any support for their learning from teachers or other adults. While some attempted to engage with learning support provision organized by the government through TV, radio and newspapers, the material was often seen as difficult to understand, not relevant to their schooling level, or did not relate clearly to what they had been taught in school. Others had no access to the technology needed to access these materials, including being able to use phones to access the web based resources. With the study suggesting that girls are less likely to own phones, there is potential for girls to be particularly disadvantaged by these challenges, with the boys having a better chance using their phones of being able to keep up with their studies. However, the boys we interviewed rarely used their phones to help with studying. In short, location and socio-economic background mattered significantly when it came to accessing distance learning provisions, reinforcing already existing forms of structural violence and inequalities.

Gender influenced experiences of the lockdown in several ways. Some young people perceived domestic violence to have increased in their communities, particularly affecting women and girls, and aggravated by men's loss of income and employment. With boys more likely to be in paid work, whether or not they are enrolled in school, the lockdown has had marked effects on the income generation capacity of the boys we interviewed. With the expectation for many of them that their entry into manhood would bring self-reliance and the ability to provide materially for their families, the loss of this capacity affected their masculine identities and relationships. The girls we interviewed who were out of school, including the two young mothers, also struggled with a loss of income. Socially, the boys we interviewed appeared to have remained much better connected with their friends than the girls, as the boys had more access to mobile phones and still found ways to meet up with their friends. The girls, on the other hand, largely remained (more than ever) confined to their homes and hardly moved around in their communities. While none of the young people interviewed reported

engaging themselves in transactional sex, their views were mixed on whether these practices had increased or decreased since lockdown. On the one hand, men's reduced incomes, restrictions on movement and access to social spaces were viewed as reducing opportunities for sex in exchange for money; on the other hand, the economic pressures on girls were viewed as increasing the likelihood of transactional sex. Possible effects on teenage pregnancy were, at the time of this study, unclear. From these interviews it was clear that the lockdown had constrained opportunities for intimate partnerships among the young people, and put pressure on their relationships, with some reports of girls leaving family homes to be with their boyfriends, with economic hardship or conflicts with caregivers noted as important reasons for this. Overall, our data points to the potential for lockdown measures to amplify intersecting gender and economic inequalities.

A theme that emerged as particularly significant in this study was the effects of COVID-19 on **mobility**. There was a considerable amount of movement affecting young people's lives at the start of the lockdown, as families attempted to find safe locations to stay during the crisis. While these moves were protective, they also led to some problems for young people. Some households in rural communities, for example, struggled to provide for the influx of extended family members from the city. Some young people were unhappy at being separated from their caregivers, and anxious for their safety. The restricted movement of people and goods made it difficult for young people and their families to sell produce, a very important source of income for many people, and for some led to challenges in accessing health care services. The restrictions on movement associated with the lockdown left a few young people feeling trapped, lonely and at risk of violence or abuse. Systemic and structural forms of violence, in terms of who has access to good quality healthcare, and who can afford to pay extra costs for transport and/or private healthcare seemed to intensify during the pandemic, nurturing pre-existing forms of inequalities.

The intensification of these forms of structural violence during lockdown erupted into direct forms of **violence**, most notably in young people's narratives about witnessing domestic violence and police beatings in their communities. The economic shocks to families and lockdown conditions were associated by some with increased fights and domestic violence among neighbouring families, and occasionally in their own families. The deepening of economic insecurities during the lockdown put pressure on family relationships, in some instances creating conflict in families, and considerable distress for young people already suffering anxieties about the loss of their education and livelihoods. The young people interviewed, particularly those in peri-urban or urban locations, found themselves in an increasingly repressive environment, witnessing and fearing enforcement measures exercised by the Ugandan police and LDU that were often brutal and involved the use of excessive force.

Across the world, including Uganda, lockdown measures have been intended to reduce transmission, protecting people by closing schools and businesses, restricting transport, banning public gatherings, and imposing curfews. While some support measures have been offered by the Ugandan government and other organisations, such as the provision of food for those most in need, the time of this study, the young people interviewed appear to have seen few benefits of this support. Though they expressed grievances about this lack of support, and some expressed concern around what they had witnessed around the enforcement of lockdown measures, few critically reflected on the larger implications for their country of these concerns. More research is needed on how the lockdown may affect young people's agency, identity and ability to challenge and ponder deeply rooted inequalities that deepened during COVID-19.¹² The young people interviewed have drawn support from family networks, particularly in the provision of material support – shelter and food to sustain themselves. There is a sense of endurance, of self-reliance within the extended family, and of family members working to sustain peaceful relationships under considerable pressure. There is a vital need, at

¹² For a detailed discussion on the role of public education in increasing young people's political agency in Uganda see: Datzberger & Le Mat, 2019.

international, governmental and community levels, to strengthen and enhance approaches to reduce these multiple pressures, that combine to amplify inequalities and injustices, creating anxiety and distress and jeopardizing the hopes for the future for these young people.

Recommendations

These findings have a number of implications for policy-makers, NGOs and international development partners/agencies responding to the COVID-19 crisis in low income contexts:.

- **Tailored approaches are needed**, recognising the diverse effects of lockdowns according to young people's gender, age, stage of education, socio-economic status, and location (rural, peri-urban and urban).
- **Provide additional economic support**: As well as ensuring access to food for all, in low income settings governments could consider some form of immediate cash transfer for young people and families, renewable if the pandemic persists. As well as meeting basic needs during crises, provision of income and food can help to prevent violence through easing household stress.
- **Direct additional resources to schools to prevent school drop out because of costs of education**: Along with waiving fees/levies, governments could consider encouraging return to school through providing free school meals, and additional subsidies for those who are at a high risk of dropping out due to the combined effects of schooling costs and economic insecurity caused by COVID-19.
- **Support learning** during periods of full/partial school closures through partnerships with local agencies and community-based organisations to facilitate radio, TV or internet based learning spaces. Explore the feasibility and safety on in-person gatherings, including engaging teachers to support locally organised, small learning groups of children; and the potential for outdoors teaching/learning. These will be particularly crucial in contexts with limited access to technology.
- **Investment is needed in violence prevention at school, community and household levels**: During lockdowns, existing services for reporting, referral, tracking and response, including free child and domestic violence helplines, and facilities for women and children to move if in danger, need to be strengthened, with additional mechanisms to address possible increases in violence. Once lockdown eases, additional investment is needed to support school and community staff with how to help children who may have experienced violence during school closures, including gender-sensitive, youth- and child-focused spaces for young people to speak out in schools and in communities. Investment in public awareness campaigns on the media working alongside community-based organisations could promote bystander interventions, such as SASA has done in encouraging neighbours to bang on pots if there is violence in a neighbour's house.
- **Health and welfare services need to be free and accessible**: This includes ensuring the availability of free and safe public transport to health and welfare facilities during lockdowns, and gender-sensitive support for mental health and well-being, including young people's feelings of fear, loneliness, anxiety, distress and loss of self-esteem that may be exacerbated by the compounding effects of lockdown measures. To avoid conflict with public authorities when movement is restricted, additional training for police and local governments may be needed to protect people's basic and civic rights during lockdowns.
- **More research** is needed on the short and long term effects on young people's lives as the pandemic continues to take its course, and more robust quantitative studies are needed on the impacts on levels of violence experienced by young people, and on how these effects vary – for girls and boys, in different locations, and different socio-economic circumstances.

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Annex 1

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	In school / out of school before COVID-19	Employed / unemployed before COVID-19	Date of Interview
Bob	Male	17	Out of school	Employed	Not done
Otim	Female	17	In school	Unemployed	06/06/2020
Atala	Female	17	In school/voc	Unemployed	19/05/2020
Apio	Female	17	In school	Unemployed	05/06/2020
Nakintu	Female	16	In school	Unemployed	16/06/2020
Paul	Male	18	Out of school	Employed	28/05/2020
Nakafeero	Female	16	In school	Unemployed	20/05/2020
Tom	Male	17	Out of school	Unemployed	16/05/2020
Jane	Female	17	In school	Unemployed	09/06/2020
Ruth	Female	16	In school	Unemployed	07/06/2020
Musisi	Male	18	Out of school	Employed	26/05/2020
Cathy	Female	16	In school	Unemployed	21/06/2020
Rose	Female	16	In school/ voc	Unemployed	21/05/2020
Tawana	Female	22	Out	Employed	19/05/2020
Nkola	Female	17	In school	unemployed	27/05/2020
Anna	Female	18	Out	unemployed	15/06/2020
Linda	Female	17	Out	Employed (about to start a job)	23/05/2020
Juliet	Female	18	In school	unemployed	08/06/2020
Peter	Male	19	In school	unemployed	09/06/2020
Mukake	Female	17	In school	unemployed	10/06/2020
Nankoma	Female	17	In school	unemployed	01/06/2020
Mark	Male	18	Out	Employed	19/06/2020
Chekurut	Male	18	In school	unemployed	20/05/2020
Adikini	Female	19	Out	Employed	28/05/2020
Kiprotick	Male	21	Out	Employed	15/05/2020
Aisha	Female	17	Out	Unemployed	14/06/2020
Mugera	Male	16	In school	Unemployed	23/05/2020
Nyanja	Male	17	In school	Unemployed	26/05/2020
Lwasa	Male	17	Out	Employed (casual work)	Not done
Sam	Male	18	Out	Unemployed (casual work)	01/06/2020
James	Male	17	In school	Unemployed	17/05/2020
Kalungi	Male	17	In school	Unemployed	25/05/2020
Kalumba	Male	18	Out	Unemployed	03/06/2020

Kato	Male	16	In school	Unemployed	28/05/2020
Dan	Male	18	In school	Unemployed	30/05/2020
Kayondo	Male	17	In school	Unemployed	08/05/2020