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Influence of COVID-19 Social Distancing Preventive Measure on the Psychological Well-Being of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) 2021 Candidates in Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract:- COVID-19 hit the world in 2019-2020 leading governments worldwide to close down learning institutions and enforce lockdown and curfew orders to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. School is a socializing agent and adolescents are at a stage where their social life affects or influences their development. Being students is a source of anxiety and therefore the present study was targeted at how social distancing affected the adolescent learner's Psychological Well-Being (PWB). This study was aimed at establishing the influence of COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure on the PWB of KCSE 2021 candidates from secondary schools in Mombasa County, Kenya. This study used the ex post facto and the cross-sectional research designs. 378 high school students were sampled through random sampling; and 11 teachers were key informants. Collection of primary data was via a questionnaire sent online. The study used descriptive statistics in analyzing data collected; findings were presented in percentages and frequencies. Statistical inference consisted of multiple linear regression and correlation analysis. Findings showed that social distancing had a negative and significant correlation with PWB among KCSE 2021 candidates The study concluded that social distancing disconnected the KCSE 2021 candiadates from friends, also limited their engagement activities, and contributed to lack of social support, this affected their PWB.

Keywords:- *COVID-19, Social Distancing, Psychological Well-Being, Adolescent Candidates*

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the COVID-19 epidemic worldwide in 2020, governments worldwide enforced preventive measures which included social distancing and the immediate closure of learning institutions to limit the escalation of the coronavirus COVID-19 (MoH, 2020). Adolescents faced an unnatural and unprecedented environment where there were strict social restrictions meaning that they largely had little or no socialization.

Psychological health and growth requires three essential needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness to be met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Requirements that people avoid social gathering and also isolate if infected with COVID-19 made it hard to satisfy psychological needs necessary for PWB (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, & Rubin, 2020). These measures limited psychological needs for 1) autonomy - since staying at home was not autonomously chosen; 2) competence - because the situation was not in the direct control of the individual creating feelings of incompetence; and 3) relatedness which is the removal of the social aspect of human living. With the school closures, students proceeded home without a clear knowledge of when schools would re-open or what would be the fate of their education. By staying at home, socialization with friends, which helps in dealing with stress, was also limited.

COVID-19 preventive measures on, physical/social distancing, quarantine and, isolation, meant that individuals could not spend time with loved ones despite the fear and anxiety resulting from the COVID-19 disease. One study done in China on 1257 medical staff in 34 hospitals, revealed a strain on their mental well-being because of quarantine and isolation, as well as an increased fear for their health or fear of spreading the infection to their family members (Lai, Ma, Wang, Cai, Hu, Wei, & Hu, 2020). Though home is expected to be a place of comfort and social support, the pandemic led to an environment where fear of contracting the coronavirus made even parents avoid close contact with their children for fear of infection. The lack of a social aspect arising from the stringent preventive measures contributes to creating fear in the population and a lack of the necessary social support while going through crises like the loss of loved ones or illness in the family.

It would be expected that relatedness satisfaction, a major component of PWB, would be satisfied by staying at home with one's family. However, this is frustrated because staying at home was not an autonomous choice but a preventive measure against COVID-19. Similarly, COVID-19 preventive measures on social distancing have been found to contribute to increased fear and anxiety across the world. A review of researches done on young people across the world on the effect of the curfew effected to stop the

spread of COVID-19 found that there were long and short-term mental health effects (Singh, Roy, Sinha, Parveen, Sharma, & Joshi, 2020). Containment measures like prolonged school closures predisposed children and the youth to loneliness, anxiety, and uncertainty thus affecting their PWB. Consequently, the COVID-19 preventive measures posed serious harm to the psychological health of the youth and led to notable behavioral changes (World Vision, 2020).

Šakan Žuljević and Roković (2020) agree that harsh measures of social distancing such as lockdown and school closure compromised the PWB of the general public as well as among students. Various mental health disorders, like anxiety, depression, and anger, manifested following government-enforced COVID-19 social distancing preventive measures. Shi, Roy, Sinha, Parveen, and Joshi (2020) conducted an online study of 571 Chinese participants and concluded that the general Chinese population experienced significant psychological distress manifested largely by fear as an impact of social distancing (Ho, Chee, & Ho 2020). The concern of contracting the virus, of the death of loved ones, and for the youth, the attendant fear arising from uncertainties over the future being a probable consequence of social distancing.

COVID-19 preventive measures saw a change and interruption of the normal lifestyles of students. Notably, most families experienced economic constraints arising from the loss of jobs following measures to prevent COVID-19 like physical distancing, travel restrictions, and stay-at-home requirements. This led to increased psychological issues in the general public and the youth, ranging from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder signs (Semo & Frissa, 2020; Ho, Chee, & Ho 2020). Studies revealed that this interruption had the potential to impact severely on the PWB of individuals. Gubric, Badovinac and Johri (2020) study on college students' mental health conducted in Canada among college students argued that students were among a population already experiencing increased stress levels. Education and academic performance contribute to varying levels of stress among male and female students in both secondary schools and higher education (Pascoe, Hetrick & Parker, 2020). COVID-19 and related preventive measures reduced the ability for students to rely on normal coping strategies like families who were also probably experiencing psychological distress. Without these normal coping methods, the mental and general well-being of students was compromised opening doors to negative behavioural outcomes like substance abuse.

The closures of universities and the resultant move to online learning led to increases in stress and anxiety in university students across the world (Sahu, 2020). Within a short duration, students' lives greatly changed following the closure of schools by governments, students had to adapt to new living conditions and learning platforms. Students experienced anxiety over the continuation of their studies in addition to probable late completion of their studies. Wang, Pan, Wan, Tan, Xu, Ho, & Ho (2020) corroborated Sahu's projection that the COVID-19 pandemic and requirements to avoid physical social contact worldwide was expected to adversely impact the PWB of the public at large, inclusive of students. These two studies however failed to sample secondary school students awaiting their summative examination, making use of university students and the general public hence failing to be exhaustive and specific. The proposed study desired to ascertain the influence of COVID-19 social distancing on the PWB of secondary school, 2021 candidates.

The significances of the COVID-19 preventive measures that can affect students' psychological health as a consequence of physical socialization limitations and isolation, closing down schools and public places include: anxiety, depression, and stress. Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong and Zhang (2020) study on the effect of COVID-19 on the mental health of 7,143 medical students in China found varying levels of anxiety: less than 1 percent reported extreme anxiety; 2.7 percent had moderate anxiety, and 21.3 percent had symptoms of mild anxiety due to delays in the academic calendar. COVID-19 preventive measures have been associated with psychological distress manifested by stress, depression, and anxiety among student populations.

The frustration resulting from daily accumulated stress and unpleasant life events can affect an individual physical and psychological health, which can lead to physical and mental health illnesses like anxiety and depression (Bhurga, Till & Sartorius, 2013). Stress is an important factor affecting psychological health and people encounter many social, cognitive, and physiological stressors in various ways during their daily lives. Njoku and Omeire (2016), describe stress as the situation in which one is about to experience an important life changing event but there is no guarantee of the outcome being in the person's favour. COVID-19 preventive measures presented a constraint to secondary school candidates' desire to complete their studies and transition to higher levels of learning and later job market. Further, is the uncertainty associated with the threat of school closures intended to stop the COVID-19 pandemic.

Studies carried out in Africa showed that COVID-19 containment measures had a significant impact the populace mental health. In one study carried out among 280 university staff in an Eastern Cape University, South Africa, 27.65% reported psychological distress during the lockdown (Niekerk & Gent, 2021). In another study of Sub-Saharan Africa, it is argued that the influence of COVID-19 preventive requirements of physical distancing on psychological health could be immense since the health care sectors are underdeveloped (Semo & Frissa 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, physical distancing and the attendant job losses contributed to the rise in psychological disorders like anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Part of the population affected by this psychological distress includes the youth, a key part in the growth and development in any society.

In Ghana, there was a notable decline in children's mental health and psychological distress as a negative effect of COVID-19 epidemic (UNICEF, 2020). From 30.4 percent of the respondent households, reports showed children between the ages of 6-and 17 years mostly sad compared to before the pandemic; 26.0 percent experienced anxiety, 18.5 percent reported being afraid, 15.5 percent were irritated and 13.1 percent distressed. Children face psychological distress in the heart of a pandemic made worse by the social restrictions targeted at curbing its spread. Matovu, Kabwama, Ssekamatte, Ssenkusu and Wanyenze (2021) also reported increased psychological health challenges arising from the COVID-19 curfew in a study of 2500 Ugandan teenage boys and young males between 10-24 years old; with 1.2 percent being suicidal. Adolescent boys aged 15-19 years and young boys were more affected. Adolescence appears to place the youth at risk amid COVID-19 preventive measures hence the need to find out the influence on secondary school candidates.

In Kenya, it was also evident that the youth were at a risk of psychological distress in an environment where there were outside forces that were brought about by COVID-19 government imposed protective measures. A report by ChildLine Kenya, an initiative supported by UNICEF whose objective is to provide help on mental health issues through telephone calls, revealed that there was an increase in the number of calls made by children seeking help between the ages of 10-19 years following the initial reports of COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya (UNICEF, 2021). To corroborate this, a study conducted in Kenya by Dyer, Wilson, Badia, Agot, Neary, Njuguna, and Kohler (2020), on COVID-19 and related social distancing effects among 1386 adolescents living with HIV aged between 10-24 years; 9 percent were identified with mild depressive symptoms. Social distancing limited access to medical facilities and therefore they could not get the routine checkups and the medicines adding to their daily lives stress.

Public health emergencies have been found to subject households to domestic violence. The stay-at-home orders significantly increased the cases of gender-based violence among young people in Kenya. An estimated 6.5 percent and 2.7 percent girls and boys between 10-19 years old were reported to have been sexually abused over the lockdown period (MoE, 2020). TIFA (2020) cited in Barasa. Kazungu, Orange, Kabia, Ogero and Kasera (2020), corroborates this in their findings from a national representative survey; there was a 22 percent rise in cases of gender-based violence against children associated with the physical distancing and stay at home directives during the dusk to dawn curfew in the country. COVID-19 containment measures to present the young people with physical health and mental health challenges, the extent to which this distress is experienced by older adolescents has not been exhaustively studied.

In another study researching the impact of COVID-19 on learning in Kenya, Nyaga (2020) found reported increase in children involvement in vices such as drug and substance abuse, crime especially among adolescent boys, teenage pregnancies, defilement of minors and child marriages due to the extended school closures. Adolescents are a vulnerable group in the society and in a pandemic like COVID-19 they have been subjected to physical abuse which also affects their mental well-being, it is, therefore, important to look at this group and establish their PWB as impacted by the preventive measures against COVID-19.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Theoretical Framework

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2017) describes three basic needs necessary for Psychological Well-being (PWB). The needs are autonomy, competence and relatedness. The need to be in control of our motivations, behaviour and emotions to deal with social pressures is termed as autonomy. Competence is the need to interact with the environment and make use of available opportunities for success. Relatedness is the need to form strong relationships and develop a sense of belonging to a group. SDT focuses on isolating the social and cultural factors that enable or limit the realization of the basic needs for PWB. Satisfaction with life depends on the psychological needs being met and this enables optimal development in human beings.

SDT also explains the motivations of human behaviour; when an individual is intrinsically motivated it means that internal forces are influencing behavior which is the ideal situation (Ryan, Deci, Patrick, & Williams, 2008). Autonomous motivation for behavior is when people are involved in an activity that they have consciously chosen to do without any outside pressure and that is their choice (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). External factors may motivate behavior but this would reduce the level of engagement as well as how enduring the behavior is. Self-determined motivation is helped when the natural environment meets the needs for autonomy (being free of external factors influencing behaviour), competence (having the skills and feeling capable to deal with life issues), and relatedness (the sense of belonging to a group and feeling involved with others).

In a school setting, students who have self-determined motivation record higher academic performance (Anderman, & Gray, 2015). Students are driven to learn and achieve when the three psychological needs are met. Thus their actions are intrinsically motivated and performance is improved. The satisfaction of the three needs also contributes to improved mental health. The need for motivation is important for optimal achievement.

Psychological needs satisfaction has been linked to positive behaviour change and better mental health which is reflected in lower depression, anxiety, and improved physical health. The strict preventive measures to curb the escalation of COVID-19 especially social distancing contributed to a controlled environment that did not meet the psychological needs resulting in feelings of distress a few weeks into the pandemic (Šakan, Žuljević & Roković, 2020). A person's psychological well-being is achieved when the basic psychological needs are met.

B. Social Distancing and Psychological Well-Being

Villani, Pastorino, Molinari, Anelli, Ricciardi, Graffigna, and Boccia (2021) studied the COVID-19 influence on psychological health of 501 Italian undergraduate students. Using a questionnaire sent through the university students' websites, the researchers did a cross-sectional survey immediately after the initial lockdown in the country. To estimate level of involvement, anxiety, and signs of depression, the study utilized the Self-Rating-Anxiety-Scale, the Patient-Health-Engagement-Scale, and the Self-Rating-Depression-Scale. In the 501 participants in the study, 35.33 percent reported anxiety, and 72.93 percent reported depression. An increase in the incidences of anxiety was linked to not being able to go to university, losing contact with friends, and the lack of physical contact with relatives. The study was however conducted among university students as opposed to the candidates in this study who may experience different psychological behavior concerning social distancing hence the need to assess this among KCSE candidates as well.

Munawara, Shivhare, Kapoor, Singh and Rohilla (2020) looked at the psychological effects of social distancing on young people in India. The survey was done via an online questionnaire distributed to students in Chandigarh in India and the surrounding areas during the lockdown period. 411 people participated in the cross-sectional questionnaire-based investigation (17-25 years). The information was entered into excel sheets and evaluated using relevant statistical methods such as the chi-square test, percentages, and proportions. The findings revealed that the students' life patterns had drastically changed. Stress from controlled movement, loneliness, lack of social interaction, academic loss, and unpredictable future possibilities were among the negative consequences. Although the study was conducted among students aged 17-25 years it did not specify those who were candidates and the specific effects on them. More so, the methodology may differ from the method that will be adopted in the current study.

Over the period of active COVID-19 prevalence, a study was done in Italy on the effect of social separation on Italian's psychological state and their physical exercise routines; the study revealed major psychological and physical impacts (Corrado, Magnano, Muzii, Coco, Guarnera, D Lucia, & Maldonato 2020). A sample size of 670 Italian adults took part in an online survey that collected demographic information, 2-week physical and emotional symptoms, any contact with COVID-19, and reports on regular physical activity. Data collected was analyzed using mixed methodologies. More than half of the respondents said the experience had a major psychological and physical impact. The study centered on the impact of COVID-19 prevalence on physical/social isolation and physical exercise habits but was not specific to influence on PWB of students preparing for a summative examination.

COVID-19 and students' pretentious psychological well-being were explored by Li, Hafeez, and Zaheer (2020). Electronic questionnaires were used to obtain data from 640 university students from both domestic and international universities. The results showed that there were considerable negative effects, such as various levels of stress, depression symptoms, and discomfort. The mental health of university students is most impacted by COVID-19, quarantine, self-imposed isolation, and other harsh interventions. The study was conducted among university students and focused on financial instability and the unpredictability of the future as well as media coverage of COVID-19.

Social distancing, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, was found to have a significant impact on the PWB and normal lifestyles of Greek university students (Karasmanaki & Tsantopoulos, 2021). Quantitative data from 181 Greek undergraduate forestry students was collected utilizing online questionnaires. According to the findings, university closures and the shift to distance learning had a notable impact on students. Moreover, many felt unpleasant emotions during the lockdown, primarily concern and anger. Male students were more probable than female respondents to suffer severe negative emotions such as fear, panic, and despair, according to a T-test. The study focused on university students in a 42-day quarantine; in Kenya, the national restrictions on social distancing extended for over four months and persisted even after the return to school for the candidate class in January 2021. It is crucial to find out the psychological implication social distancing might have had on this population.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed cross-sectional and ex post facto research. Using this strategy, investigations begin after the fact has taken place with no interference from the researcher (Salkind, 2010). KCSE 2021 candidates experienced the COVID-19 social distancing preventive measures between March 2020 and January 2021 and possible psychological effects. The researcher therefore collected data on the experience of COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure and related it to the psychological status of the respondents. The study described the study variables regarding the relationship and did not seek to understand why the relationship may exist. Cross-sectional descriptive survey design enabled the researcher to describe the prevailing circumstances of phenomena by taking primary data and tabulating it in a format that can be used to arrive at conclusions. Ex post facto research enabled the description of the occurrence of measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, as well as an understanding of the relationship that exists between these measures and the psychological well-being of KCSE 2021 candidates in Mombasa County, Kenya.

B. Study Variables

The study variables comprised measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 and psychological well-being. The independent variable COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure has these specific indicators: – disconnection from friends, loss of social leisure activities, disconnection from relatives, and, reduced social support. The dependent variable is psychological well-being. Its main

indicators were: negative self-concept, sense of doom, self-doubt/loss of confidence, loss of interest, loss of hope, loneliness, and sense of social support.

C. Location of the Study

The location for this study was Mombasa County in Kenya. Being one of largest cosmopolitan and metropolitan cities in Kenya, residents come from different ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. It was therefore expected that the student candidates' population varied considerably in terms of social, economic, and cultural demographics making the sample representative of KCSE 2021 candidates in Kenyan secondary schools. Mombasa County also reported the second highest cases of COVID-19 infections in the country, with 15,452 cases as of September 2021 (Faria, 2021). Mombasa County also has an international airport and is a port of entry placing its inhabitants at an increased exposure rate to the Coronavirus. It is also a tourism destination, a major economic activity in the county that was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 preventive measures further affecting livelihoods.

D. Target Population

The population for this study comprised all the KCSE 2021 candidates in secondary schools in Mombasa County Kenya. This population was perceived to have encountered the weight of the government's strategies to curb the spread of COVID-19 during their final year in secondary school education as they prepared to sit their national examination. Adolescents, especially late adolescents, are reported to have suffered mental health disorders over the shutdown period following reported cases of COVID-19 and there were increased cases of suicide among this group (UNICEF, 2021). Moreover, the choice for secondary school candidates was based on the fact that all of them are adolescents who are easily affected by any change in lifestyle especially changes to their education, an important pathway in their transition to adulthood. According to 2021 KCSE Examination Essential Statistics, 10,062 students were candidates for the year 2021. This formed the total population; to get the target population data, was got from the Mombasa County Education Office 2021 KCSE statistics. 6085 and 3977 candidates sat the 2021 KCSE in public and private centers respectively. From this number a sample of n=384 was selected via stratified and simple random sampling while candidates were purposively sampled from both the public and private schools in the county at a ratio of 6:4, a total of 10 schools formed the sample.

Then, simple random sampling was applied to single out government and privately-owned schools taking part in this research and individual KCSE 2021 candidates from each school who were the respondents. Proportionate stratified random sampling was utilized to determine the sample sizes in public and private schools. Proportionate stratified random sampling ensures that number sampled from each segment is proportional to the population size in the strata (Taherdoost, 2016).

E. Data Collection Intruments

A questionnaire was utilized to obtain raw data. Young (2016) argue that a questionnaire is a set of particular, normally short questions that can be replied to independently by a respondent. A questionnaire generated by the researcher with adaptations from Ryff's measures of PWB for teenagers and in consultation with the university supervisor was used. There were three sections to the questionnaire. The initial section entailed items collecting demographic data about the respondent. Section two constituted statements social distancing and section consisted of questions on psychological well-being. The questionnaire was structured into a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire was useful and suitable since it helped in asking many questions and also gave the respondents time to respond. They also permitted anonymity, so participants received assurances of secrecy. The questionnaire enabled the researcher to reach respondents who resided all over the country. The questionnaires were also useful in keeping up with the COVID-19 preventive measures as no close contact was needed.

An interview schedule was used on the guidance and counseling teachers who were key informants in this study. The interview schedule included questions on the teacher's perception of the KCSE 2021 candidates' psychological well-being as an influence of the COVID-19 social distancing and any psychosocial support provided during the return to school period and before sitting the national examination.

F. Data Collection Methods

The researcher recruited research assistants in every school who helped in the identification of respondent students and getting their contact details. The research assistants were trained on data collection before being allowed into the field. The researcher then distributed the introduction letters through the research assistants who then first ensured that the respondents accepted to take part in the study. Permission was then obtained, by the researcher, from the school heads to collect data from the school. Distribution of the online questionnaires was done by the researcher assisted by research assistants. Questionnaires were sent via email or Google forms to the respondents and emailed back within two weeks to the researcher once filled. The researcher also conducted physical interviews with teachers who were key informants. The teachers were those who were in the guidance counseling department for each of the schools sampled during the period before and following the closing of schools during active COVID-19 period in the country. The teachers were given an explanation of the objectives of the research and they then gave consent to participate by signing the consent forms. The researcher then proceeded to interview them.

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G. Data Analysis Techniques

Questionnaires, once returned, were put through a review to check comprehensiveness and uniformity then they were analyzed. To begin with, the study conducted diagnostic tests, which were utilized to evaluate the regression analysis assumptions before data analysis. Multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity were tested as part of the diagnostic process. Data collected was evaluated through the SPSS version 23 program. Descriptive statistics like percentages, frequencies, mean, and standard deviation were utilized. The descriptive statistics helped summarize the data for easier interpretation. Multiple linear regression analysis was utilized for inferential statistics. Regression were applied to ascertain the correlation of the independent variable social distancing and the dependent variable (psychological well-being). A multiple linear regression analysis provided statistics for regression coefficients and p values. The statistics was used to test the statistical importance of the variables' relationship. A p-value of or less than 0.05 shows a significant connection. The correlation was utilized to ascertain the interconnection of the variables. The correlations coefficient (r) was used to demonstrate the strength of the association between the research variables. A positive coefficient indicated a positive correlation indicating that a link existed between the variables; while a negative coefficient would be an indication for a negative correlation, that is, no relationship existed between the study variables. Presentation of results was done through tables and figures.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

A. Questionnaire Response Rate

348 questionnaires were sent via google forms to the KCSE 2021 candidates from Mombasa County. In total, 270 questionnaires were duly filled and submitted. The overall response rate was 70.31% which, in accordance with Babbie's (2004) claim, a response rate of above 60% is good for a study.

B. Demographic Information

In this section the respondents' bio data is presented. Demographics presented included: gender of the respondents; number of members in the family; parent's income; level of emotional and physical support received from parents.

- *Respondents' Gender*

The survey participants were requested to specify their gender as either male or female. There were 63% male respondents compared to 37% female respondents. More boys than girls sat the KCSE 2021 from Mombasa County Kenya hence the representation of the genders indicated a reliable and valid sample.

- *Number of Family Members*

The respondents were requested to state how many family members they were in their households ranging from 0 to more than 10 members. 53 percent respondents stated that they came from a family of 5 – 10 members; while the least at 2 percent of the respondents indicated that they came from a family of more than 10 members. This indicated that the student respondents mostly came from fairly large families of 5-10 members.

- *Parents' Income*

Respondents were required to give the range of their parents' income; descriptive analysis was utilized to analyse the data collected and results indicated that the majority 37.2 percent student respondents placed their parents income between 11,000 and 20,000; 4.8 percent of the students indicated that their parents earned between 41,000 and 50,000;. This implied that a relatively significant number of the KCSE 2021 candidates from Mombasa County came from low income families which is consistent with (Jelimo, 2020) that COVID-19 preventive measures of lockdown contributed to financial crisis in most Kenyan households.

- *Level of Emotional and Physical Support Received from Parents*

The survey participants were required to rate the level of emotional and physical support they received from their parents within a range of very little, little, unsure, huge and very huge. A majority of 45.4 percent of the respondents reported that they received very little emotional and physical support from their parents; while the least at 4.8 percent of the student respondents indicated that they received very huge emotional and physical support from their parents. These results were consistent with studies done on social distancing which indicated a decrease in physical contact with relatives over the COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant social distancing controls (Villani et al, 2021).

C. Influence of Social Distancing on Psychological Well-Being

The respondents were requested to indicate levels of interaction with friends and relatives, engagement in exercises and social support which reflected their experience of social distancing on a Likert scale of five items: 5 – strongly agree; 4 – agree; 3; neutral; 2; disagree; 1- strongly disagree. To accurately interpret the study's findings, strongly agree and agree (5&4) - as agree; disagree and strongly disagree (2&1) - as disagree; and 3 as neutral. The findings were exhibited in Table 1.

From the findings, majority of the respondents (71.4 percent) felt that social distancing measures disconnected them from their friends and relatives. Further, 79.2 percent reported that social distancing limited engagement in play activities; while 60.6 percent reported a lack of needed social support due to social distancing.

Further probing from the guidance and counselling teachers on the students reported feelings about social/physical restrictions, indicated that most students felt lonely and could not engage in any social activity with their friends and relatives.

Table 1 Students' Experience of Social Distancing

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
When social distancing measures were put in place I was disconnected from my friends	11.20%	13.00%	5.60%	32.30%	37.90%	3.73	1.38
Social distancing limited my engagement in activities like play, swimming, exercise	4.50%	12.30%	4.10%	30.10%	49.10%	4.07	1.19
Social distancing disconnected me from my relatives	5.20%	15.20%	6.30%	40.50%	32.70%	3.80	1.20
I lacked needed social support due to social distancing	9.30%	4.10%	26.00%	39.40%	21.20%	3.59	1.14

Table 2 Correlation Analysis between Social Distancing and PWB

		Psychological Well-Being	Social distancing
Psychological Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Social distancing	Pearson Correlation	-.777**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

These findings were consistent with studies that showed major mental health and physical effect of the Coronavirus pandemic social separation and physical exercise routines among Italians (Corrado et al, 2020).

D. Correlation Analysis of Social Distancing

To determine the association between social distancing and psychological well-being among 2021 KCSE candidates, correlation analysis was conducted. Table 2 exhibits the results which showed that social distancing had a negative and significant correlation with psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates (r=-0.777, p=0.000). This suggested that there was a decline in the psychological well-being of the candidates as social distancing restrictions increased. The study findings agreed with Munawara et al. (2020) who found social distancing to have had an effect on psychology of young learners.

E. Regression Analysis of Social Distancing

Regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the link between social distancing on the psychological well-being among 2021 KCSE candidates. Table 3 shows the results.

Regression analysis revealed a negative and significant effect of social distancing on psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates (β=0.310, p=0.000). This implied that a decline in social distancing by one unit would improve psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates by 0.310 units. The study findings are consistent with Villani et al (2021) where increased levels of anxiety were associated to separation from friends and lack of social support among Italian undergraduate students.

F. Psychological Well-Being among KCSE 2021 Candidates

- *The Questionnaire Items Required Respondents to Report their Degree of Psychological Well-Being on Six Levels:*

Liking aspects of their personality, fear of future, lack of faith in decision making, lack of interest in life, loss of hope of completing secondary education, difficulties in organising self, feelings of loneliness, and lack of moral support system. Using a 5-Likert scale item of: 5 – strongly agree; 4 – agree; 3; neutral; 2; disagree; 1- strongly disagree. The findings were grouped and calculated for ease of interpretation as: agree and strongly agree; disagree and strongly disagree; and neutral. Table 4 presents the results.

Findings indicated that 78.4 percent respondents liked most aspects of their personality; 71.4 percent reported that they lost hope of completing their secondary education; 75.5 percent felt lonely often; and 76.6 percent did not have many people who wanted to listen when they needed to talk. These findings imply a significant association of the COVID-19 restriction to the overall psychological well-being of the respondents. There were reported feelings of loneliness, loss of hope and lack of social support. It corresponded with studies done by Hassan and Bao (2020) on college students which revealed increased mental stress over the COVID-19 curfew, and Popescu et al (2020) findings that college students experienced emotional loneliness and depressive episodes including worry and a sense of powerlessness as an effect of COVID-19 pandemic.

The guidance and counseling teachers were interviewed on whether there was any effort by the school to check on the candidates' well-being over the school closure period. Majority indicated little or no support towards students' well-being during the COVID-19 active period. In schools where there had been an attempt to check on the students, there were reported feelings of fear among students that the school closure would negatively affect their overall preparedness for the national examination and their expected outcomes.

Table 3 Regression Analysis for Social Distancing

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-0.001	0.143		-0.008	0.994
Social distancing	-0.310	0.052	-0.294	-5.944	0.000

Table 4 Students' Reports on Psychological Well-being

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std.Dev
I liked most aspects of my personality	11.90%	2.20%	7.40%	31.20%	47.20%	4.00	1.31
I feared that my life was getting adversely affected	11.90%	0.00%	14.90%	28.30%	45.00%	3.94	1.29
I lacked faith in my judgements, especially when they did not agree with the general consensus	9.70%	3.30%	25.30%	26.00%	35.70%	3.75	1.25
I had little interest or enjoyment in doing things	11.20%	14.50%	14.90%	33.10%	26.40%	3.49	1.32
I lost hope of completing my secondary education.	9.30%	4.10%	15.20%	38.70%	32.70%	3.81	1.20
I had a hard time organizing my life in a satisfactory way.	10.80%	0.70%	11.90%	27.90%	48.70%	4.03	1.27
I felt lonely most of the time	4.50%	6.70%	13.40%	22.30%	53.20%	4.13	1.15
I did not have many people who wanted to listen when I needed to talk.	10.00%	4.80%	7.80%	28.30%	49.10%	4.01	1.29

The guidance and counselling teachers were interviewed on their impression of the overall well-being of the candidates after the return to school in January 2021. They indicated that most students had been affected psychologically especially due to isolation and home stress. There were a few reports of drop-out rates due to teenage pregnancies, early marriages and some boys having gone into 'bodaboda' (motorcycle) business.

Guidance and counselling teachers also indicated little or no psychosocial support to the KCSE 2021 candidates' psychological well-being during the school closures as well as on return to school as students prepared to sit their final examinations in secondary schools.

Inferential statistics was conducted to assess the relationship between COVID-19 preventive measures and the PWB of KCSE 2021 candidates. Regression results are exhibited in Table 5.

Results showed that the R was 0.866. This implies that COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure had a strong correlation with psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates.

Table 5 Model of Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.866a	0.751	0.748	0.49224

Table 6 Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	193.469	3	64.49	266.155	.000b
Residual	64.21	265	0.242		
Total	257.679	268			

Furthermore, the R square was 0.751, this inferred that social distancing explains 75.1 percent of the variations in the PWB among KCSE 2021 candidates.

To determine the COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure as a predictor for PWB among KCSE 2021 candidates, the ANOVA was computed. The analysis of the variance (ANOVA) results are exhibited in Table 6.

Table 6 indicates that COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure was a good predictor of PWB among KCSE 2021 candidates as represented by an F statistic of 266.155 and the reported p value of 0.000, which was less than the conventional probability of 0.05 significance level. This implied that the COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure was had statistically significant effect on psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates at a 95 percent confidence level.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Social Distancing and Psychological Well-Being

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of COVID-19 social distancing preventive measure on psychological well-being among Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education 2021 candidates in Mombasa County, Kenya. The results showed that putting social distancing measures in place as a preventive measure for COVID-19 disconnected students from their friends. In addition, social distancing limited students' engagement in activities like play, swimming, exercise; and most student respondents lacked needed social support due to social distancing.

Correlation results showed that social distancing had a negative and significant correlation with psychological well-being among Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education 2021 candidates. Regression results showed that social distancing had a negative and significant effect with psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates.

B. Conclusions of the Study

The study concluded that social distancing had a negative and significant effect with psychological well-being among KCSE 2021 candidates. The study further concluded that social distancing of secondary school students disconnected them from friends and also limited their social engagement activities. This therefore affected their psychological well-being. Social distancing also contributed to lack of social support.

C. Recommendations

This study recommends timely and routinely assessment of the secondary schools students for their psychological well-being needs and as a way of monitoring. All round intervention measures may also be helpful to the secondary school students. This therefore calls for combined efforts by Ministries of Education, mental health experts, and other health practitioners to put in place management strategies.

Preventive measures are necessary to cushion the students from the negative effects of a pandemic. Of importance too is the formulation of appropriate policies to support secondary school students especially from adverse effects of the pandemic.

Recommendations to parents to be cautious of their children's predisposition to stressful environments especially while they are at home especially during periods of national disasters or outbreaks of diseases like the coronavirus. This is because family stress affects students' psychological reactions and also causes fear.

It is recommended that teachers make routinely follow ups or monitoring of students' well-being in the event of a national disaster or pandemic like the COVID-19 which may lead to schools closure. The Ministry of Education should also devise vibrant and nationwide measures to provide psychosocial support to students in any event of a national disaster or pandemic.

D. Recommendations for Further Research

This study investigated the influence of COVID-19 preventive measures of social distancing on psychological well-being among Kenyan secondary 2021 candidates in Mombasa county Kenya. The study recommends further research on the influence of the wide range of COVID-19 preventive measures on psychological well-being among lower level secondary school students within the country and world over.

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