

# Covid-19 and Girl Child Educational Attainment in Selected Primary Schools in Kyamuhunga Sub-county, Bushenyi district-Western Uganda

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## Abstract

*With the outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the little ray of hope for girl-child educational attainment was completely shuttered. Historically, education in general and girls' education in particular has been an issue in development circles especially among the poor countries of the world, and with the outbreak of COVID-19, this was no exception as COVID-19 hit education; and girl child situation hardest in the poor countries of the world. Against this background, it was imperative that a study entitled; COVID-19 and Girl Child Educational Attainment in Selected Primary Schools in Kyamuhunga Sub-county, Bushenyi district-Western Uganda be carried out. The purpose of the study was to find out how COVID-19 affected girl-child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District. The study used a mixed research design where both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used.*

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, Girl Child, Girl child education, Educational attainment, Girl Child educational attainment

## Introduction

This study was carried out of dire need to ascertain how COVID-19 affected girl child education. Whereas COVID-19 affected education worldwide, this study particularly aimed at finding out how COVID-19 affected girl-child educational attainment in Selected Primary Schools in Kyamuhunga Sub-county, Bushenyi district-Western Uganda. Girl-child education has a considerable influence on society, resulting in healthier and more empowered children (Noble *et al.*, 2016). Over time, more than 90% of countries worldwide shut down schools to curb the transmission of COVID-19. Education is one of the most significant means for empowering an individual or community in general, and women and girls in particular. Level of educational attainment and literacy rate are indicators of general development of any society.

Globally, primary, and secondary school enrollment rates are getting closer to equal for girls and boys (90% male, 89% female) (Yasmin, 2020). But while enrollment rates are similar in fact, two-thirds of all countries have reached gender parity in primary school enrollment completion rates for girls are lower in low-income countries where 63% of female primary school students complete primary school, compared to 67% of male primary school students. In low-income countries, secondary school completion rates for girls also continue to lag, with only 36% of girls completing lower secondary school compared to 44% of boys (Van Kerkhove, 2021).

Globally, primary, and secondary school enrollment rates are getting closer to equal for girls and boys (90% male, 89% female) (Yasmin, 2020). But while enrollment rates are similar in fact, two-thirds of all countries have reached gender parity in primary school enrollment completion rates for girls are lower in low-income countries where 63% of female primary school students complete primary school, compared to 67% of male primary school students. In low-income countries, secondary school completion rates for girls also continue to lag, with only 36% of girls completing lower secondary school compared to 44% of boys (Van Kerkhove, 2021).

However much the need for educational attainment among girl children is essential, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in massive closure of schools making girls to have early pregnancy and early marriage issues. The incidence of early marriage was found to be low 2.8% of the girls and young women surveyed reported being pressurised by their parents to get married during the lockdown. This showed that the lockdown was a risk factor that disposed girls and young women towards early marriage. It was reported by 31% of study participants that they knew a young girl/ woman who was married off during the pandemic. Girls and women who reported cases but were frustrated and their calls were not responded to and their movements are restricted were quite a big number. Lack of scholastic materials like text books, shoes and uniforms (Muramuzi, 2023) made most parents dash out their girls for marriage in order to get dowry consequently disfavoured girl child education.

These problems that a girl-child faced necessitated the researcher to come up with this study so as to critically analyze and come up with clear mechanisms of these situations so as to increase future enrolment in education because educating a girl child is like educating the whole society because they involve themselves in more development issues in the society. This study therefore attempted to explore the impact of COVID-19 on girl-child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District.

The COVID-19 response included the closure of education institutions which increased girls' vulnerability to various forms of violence and exposure to sexual abuse. This has led to increased teenage pregnancies and early marriages. The girls may also not be benefitting from the home-based learning as they are heavily engaged in household chores. To that effect, the chances of many girls returning to school are dwindling (Fontanesi *et al.*, 2020). This is exacerbated by the loss of livelihoods for many households that prioritised educating the boys. As the government seeks to alleviate the effects of the lockdown brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasis should be placed on ensuring that systems that are supposed to protect girls and women from GBV are not compromised.

In March 2020, the first case of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) was reported in Uganda. This led to various COVID-19 response strategies that included indefinite closure of all educational institutions. In Uganda, over 15 million learners were out of school and almost half of these were girls and young women. A study by Save the Children (2020) indicates that when child protection systems including schools were locked down, all children were affected, but the marginalized are more vulnerable. It is widely believed that the closure of schools worsened gender inequalities in education. The education sector worked closely with all stakeholders to ensure continuity of learning however, pre-existing gender inequalities which promote an unfriendly learning environment at home, as well as less prioritisation of a girl child's education hampered their education (Fontanesi *et al.*, 2020, Kabonesa and Kindi, 2020). The policy brief identified challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic had on girl child education in Uganda, and proposed recommendations.

Uganda, like the rest of the world, struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus affected the social, economic, and health status of all populations. In a bid to contain its spread, the government of Uganda instituted several measures that entailed the closure of all education institutions, and limited travel and transport services among others. To that effect, the girl child had to be protected from the virus, gender-based violence, as well as exploitation that may affect their education. In many parts of the country, there was an increase in girls drawn into commercial sexual exploitation, trading sex for money, food or even sanitary towels. In Karamoja, girls increasingly went to work in gold mines to make ends meet. Ever since schools were closed, so many girls and boys were idle and in one place. They were kept busy by getting involved in behavior which could lead to unwanted pregnancies and child marriages. Every day, I see young girls being around boys almost from morning to evening and sometimes until late in the night (Pathak, Shukla, Tiwari, Stalin, Singh & Shukla, 2022).

The COVID-19 lockdown subsequently increased adolescent girls' vulnerability to Gender Based Violence and as a result of the gendered unequal power dynamics that manifests in physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence, the girl child was the biggest loser. COVID-19 had a devastating impact on girls' short and long-term mental and physical well-being as well as their sexual and reproductive health (AfriChild Centre, 2020).

Between March 2020 and June 2020, there was a 22.5% increase in pregnancy among girls aged 10-24 seeking 1st ANC from 80,655 to 98,810 respectively. Among girls aged 10-14 years, incidence of pregnancies had increased the most (by a staggering 366.5% from 290 in March to 1,353 in September 2020) compared to those aged 15- 19 years (25.5%) and young women aged 20-24 (21.1%). The risk of getting pregnant was higher among girls and young women aged 20-24 with the highest number of pregnancy cases registered in Kampala (24,059), Wakiso (21,595), Mukono (8,639), Kamuli (7,847), Kasese (6,957), Jinja (6,950) and Mayuge (6,648) (AfriChild Centre, 2020). In addition, 5 in 10 young people perceive the number of girls getting pregnant to have increased during the COVID-19 period compared to before; 3 in 10 girls (31.1%) were aware of a peer who became pregnant during the pandemic.

Many girls and women were locked down at home with perpetrators of violence and it was challenging to access medical treatment, refuge, or help because of the ban on public and private transport, resulting in an exponential increase in cases of GBV.

Violence against women and girls was already a widespread social issue in Uganda. According to the 2019 Uganda Police Report, there was an average of 1,141 cases of domestic violence reported monthly, and 64% of women between the ages of 15-49 in Uganda reported having ever experienced gender-based violence (UBOS, 2012). Inevitably, in the first month of the lockdown, police noted a significant surge in GBV cases with an estimated 3,280 cases reported to them between March 30 and April 28 (AfricChild Centre, 2020).

There has been a sharp rise in exposure of adolescent girls to sexual exploitation, harassment and other types of gender-based violence. Multiple cases have been reported and documented by various service providers and childcare platforms including police. Some of the adolescent girls fell victims of sexual exploitation and abuse in exchange for food and other needs. Others, have been abused by the rarely suspected relatives, workers, close family friends and peers (Noble *et al.*, 2016).

The pandemic led to increased incidents of early and unwanted pregnancies as well as early/forced marriages. Some adolescent girls along with their parents as a result of the prolonged lockdown lost hope for education. Pregnant girls and adolescent mothers do not tend to go back to school due to stigma, childcare, economic considerations and the status of laws, policies, and practices that block their access to education once married or impregnated. Quarantine measures in already cramped and insecure housing and exacerbated economic strain placed additional burden on households, which resulted in early or forced marriage as a coping mechanism to 'ease the burden (Maddaleno & Silber, 2013).

The Covid-19 pandemic put multiple additional challenges in young people's lives with schools first closed in late March 2020 followed by partial reopening for candidates and finalists (P.7, S.4 and S.6) as of mid-October 2020. For the majority of students who were not sitting national exams (more than 90%), schools remained closed for almost a year during the first lockdown. When schools finally re-opened in a staggered manner between March and June 2021, Bushenyi district faced a surge of Covid-19 cases and all educational institutions were forced to close again (Biryabarema, 2021). The country eventually enforced the longest school-closure nationwide, with schools either fully or partially closed for 83 weeks or starting to gradually reopen in January 2022.

While the long-term effects of the pandemic can only be speculated, the immediate effects on a girl child were devastating. Recent statistical models predict a learning deficit of 2.8 years in Uganda (Angrist *et al.*, 2021). According to the UBOS (2020) there was an increase in child labour from 21% to 36% affecting in particular girls, with an increase from 20% before to 37% during the COVID-19 lockdown compared to boys with an increase from 22% before to 35% during the same pandemic period.

### Findings

Below is a discussion of the findings on how COVID-19 affected girl-child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub-county, Bushenyi district-Western Uganda. Data was analysed according to the major themes of the objectives of the study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were studied and they included age, gender, marital status, level of education, and employment status all as well. This information was obtained from the parents, teachers, and students.

To be able to have a full understanding of the respondents' views, an analysis of their biodata was important as shown below. For example, table 1 below shows respondents' age.

Table 1: Respondents' age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 13	34	33
13-17	10	10
18-22	12	12
23-27	24	23
28-32	13	13
33-37	7	7
38 and above	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

According to Table 1 above, the majority of the respondents were in the age bracket below 13 (33%). All these were the pupils of primary schools, and the minority of the respondents were between the age of 38 and above at 3%. This meant that the target group for the study was greatly involved as it formed the majority of the respondents. Barach, Jacobs, Lipshultz & Laussen, 2015) stresses the importance of analysing the age of the respondents because it helps the researcher to attach the respondents to their views because age is an important aspect in data analysis.

**Respondents’ Gender**

The gender aspect in the identification of study respondents to this study was given priority to ensure that the views of the female gender on the issue of COVID 19 and girl child educational attainment were well captured. Accordingly, the chart below shows respondents of the study by gender.

Table 2: Respondents’ Gender

Gender of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	55	53
Female	48	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

According to table 2 above, the majority of the respondents were male (53%) while the rest of the respondents were female (47%). This implies that males were mostly involved in the study since they were more willing to participate in the study than females. But nevertheless, 47% female response rate was fairly good in capturing the female gender’s views on the topic of the study. Respondents’ gender forms an important aspect for any study (Gideon, 2012). It is contended that any study needs to take care of the background information of respondents and one of them is the gender of the respondents.

**Respondents’ marital status**

Marital status of the respondents was studied to identify the views of the respondents according to their marital status on COVID-19 and girl child educational attainment.

Table 3: Respondent’s marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	40	39
Married	51	50
Divorced	4	4
Widow	8	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

From table 3 above, respondent’s marital status indicated that the majority of the respondents were married (50%), those who were single were 39%, divorced were 4% while the widowed were at 8%. As contended by O’Neil & Gidengil (2006), the impact of the marital status of a respondent in any study is important because a married respondent and an unmarried respondent may see the same issue using different lenses given the environment in which they live and operate in and this may greatly affect their views in any study.

**Respondents’ level of education**

The level of education of the respondents was also studied to relate with the study and identify how COVID-19 affected girl child educational attainment in the area.

Table 4: Respondents level of education

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Non	50	49
Primary	20	19
Secondary	18	17
Tertiary (University/College)	15	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

According to table 4 above on the respondents' level of education, it was found out that the majority had not attained any education level (49%). This is a result of the fact that the majority were primary school going children who had not attained any level of education. This was followed by those who completed primary level 19%; Secondary level were 17% and 15% had completed Tertiary studies (University/College). Any scientific study needs to ascertain the level of education of the respondent because it greatly relates to the quality of responses given by a respondent (Remenyi, Swan & Van Den Assem, 2011). Accordingly, more than 5% of the respondents were educated enough to fully and effectively understand the purpose of taking art in the study. **Respondents' employment status**

The employments status of the respondents is significant towards any study because responses from the employed and unemployed respondents over the same issue can never be same. Therefore respondent's employment status was studied as shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Respondents employment status

Employment status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employed	18	17.6
Self-employed	15	14.5
Not employed	70	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

Results presented in table 5 above show that the majority of the respondents 65% were not employed, followed by 17.6% who were self-employed while the minority 14.5% were self-employed. As reported by Narayana & Acharyulu (2009), the employment status of a respondent has a great impact and influence on the quality, accuracy and objectivity of the responses raised by a respondent in any study

**The state of girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District**

Below is a presentation and analysis of the different responses on questions raised on the first theme of the specific objective of the study as shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: Responses on whether COVID-19 response included closure of education institutions which increased girls' vulnerability to various forms of violence and exposure to sexual abuse

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	75	73
Agree	28	27
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

It was indicated that COVID-19 response included closure of education institutions which increased girls' vulnerability to various forms of violence and exposure to sexual abuse as shown by 73% of the respondents who strongly agreed while 27% agreed. None disagreed or strongly disagreed meaning that all the respondents realised that COVID 19 increased girl child's vulnerability to various forms of violence.

The study further found out that schools carried out regular roll calls to establish the attendance of girl child as stated by the respondents. Additionally, girl child education was specifically challenged by the pandemic especially for girls from low-income households and girls in rural areas. Girls faced threats including increased child marriage, teenage or early pregnancy and gender-based violence. Many girls were married off in exchange for money as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic on families. The increase in child marriage resulted in an increase in teenage or early pregnancy. There was also an increase in rape cases which led to unwanted pregnancy and survivors were more likely to drop out of school. We have seen the impact of these in our communities (Njau, 1993).

The findings were further collaborated with the data collected when interviewees stated that:

*Teachers carried out roll calls and this was done at the beginning of the lesson and other teachers did it as the lesson went on. This showed the seriousness of the teachers to get to know the girl child attendance recording the number of girls in class and those that did not attend regularly were affected by COVID 19* (Interview held with the Headteacher of Kyamabaare Primary school).

Table 7: The challenges affecting the girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Increases in child marriage, teenage or early pregnancy	23	22.3
Gender-based violence	9	8.7
Many girls were married off in exchange for money as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic on families	13	12.6
There was also an increase in rape cases	11	1.6
Increase of girl child drop out of school	47	45.6

From the findings in table 7 above, the challenges affecting girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District included increase in child marriage, teenage or early pregnancy given that (22.3%), gender-based violence 8.7%, many girls were married off in exchange for money as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic on families 12.6%. There was also an increase in rape cases 1.6% and increase in girl child drop out of school at 45.6%. All these point to a grim picture of how COVID 19 affected girl child educational attainment (Biryabarema, 2021). in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub county, Bushenyi district.

#### The effect of COVID-19 in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District

Table 8: Teachers’ responses on how they thought when children are not able to interact with their teachers and their peers directly & whether it affected their learning negatively

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	92	89
Agree	11	11
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

From table 8 above, (89%) of teachers strongly agreed that when children are not able to interact with their teachers and their peers directly, their learning is affected negatively and the rest 11% only agreed to the assertion that when children are not able to interact with their teachers and their peers directly, their learning is affected negatively. The study findings are in agreement with the findings of Yasmin, 2020, Fontanesi *et al.*, 2020, Kabonesa and Kindi, 2020) who contend that when children are not able to interact with their teachers and their peers directly, their learning suffers.

#### The effect of COVID-19 on girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District

Table 9 below presents the respondents’ views on the effect of COVID-19 on girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District.

Table 9: The effect of COVID-19 on girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Closure of all education institutions	35	26.9
Covid 19 affected the social, economic & health status of the populations	8	7.7
The rapid closures gave no time for planning or any other alternative form of learning, which only meant that schooling at all levels in Uganda went on a standstill	11	10.6
Ever since schools were closed, so many girls and boys are idle and in one place.	8	7.7
There has been sharp rises in exposure of adolescent girls to sexual exploitation, harassment and other types of gender-based violence.	38	36.8



The pandemic has led to increased incidents of early and unwanted pregnancies as well as early/ forced marriage.	3	2.9
<b>Total</b>	103	100

From table 9 above, the respondents’ views on the effect of COVID-19 on girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district included; closure of all education institutions 26.9%, COVID 19 affected the social, economic & health status of the populations 7.7%, 10.6% of the respondents revealed that the rapid closure of educational institutions gave no time for planning or any other alternative form of learning which meant that schooling at all levels in Uganda went on a standstill. 7.7% of the respondents revealed that ever since schools were closed, so many girls and boys were idle and in one place. There was sharp rises in exposure of adolescent girls to sexual exploitation, harassment and other types of gender-based violence 36.8% as well as the pandemic led to increased incidents of early and unwanted pregnancies as well as early/forced marriage 2.9% (Fontanesi *et al.*, 2020).

The findings were further corroborated by the views from key respondents when the Headteacher from Ryamarembo primary school stated that: “All classes in this school the number of girls reduced as per the class registers which showed that COVID 19 affected mostly a girl child educational attainment. So Teachers are also urged to encourage and motivate the girls to stay in school in order to achieve educational attainment”

Data from Liberia shows that 43% of the students in public schools did not return when schools reopened in December 2020. The number of out-of-school children in South Africa tripled from 250,000 to 750,000 between March 2020 and July 2021. In Uganda, around 1 in 10 school children did not report back to school in January 2022 after schools were closed for two years. In Malawi, the dropout rate among girls in secondary education increased by 48 percent per cent between 2020 and 2021. In Kenya, a survey of 4,000 adolescents aged 10-19 years found that 16 percent of girls and 8 percent of boys did not return when schools reopened (Fluerent, *et al.*, 1992).

**The measures being taken to improve girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District**

The respondent’s views to this question attracted the following responses as shown in table 10 below;

Table 10: The respondents’ responses on whether they thought it’s the role of the government to improve on academic performance of pupils in primary schools

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	43	42
Agree	31	30
Disagree	24	23
Strongly disagree	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

Responses as indicated in table 10 above showed that it’s the role of the government to improve on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools of Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district (42%) strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 23% disagreed and (5%) strongly disagreed that the government has a great role to play towards academic performance of a girl child (Kabonesa and Kindi, 2020).

**The measures to improve the academic performance of pupils of primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District**

On the different measures to improve the academic performance of pupils in primary schools of Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District, the following were the views of the respondents as shown in table 11 below.

Table 11: The measures to improve the academic performance of pupils in primary schools of Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District as given by all the respondents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
The use of better teaching methods	21	20.3
Provide adequate sanitary facilities including sanitary towels	36	34.9
The administration and teachers should be committed to their work	19	18.4
The government should put in more efforts	13	12.6

Parents should be sensitized	14	13.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

The measures to improve the academic performance of pupils in primary schools of Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District as given by all the respondents included; the use of better teaching methods 20.3%, provide adequate sanitary facilities including sanitary towels 34.9%, the administration and teachers should be committed to their work 18.4%, the government should put in more efforts, 12.6% and parents should be sensitized, 13.5%. The plan also stipulates measures to minimise the adverse effects of the virus to learners and to enhance the capacity of MoES, district local governments and other stakeholders to promote protection of all learners (Maddaleno and Silber, 2013). The Headteacher of Ryamarembo primary school also mentioned that, “Other factors that let a girl child fail to achieve education attainment in addition to the aforementioned ones were geographical location of a school as well as lack of adequate sanitary facilities including sanitary towels.

**The relationship between COVID-19 and girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District**

On the question of respondents’ views about the relationship between COVID 19 and girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Subcounty, Bushenyi district, the following were their views as shown in table 12 below.

Table 12: The respondents’ views on the relationship between COVID-19 and the pupils’ academic performance in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	55	53
Agree	39	38
Disagree	8	8
Strongly disagree	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the respondents’ as shown in table 12 above on whether they thought there is a relationship between COVID-19 and the pupils’ academic performance in selected primary schools of Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district, 53% of the respondents strongly agreed, 38% agreed, 8% disagreed while 1% strongly disagreed that there is a relationship between COVID-19 and pupils’ academic performance (Fontanesi, 2020, Kabonesa & Kindi, 2020). From a PTA Executive member of Kibazi primary school, it was revealed that, “The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls: Their physical and mental health, their education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Changes like these increased the likelihood of child marriage and over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic. The risk of child marriage increased through various pathways including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services”

On the question of how did COVID-19 affect girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District the views of all respondents were as given in table 13 below.

Table 13: How did COVID-19 affect girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi District

Response	Frequency	Percentage
As girls stay at home because of school closures, their household work burdens might increase, resulting in girls spending more time helping out at home instead of studying.	45	43.6
The prolonged lockdown encouraged parents, particularly those putting a lower value on girls' education, to keep their daughters at home even after schools reopened	22	21.3
COVID-19 pandemic, led more girls than boys helping at home, lagging behind with studying, and dropping out of school	16	15.5
The risk of child marriage increases through various pathways, including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services	13	12.6
Economic insecurity can lead to child marriage as a way to relieve financial pressure on a family	7	6.7



<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>
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As shown in table 13 above, COVID-19 greatly affected girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district as given by all the respondents for example 43.6% of the respondents revealed that as girls stayed at home because of school closures, their household work burdens increased resulting in girls spending more time helping out at home instead of studying. 21.3% of the respondents revealed that the prolonged lockdown encouraged parents, particularly those putting a lower value on girls' education to keep their daughters at home even after schools reopened (Biryabarema, 2021; Pathak, Shukla, Tiwari, Stalin, Singh & Shukla, 2022).

And, 15.5% of all the respondents revealed that COVID-19 pandemic led to more girls than boys helping at home, lagging behind with studying and dropping out of school. 12.6% the respondents revealed that the risk of child marriage increased through various ways including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services. And, 6.7% of all the respondents revealed that economic insecurity led to child marriage as a way to relieve financial pressure on a family. This idea was backed up by a PTA member from Kakoni primary school who stated that *“COVID-19 pandemic led more girls than boys getting busy with household chores than helping at home, lagging behind with studying, and dropping out of school compared with their male counterparts”*.

From the above responses, it is well known for example that economic insecurity can lead to child marriage as a way to relieve financial pressure on a family. The evidence is also clear that education is a protective factor against child marriage. Thus school closures such as those triggered by COVID-19 in effect pushed girls towards marriage since schooling was no longer an option. Additionally, the disruption of ‘non-essential’ services including reproductive health services had a direct impact on teenage pregnancy and subsequently on marriage. While the actual number of girls that were married during the beginning of the COVID 19 crisis and thereafter are unknown, pre-COVID data can be used to predict the impact of the pandemic on child marriage in the near future. Such projections can be made by examining existing patterns as well as historical information on the effects of educational disruption, economic shocks and programme efficacy on this harmful practice (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1996, Renault, 2020).

**Conclusion**

The study concluded the findings based on each objective of the study namely establishing the state of girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub county, challenges affecting the girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district, measures being taken to improve girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub county as well as the relationship between COVID-19 and girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County as shown below.

On the first objective of the study, which was to establish the state of girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub county, it was established that the challenges affecting the girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district were several including increases in child marriage, teenage or early pregnancy, gender-based violence, many girls were married off in exchange for money as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic on families. There was also an increase in rape cases and increased girl child drop out of school and absence of positive role models.

On the second objective of the study which was the effect of COVID-19 in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub county, the study finding established that the effect of COVID-19 in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub county, Bushenyi district included closure of all education institutions, the virus affected the social, economic, and health status of all populations, the rapid closures gave no time for planning or any other alternative form of learning which only meant that schooling at all levels in Uganda went on a standstill. Ever since schools were closed, so many girls and boys were idle and in one place, there were sharp rises in exposure of adolescent girls to sexual exploitation, harassment and other types of gender-based violence and the pandemic led to increased incidents of early and unwanted pregnancies as well as early and forced marriage.

On the third objective of the study which was the measures to improve the academic performance of pupils in primary schools of Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district the following measures were identified; the use of better teaching methods, providing adequate sanitary facilities including sanitary towels, the administration and teachers should be committed to their work, the government should put in more efforts, parents should be sensitized, provision of guidance and counseling to children, preventing the absenteeism of both the teachers and children and that teachers should always use learning aids to interest learners to remain in school.

And ultimately, on the fourth objective of the study which was to establish the relationship between COVID-19 and girl child educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga Sub County, Bushenyi district the following was observed for example as girls stayed at home because of school closures, their household work burdens increased, resulting in girls spending more time helping out at home instead of studying, the prolonged lockdown encouraged parents particularly those putting a lower value on girls' education to keep their daughters at home even after schools reopened. COVID-19 pandemic led to more girls than boys keeping at home, lagging behind with studying and dropping out of school. In addition, the risk of child marriage increased through various pathways including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services and economic insecurity led to child marriage as a way to relieve financial pressure on a family. In a word, COVID 19 exacerbated the already precarious situation.

**Recommendations**

The study made the following recommendations for example on the state girl child educational attainment, the government should train and recruit more teachers to provide quality education services, the teachers should learn how to improvise for those teaching materials they cannot access by the use of the available resources in the environment.

On the effect of COVID-19 on educational attainment in selected primary schools in Kyamuhunga sub county, Bushenyi district, there is need to sensitize the parents and pupils on the value of educating a child which may change their attitude towards the value of education even if there is a pandemic outbreak or not.

On the measures that can be taken to improve girl child educational attainment, there should be the development of proper scientific attitude as one of the major objectives of education. The development of scientific attitudes makes learners open minded, helps them to make critical observations, critical thinking skills, development of intellectual honesty, curiosity, unbiased and impartial thinking which are all key to the academic and intellectual development of the learner.

And lastly, on the objective of the relationship between COVID-19 and girl child educational attainment, it was recommended that there should be improved computer literacy skills among both teachers and learners so that in case of another pandemic, the teaching learning process should always continue undisturbed like it was in other first class schools in the country. It was also recommended that storage of teaching learning materials in soft copy could easily lessen the effect COVID 9 on girl child educational attainment.

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