



COVID-19 Awareness, Adoption of COVID-19 Preventive Measures, and Effects of COVID-19 Lockdown Among Adolescent Boys and Young Men in Kampala, Uganda

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Accepted: 4 January 2021

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Abstract

There is growing evidence of the challenges with adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures and the effect of the prevention measures on the health of populations in various parts of the world but with limited documentation in sub-Saharan Africa. We assessed COVID-19 awareness, adoption of COVID-19 prevention measures, and the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on the mental health status, socio-economic disruptions and engagement in unhealthy behaviours among 2500 in- and out-of-school adolescent boys and young men (ABYM) aged 10–24 years in Kampala, Uganda. 74.8% ($n = 1869$) were in-school; nearly half (47.3%, $n = 1182$) were aged 15–19 years. Although > 80% were aware of at least two COVID-19 prevention measures, only 22.2% ($n = 555$) reported that they always wore a face mask while in a public place; 40.9% ($n = 1023$) always washed their hands with soap and running water while 17.6% ($n = 440$) always avoided gatherings of more than five people. COVID-19 lockdown led to: (a) *increased mental health challenges* (e.g. 1.2% [$n = 31$] contemplated committing suicide); (b) *limited ability to meet basic needs* (e.g. 62.0% [$n = 1549$] found it difficult to afford a diverse/balanced diet); (c) *socio-economic disruptions* (e.g. 30.3% [$n = 756$] experienced a reduction in income) and (d) *engagement in unhealthy behaviours* (e.g. 62% [$n = 1554$] reported a sedentary life style such as excessive watching of TV). These effects were more pronounced among older adolescent boys (15–19 years) and young men (20–24 years) and out-of-school compared to in-school ABYM. Our findings suggest a need for appropriate health promotion, mental health and socio-economic interventions targeting ABYM in Kampala, Uganda.

Keywords COVID-19 · Lockdown · Adolescent boys and young men · Kampala · Uganda

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Background

Globally, there were 42,549,383 cumulative cases of COVID-19 by October 24, 2020 [1]. Of these, a cumulative total of 1,150,163 (2.7%) patients had died of the disease while 31,456,279 cases had recovered from the disease. Although earlier studies suggested that about 80% of those who died were over the age of 60 [2, 3], the World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that people of all ages can be infected by the novel coronavirus. However, older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill and to die of COVID-19 than other at-risk populations.

While the virus was slow in reaching the African continent compared to other parts of the world, infection has grown exponentially in recent months and continues to spread throughout Africa. Africa's first COVID-19 case