

Impacts of COVID-19 among Mothers of Young Children in Siaya County, Kenya

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES - AUGUST 2020



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- While less than one percent of mothers indicated any COVID-19 related known symptoms, hospitalizations or death in their families, most reported that the pandemic negatively affected daily life.
- Most mothers reported a decrease in income (82%) and difficulty getting food (67%), health care (46%) or medicine (48%) for their families due to the pandemic.
- Mothers perceived that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health (82%) and that of their child (54%).
- Though Kenya has not yet seen an immediate health disaster due to COVID-19, these findings suggest significant secondary impacts of the crisis. It is critical that the pandemic response address these indirect impacts, including economic, psycho-social and protection.

BACKGROUND

Kenya detected its first case of the novel coronavirus on March 13, 2020. The national government instituted containment measures, including school closures and banning large social gatherings, shortly thereafter. This research describes the perceived effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on households with young children in Siaya County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), in close partnership with the Evidence Lab at the Duke Global Health Institute, conducted a longitudinal, quasi-experimental evaluation of the Integrated Mothers and Babies Course (iMBC). In August 2020, CRS and Duke collected the fourth round of evaluation data, adding a COVID-19 module that was adapted from the [Pandemic Stress Index](#) and the [COVID-19 Exposure and Family Impact Scale](#). The survey reached 340 mothers of children (1 to 4 years) who were enrolled in CRS early childhood development programming.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Mothers surveyed did not report almost no COVID-19 illness. Less than one percent of survey respondents reported any known COVID-19 symptoms, hospitalizations or death in their families. Only 1.5% of respondents indicated that someone in their family was known to have been exposed to the novel coronavirus.

In contrast, COVID-19 and related containment measures were perceived to impact many aspects of daily life. Nearly 66% of mothers reported that COVID-19 affected their day-to-day life (much, very much or extremely). Over 67% of mothers reported that since March 2020 they had difficulty accessing food for their family. They also reported difficulty obtaining medicine (48%) and health care (46%) when they needed it. Almost 100% of the mothers stated that schools or childcare centers were closed, and that their children's education was disrupted. Since March 2020, over 78% of mothers missed an important family event and 45% stated that their family lived separately for health, safety or job demands.

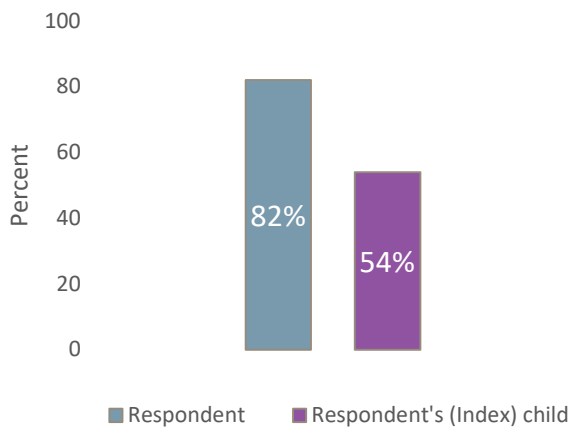
MENTAL HEALTH

Mothers also perceived that COVID-19 affected their own mental health and the mental health of their children. Nearly 82% of respondents reported that COVID-19 negatively impacted their own mental health (much, very much or

67% *of mothers reported that they had difficulty getting food for their families due to COVID-19*

extremely). Over 53% of respondents indicated that COVID-19 negatively impacted the mental health of their young child. (See Figure 1.) Seven percent of mothers had symptoms of moderate or severe depression, as measured by the [Patient Health Questions-9](#).

FIGURE 1: PERCEIVED NEGATIVE IMPACTS TO MENTAL HEALTH FOR MOTHERS & THEIR YOUNG CHILD



PARENTING AND CAREGIVING

Nearly 84% of mothers indicated that COVID-19 negatively affected (worse / a lot worse) their ability to parent. Over seven in ten mothers reported that COVID-19 negatively affected their ability to care for their own young child (72%) or other children in their family (73%). Nearly 46% of mothers indicated that their ability to care for older adults or people with disabilities in their family was worse or a lot worse due to COVID-19. Over 87% of respondents were unable to visit or care for a family member (at home, in the hospital or in the community).

COVID-19 negatively impacted parenting for more than 4 out of 5 mothers.

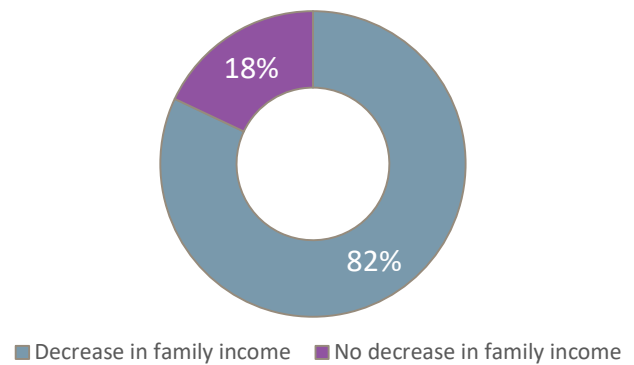


Additionally, mothers perceived that the pandemic negatively impacted family relations. Eighty-three percent of mothers reported that COVID-19 negatively affected how family members got along with each other.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Mothers reported that both employment and family income were negatively impacted since March 2020. Over 82% of mothers reported a decrease in family income since March 2020. (See Figure 2.)

FIGURE 2: PERCEIVED NEGATIVE IMPACTS TO FAMILY INCOME SINCE MARCH 2020



While more than 36% of mothers indicated that a family member was required to stop working temporarily, almost 12% reported that a family member lost their job permanently. Nearly three out of four mothers (74%) reported that someone in the family was forced to work less (e.g. cut back hours, had fewer customers) during this period.

CONCLUSIONS

Although mothers reported very little COVID-19 related illness, the pandemic and related containment measures have disrupted their lives and increased hardships and vulnerabilities. Mothers reported decreased income and reduced access to food, medicine and healthcare. Mothers perceived negative impacts of the pandemic to their own mental health and their children's mental health. It also negatively impacted parenting and caregiving practices.

While the response to the pandemic must mitigate the direct health impacts of the virus, it must also help families to access their basic needs and address the economic, psycho-social and protection-related impacts of COVID-19. These impacts could continue to negatively affect families long after containment measures are lifted.