

Odiwuor, W.H. (2000). *The Impact of HIV/Aids on Primary Education. A Case Study on Selected Districts of Kenya*. Stockholm: Institute of International Education.

This study was presented as a Doctoral Dissertation at the Institute of International Education at Stockholm University in June 2000. The field study and the research was carried out in the period 1994 to 1998 in two districts in Kenya; Homa Bay in Nyanza Province and Murang'a in Central Province.

i) What did the study aim to?

The overall aim of the study was to analyze the impact of HIV/Aids on primary education in Kenya and reactions to the pandemic among pupils and teachers, the authorities and the local communities. Specific objectives were to:

- examine the impact of HIV/Aids in terms of pupil enrolment, participation, dropout, and completion with special focus on the two cases of Homa Bay and Murang'a districts.
- compare the impact of HIV/Aids on female and male pupils.
- compare the impact of HIV/Aids with other factors affecting primary education in Kenya.
- discuss some possible strategies in the struggle against HIV/Aids.

ii) What was the approach?

The research methods were field-oriented. Focus group discussions (FGD), questionnaires, in-depth interviews, non-participatory observations and documentary reviews formed the data collection techniques. In the two districts, two schools (1 urban and 1 rural) were selected for the study. 108 pupils (39 girls and 69 boys) in Grade 8, 57 teachers, 84 parents and 18 district officials participated in the study. A collaborative approach was sought with the pupils, teachers, parents, village- and community leaders, religious elders, district education- and health officials, and non-government agencies with Aids as a priority agenda in their service organizations.

iii) What were the limitations of the study?

The study was limited to observing the impact of HIV/Aids on education and very little on the reverse, i.e. how education affects HIV/Aids. The focus was on youth within the formal education system in Kenya and it was also limited to primary education. The time frame was a major limitation. The research and the field study lasted for a period of four years during which there were rapid changes and developments in the fields of HIV/Aids research. The impact of HIV/Aids on the education constantly experienced new developments as time went by, and it had influence on the study. Language and cultural difference in one of the case districts caused a certain degree of bias in interpretations

iv) What were the key findings of the study?

The study found that almost everyone in the communities studied had heard of Aids, but they do very little about it. They do not actualize, comprehend, admit or even accept the seriousness of the Aids menace. Findings:

- Sexual activity starts very early in all the school communities studied. In most cases sex is generally unprotected as demonstrated by unwanted pregnancy in these schools.

- Sexual abuse and rape in some of the schools were reported. It was revealed that schoolteachers were the perpetrators of many of the rapes
- Absenteeism was a common occurrence within the school community, not only of the pupils, but also of their teachers due to an Aids-related condition. There was evidence of fewer teachers in all the schools visited. Sick teachers in the rural schools never took official sick leave, especially when sick leave was on a routine basis. They feared rumors and stigmatization and that their sickness might be associated with HIV/Aids and this would discredit them. The situation is getting more difficult for teachers as they face greater stress as they seek to compensate for their sick colleagues. It was stated that the quality of teaching and learning has deteriorated.
- There was constant absenteeism of children from certain families in some of the communities. Children were dropping out of school for various reasons. Some of the male students in the rural school around Lake Victoria were habitually out of school. The demand for child labor has been on the increase. Children would skip some classes or even an entire school session to support the family, girls and boys alike, though they had different roles to play. It was however found that girls had more roles to play at home, and that meant that they did stay away from school more than boys.
- The greatest impact was on the poor rural school communities. For widows and orphans, the study found that in some cases they lost their land, shelter and inheritance to uncles and brothers-in-law, forcing some of them to depend on relatives for almost everything. This created a situation wherein widows and orphaned children were forced to migrate to towns, where they became a part of an urban underclass of commercial sex workers and street children.
- The number of street children was increasing. It found that in the rural areas, the extended family is now stretched to breaking point in an effort to care for its orphans. This was particularly noticed in Homa Bay district. There were a growing number of orphans in all the four school communities studied, though most cases were reported within rural schools. Cases of increases in the mortality rate among the orphans were also reported. The study noticed that the orphans were facing difficulties due to poor nutrition, being overworked by their guardians and lacking supervision and proper care. It caused a situation, in most of the communities studied, of an increase in the numbers of abandoned, exploited and unschooled children. Orphaned and street children had become synonymous terms.
- Stigma and ostracism due to HIV/Aids existed in the communities studied. The majority of the pupils who had been affected by HIV/Aids expressed feelings of exclusion from their peers. They felt a lack of social acceptance by their classmates and in some cases even by their teachers. No form of counseling existed in the schools studied.
- The social welfare of the communities studied was on the decline while families in the communities that were hit intensely by the epidemic needed assistance to cope with the impact. In both the districts increased mortality rates were found.

v) What were the recommendations?

The study gives recommendation for action, policy and further research. It acknowledges the facts that much have been done in Kenya to educate people about the dangers of Aids, but it also states that these efforts are not enough. It recommends a number of actions, e.g. strong political commitment and support by the top leaders of Kenya, adoption of a multi-dimensional approach to Aids intervention, establishment of National Aids Council for the effective co-ordination of Aids prevention programs and incorporation of effective FLE into school curricula.

The study recommends more research in areas that will improve the quality of interventions. It gives examples of areas, e.g. anthropology, psychology and behavior change, determinants of sexual practices amongst youth, traditional practices and other factors that predispose individuals to HIV infection.