

**EXPLORING LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL
RISKS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN: A CASE OF
SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION,
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND EDUCATIONAL
MEDIA IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE IN EDUCATIONAL
COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

MOI UNIVERSITY

2025

DECLARATION

Declaration by Candidate

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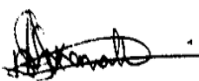
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DEDICATION

To my father, Hoseah Yego,

Your love, guidance, and untiring belief in me have shaped the person I am today. Though you are no longer here to see this achievement, your memory has been a constant source of motivation and inspiration. This thesis is dedicated to you, with deepest love and gratitude.

Rest Easy Dad. Your legacy lives on in all that I achieve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I am grateful to the Almighty God for providing me with good health and strength and for sustaining me throughout this journey to complete this thesis.

My second and deepest gratitude goes to my supervisors, Prof. Susan Kurgat and Dr. David Ssekamatte for providing me with prompt, invaluable, continuous input throughout the period of this study. I thank them for their productive guidance which made me a critical researcher. They will continue as always to inspire me in all my current and future endeavours.

Third, I am grateful to DAAD through CERM-ESA for giving me another chance to further my studies. Without this valuable assistance, I would not have been able to pursue my doctorate degree.

Fourth, I thank my parents, my dad - the late Hoseah Yego, and my mum Nelly Yego for instilling in me the value of education, and to my guardians James and Viola Serem-thank you for being there for me. Special gratitude to my daughter, Lindsay Chepkoech-thank you for being my inspiration and my greatest cheerleader. To my siblings, Janet, Peninah, Sarah, Kip and Joanne, thank you for your endless love and support. To Rodgers, my brothers-in-law, my nieces Tamira, Lainey, Summer, and my nephews Kylan and Joe-thank you for your prayers and support.

Additionally, I extend my gratitude to the teaching and non-teaching staff of Moi University and CERM-ESA for their diligent academic and social collaboration and support during my study.

Lastly, to my study participants, friends, classmates and colleagues- thank you very much for your support.

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown imposed unprecedented challenges to societies worldwide, disrupting daily routines, economies, and social interactions. Governments implemented various containment measures, including lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus. While these measures were essential for public health, they led to socio-ecological risks that profoundly impacted individuals, particularly learners; altering their educational experiences and well-being. This study embarked on an exploration of learners' encounters during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The exploration unraveled the multifaceted relationship between social, economic, and environmental factors that influenced learners' lives. Thus, this study's main purpose was to explore socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The study was guided by the following objectives: to investigate how the socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya, to explore how learners perceived the socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, and; to explore learners' coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The study was guided by Freire's empowerment education theory which specializes in encouraging individuals to become vocal about their needs and those of the community. This study took a qualitative approach, a phenomenological critical paradigm, and a participatory visual approach. Data was generated using drawing, memory account, cellphilm, unstructured individual interview and a focus group discussion. The study involved working with 26 participants- 3 Parents Association members, 3 teachers and 20 learners (aged 15-24 years) enrolled in Form 1 and 2 in secondary schools in Kenya. The data was triangulated and thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that learners were affected by sexual, family and criminal related risks during the pandemic lockdown; learners perceived socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as: psychologically torturing as they caused fear and led to emotional instability. The risks were life destructive for causing learners to drop out of school, loosing hope as a result of contracting diseases and becoming pregnant, leading to family conflicts, and; lowering learners' integrity by causing shame and guilt and leading to victimization of the affected learners. As a result, actionable results aimed at addressing these challenges and fostering resilience within educational ecosystems were attained as learners came up with learner capabilities during crises as well as emancipation strategies through their voice, taking part in decision making and having hope in the future. In conclusion, learners faced risks in their socio-ecological setting during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown whereby these risks had devastating effects on their lives, their families, schools, and the communities at large. It was recommended that the Kenyan Ministry of Health, department of public health and the Ministry of Education's department of Basic education, should prioritize equitable access to technology and resources, enhance support for mental health and well-being, strengthen social support networks, build resilience and adaptation strategies, and foster interdisciplinary research collaborations to address the multifaceted challenges faced by learners in times of crises thereby creating more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable educational ecosystems.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xvii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	6
1.3 Purpose of the Study	7
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	7
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.5.1 Secondary research questions.....	8
1.6 Justification of the Study	8
1.7 Study Significance	9
1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study.....	9
1.8.1 Scope of the study	9
1.8.2 Limitations of the study	10
1.9 Assumptions.....	11
1.10 Theoretical Framework.....	11
1.11 Conceptual Framework.....	15
1.12 Operational Definition of Key Terms	16
1.13 Outline of Chapters	21
1.14 Chapter Summary	22
CHAPTER 2	23
LITERATURE REVIEW	23
2.0 Introduction.....	23
2.1 Conceptualizing Young People and Risk	24

2.1.1 Young people ‘at risk’	26
2.1.2 Capabilities in risk.....	28
2.1.3 Capability approach to reflect on the purpose of education.....	30
2.1.4 Being young today	31
2.1.5 Learners voices.....	32
2.1.6 Youth participatory research and learner voice.....	34
2.1.7 Factors influencing young people’s decision making in times of risks	36
2.2 Conceptualizing Socio-Ecological Risks in Kenya During the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	39
2.2.1 Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).....	39
2.2.2 Teenage pregnancies, abortions and forced early marriages.....	41
2.2.3 Female Genital Mutilation	43
2.2.4 Pornography materials.....	45
2.2.5 HIV and AIDS in Kenya during the COVID pandemic.....	46
2.2.6 Family associated risk factors	47
2.3 Conceptualizing the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	50
2.3.1. COVID-19 pandemic	50
2.3.2 COVID-19 pandemic and schooling.....	51
2.3.3 COVID-19 pandemic and Education	53
2.3.4 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the young people globally	56
2.3.5 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the young people in Kenya.....	57
2.4 National Goals of Education.....	59
2.5 Life Skills Education Programme in Kenya	62
2.6 COVID-19 Supportive Coping Strategies	66
2.6.1 Coping strategies when faced with risks	66
2.6.2 Hope and optimism in times of risk	68
2.7 Research Gap	70
2.8 Chapter Summary	71
CHAPTER 3.....	72
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	72
3.0 Introduction.....	72
3.1 Research Approach	72
3.1.1 Research paradigm	74

3.1.2 Research design.....	75
3.1.3 Study Area.....	76
3.1.4 Study Population	77
3.1.5 Sampling techniques and sample size	77
3.1.6 Pilot study.....	81
3.1.7 Data generation methods	81
3.1.7.1 Participatory Research methodology.....	82
3.1.7.1.1 Memory accounts.....	84
3.1.7.1.1.1 Using Memory accounts in the Field	86
3.1.7.1.2 Drawings	87
3.1.7.1.2.1 Using Drawing in the Field	88
3.1.7.1.3 Cellphilms	89
3.1.7.1.3.1 Using Cellphilms in the Field	90
3.1.7.2 Unstructured individual Interviews	92
3.1.7.2.1 Using Unstructured Individual Interviews in the Field.....	92
3.1.7.3 Focus group discussion.....	93
3.1.7.3.1 Using Focus Group Discussion in the Field	94
3.2 Data Analysis	95
3.2.1 Thematic Analysis.....	96
3.2.2 Working with Data	97
3.3: Summary of the data generation tools, participants and analysis technique	101
3.4 Trustworthiness.....	103
3.5 Ethical Considerations	106
3.6 Positioning Myself as a Researcher	110
3.7 Chapter Summary	113
CHAPTER 4.....	115
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND	
DISCUSSION	115
4.0 Introduction.....	115
4.1 Information of Participants	115
4.2 Findings and Discussion	116
4.2.1 Socio-ecological risks affecting learners during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya	116

4.2.1.1 Presentation of memory accounts	117
4.2.1.1.1 Alexas	118
4.2.1.1.2 Gaddafi	119
4.2.1.1.3 Thored	120
4.2.1.1.4 Traf	121
4.2.1.1.5 Wiseman	122
4.2.1.1.6 Zack	123
4.2.1.1.7 Justin	124
4.2.1.1.8 Liz	125
4.2.1.1.9 Joyce	126
4.2.1.1.10 Ben	127
4.2.1.1.11 Glen	128
4.2.1.1.12 Arel	129
4.2.1.1.13 Jane	130
4.2.1.1.14 Rean	130
4.2.1.1.15 Roy	131
4.2.1.1.16 Jeff	132
4.2.1.1.17 Rich	133
4.2.1.1.18 Lez	135
4.2.1.2 Presentation of drawings	136
4.2.1.2.1 Traf	136
4.2.1.2.2 Arel	137
4.2.1.2.3 Gaddafi	137
4.2.1.2.4 Wiseman	138
4.2.1.2.5 Ben	139
4.2.1.2.6 Roy	140
4.2.1.2.7 Justin	141
4.2.1.2.8 Jane	142
4.2.1.2.9 Glen	143
4.2.1.2.10 Larin	144
4.2.1.2.11 Liz	145
4.2.1.3 Theme 1: Sexual related risks	147
4.2.1.3.1 Contracting STIs, HIV and AIDS	147

4.2.1.3.2 Teenage pregnancies and abortion.....	149
4.2.1.3.3 Addiction to pornographic videos.....	152
4.2.1.4 Theme 2: Family related risks	153
4.2.1.4.1 Domestic violence.....	154
4.2.1.4.2 Alcoholism and drug abuse.....	156
4.2.1.5 Theme 3: Criminal related risks	159
4.2.1.5.1 FGM, forced early marriages and Sexual and gender-based violence	159
4.2.1.5.2 Suicide.....	161
4.2.2 Learners Perception of Socio-Ecological Risks Experienced During COVID- 19 Pandemic Lockdown	163
4.2.2.1 Presentation of samples of Cellphilms	163
4.2.2.2 Theme 1: Psychologically torturing	165
4.2.2.2.1 Fear	166
4.2.2.2.2 Emotional instability/distress.....	168
4.2.2.3 Theme 2: Life destructive.....	171
4.2.2.3.1 Dropping out of school	172
4.2.2.3.2 Family conflicts	176
4.2.2.3.3 Losing hope after contracting diseases and getting pregnant	179
4.2.3 Theme 3: Lowering integrity.....	181
4.2.3.1 Shame and guilt	182
4.2.3.2 Victimization	184
4.2.4 Learners Coping Strategies in the Face of Socio-Ecological Risks Faced During the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown.....	186
4.2.4.1 Theme 1: Young people/ learner capabilities during a crisis	187
4.2.4.1.1 Recreational activities.....	188
4.2.4.1.2 Community peer projects.....	191
4.2.4.2 Theme 2: Young people's emancipation/empowerment.....	194
4.2.4.2.1 Young people voice/Taking part in decision making	195
4.2.4.2.2 Hope: Acceptance and moving on	198
4.3 Chapter Summary	201
CHAPTER FIVE	202

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	202
5.1 Introduction.....	202
5.2 Summary of the Findings.....	203
5.2.1 How socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya	204
5.2.2 How learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.....	205
5.2.3 Learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.....	206
5.3 Study Conclusions	207
5.3.1 How socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya	207
5.3.2 How learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.....	208
5.3.3 Learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.....	208
5.4 Theoretical Contributions	209
5.5 Conceptual model- Coping Strategies Model	213
5.6 Recommendations.....	219
5.7 Recommendations for Further Research.....	221
REFERENCES	223
APPENDICES	245
Part A: Letters of Permission	245
I: Letter from Moi University School of Education	245
II: Letter from NACOSTI.....	246
III: Permit from Uasin Gishu County Director of Education	247
Part B: Letter of Invitation to School Principals	248
Part C: School Principal Consent Form	250
Part D: Letter of Invitation to Study Participants.....	251
Part E: Learners' Consent Form.....	252
Part F: (I) Memory Accounts Prompt	253
Part G: (II). Drawing prompt	254

Part H: Cellphilm Prompt.....	255
Part I: Unstructured Individual Interview Schedule for Teachers and Parents’ Association (PA) Representatives.....	257
Part J: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Learners	258
Part K: Budget for the Study	260
Part L: Samples of Data Generated	261
I: Drawings	261
II: Cellphilm	261
III: Unstructured Individual Interviews	262
IV. Focus group discussion	264
V: Memory Accounts	266
Part M: Map of Kenya Showing Uasin Gishu County.....	267
Part N: Plagiarism Report	268

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Philosophical assumptions of critical research adapted from Lincoln and Guba (2011).....	75
Table 3.2 Summary of the methods, participants and analysis technique for each research question	102
Table 3.3: Summary of research design and methodology.....	114
Table 4.1 Participant information	116
Table 4.2: Summary of the findings addressing the first research question	147
Table 4.3: Theme 1 and its categories	147
Table 4.4: Theme 2 and its Categories.....	154
Table 4.5: Theme 3 and its Categories.....	159
Table 4.6: Summary of the findings addressing the second research question	165
Table 4.7: Theme 1 and its categories	165
Table 4.8: Theme 2 and its categories	172
Table 4.9: Theme 3 and its categories	182
Table 4.10: Summary of the findings addressing the third research question	187
Table 4.11: Theme 1 and its categories	188
Table 4.12: Theme 2 and its categories	195

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework adapted by researcher	15
Figure 3.2 Data Analysis in Qualitative Research. Source (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).	96
Figure 3.3 Six key steps in conducting thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data.	98
Figure 4.1: Alexas' memory account.....	118
Figure 4.2: Gaddafi's memory account.....	119
Figure 4.3: Thored memory account.....	120
Figure 4.4: Traf's memory account	121
Figure 4.5: Wiseman's memory account	122
Figure 4.6: Zack's memory account	123
Figure 4.7: Justin's memory account	124
Figure 4.8: Liz's memory account.	125
Figure 4.9: Joyce's memory account	126
Figure 4.10: Ben's memory account.....	127
Figure 4.11: Glen's memory account.....	128
Figure 4.12: Arel's memory account	129
Figure 4.13: Jane's memory account.	130
Figure 4.14: Rean's memory account	131
Figure 4.15: Roy's memory account.....	132
Figure 4.16: Jeff's memory account	133
Figure 4.17: Rich's memory account.....	134
Figure 4.18: Lez's memory account	135
Figure 4.19: Traf's drawing.	136
Figure 4.20: Arel's drawing.....	137
Figure 4.21: Gaddafi's drawing.	138
Figure 4.22: Wiseman's drawing.....	139
Figure 4.23: Ben's drawing.....	140
Figure 4.24: Roy's drawing	141
Figure 4.25: Justin's drawing.....	142
Figure 4.26: Jane's drawing.....	143
Figure 4.27: Glen's drawing.	144
Figure 4.28: Larin's drawing.	145

Figure 4.29: Liz's drawing	146
Figure 4.30: A cellphilm presentation of the devastating effects of COVID-19 pandemic that exposed young people to various risks.....	164
Figure 4.31: A cellphilm presentation of a young person smoking bhang	164
Figure 4.32: Cellphilm presentation of a girl after being sexually molested by three men.....	167
Figure 4.33: A cellphilm presentation of a victim of sexual molestation finally facing her mother	167
Figure 4.34: A cellphilm of learners coping with abrupt school closures and exposure to risks.....	168
Figure 4.35: A cellphilm of a distressed child (Thored) who lost their family breadwinner.....	170
Figure 4.36: A cellphilm of a young person (Lez) stealing to get money for their family subsistence	171
Figure 4.37: A cellphilm presentation of learners idling and engaging in life destructive activities (smoking)	173
Figure 4.38: A cellphilm of three young people after sexually molesting a girl.	173
Figure 4.40: A cellphilm presentation of a young nursing mother who had to drop out of school after becoming a young mother.....	175
Figure 4.41: A cellphilm of young people who have resorted to drug abuse because of family related conflicts	177
Figure 4.42: A cellphilm of a girl in a family conflict for getting pregnant after a mass rape.....	178
Figure 4.43: A cellphilm of a depressed boy contemplating suicide	180
Figure 4.44: A presentation of a girl with suicidal thoughts.....	181
Figure 4.45: Presentation of a girl crying whenever she thinks of the risks she faced	184
Figure 4.46: A cellphilm presentation of a boy who is being victimized by peers and society	186
Figure 4.47: A cellphilm presentation of boys playing football.	189
Figure 4.48: A cellphilm presentation of a learner playing basketball	189
Figure 4.49: A cellphilm presentation of a learner playing lawn tennis	190
Figure 4.50: A cellphilm of learners writing poetry as a recreational activity	190

Figure 4.51: A cellphilm of learners reading in a community library.	193
Figure 4.52: A presentation of young people busy playing games together.....	193
Figure 4.53: A cellphilm of a girl talking a walk.....	193
Figure 4.54: A cellphilm of learners engaging in a peer-to-peer counselling session.	194
Figure 4.55: A cellphilm of youth taking part in decision making on matters affecting them.....	196
Figure 4.56: A cellphilm presentation of young people engaging in a capacity building programme.	196
Figure 4.57: A cellphilm of a girl that finally sees hope in going back to school after getting a child.....	200
Figure 4.58: A cellphilm presentation of a boy taken to a rehabilitation centre and later goes back to school.	200
Figure 4.59: A cellphilm of a boy who quits stealing, returns stolen goods and hopes for a better life by going back to school.	201
Figure 5.1: Coping strategies model adopted by researcher.	214

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AVERT	: Anti-Virus Emergency Response Team
CERM-ESA	: East and South African-German Centre of Excellence for Educational Research Methodologies and Management
COVID-19	: "CO" stands for corona, "VI" for virus and "D" for disease and the number 19 stands for the year (2019) in which the outbreak occurred.
CSE	: Comprehensive Sexuality Education
DAAD	: Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service)
HIV	: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NACC	: National AIDS Control Council
NACOSTI	: National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
PEPFAR	: President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
SDGs	: Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	: Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SSA	: sub-Saharan African
STIs	: Sexually Transmitted Infections
UN	: United Nations
UNAIDS	: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNDP	: The United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNFPA	: The United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	: The United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	: World Health Organizations
YPAR	: Youth Participatory Action Research

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study. It begins by providing the relevant information on the background of the study from the global, regional and local contexts. This is drawn from related prior studies on socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The chapter also presents statement of the problem, the study purpose, objectives of the study, research questions, significance, justification, assumptions of the study, scope, limitations, theoretical and conceptual framework and operational definition of terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic hit hard and interrupted many scopes of our lives, basically education. The interruption of education highlights issues that arise as a result of a pandemic in that the world underwent an unprecedented alteration. Consequently, schools closed, and millions of learners transitioned to remote learning modalities, basically changing the dynamics of education. However, beyond the immediate challenges posed to academic continuity, a deeper exploration revealed the complex socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the pandemic lockdown period. As countries enforced rigorous lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus, communities dealt with multifaceted challenges ranging from health, economy, environment, and society. Within this complex period of uncertainties, learners emerged as key victims, encountering unique perceptions of risks designed by their social, economic, and environmental settings.

During COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, young people's abuse was evident, and due to lesser access to health care and other social facilities, young people became increasingly vulnerable to abuse and its consequences (Baird, 2020 et al.; Roje et al., 2020). When a pandemic breaks out, matters surrounding human well-being in their socio-ecological setup are not side-lined; consequently, human-sensitive responses can go a long way in determining how such occurrences are addressed (Lewis et al., 2021; Baird et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic lay bare pre-existing social inequities and exacerbating disparities across various dimensions. Socio-economic factors such as income inequality, access to resources and parental education levels played a crucial role in shaping learners' experiences during the pandemic lockdown. For marginalized communities already grappling with universal disadvantages, the shift to remote learning aggravated prevailing discrepancies, widening the educational divide (Rosenfeld, 2021). Varied inquiries offer knowledge of the potential short-, mid-, and long-term consequences of an outbreak. During such times, it is important to adopt a strengths-based approach to research and intervention, whereby the young people are empowered to enhance positive aspects of themselves and their lives and how they might be most safely reinforced to be strong and suitably resistant under circumstances of socio-ecological risks (Imburgia, 2023). Meaningful young people engagement is imperative not only for ideal youth development, but also as a catalyst for change to support high-risk young people (Lee, 2023; Brown et al., 2024).

Understanding how learners perceived socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown is crucial for developing effective strategies to alleviate adverse effects and foster resilience. There is a need to be conscious of these risks and to make reasonable supportive guidelines. This exploration probes into the complex relationship between learners and their settings, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics that

influence risk perception and response. As such future occurrences are averted while learners are assisted if the risk pathways are already recognized. By strengthening the voices of learners and clarifying their perceptions, there is a contribution to the joint effort of building a more resilient and an impartial future in the face of global challenges. It is only through collective action and unity that nations can build a more resilient and impartial educational system capable of withstanding the storms of the future.

In many communities, young people are bounded by widespread socio-ecological risks on a regular basis (Attanasio & Rajan, 2021; Gewirtz-Meydan, & Finkelhor, 2020). A major concern about youth livelihood is that it is framed within the danger discourse and concerns around sexual and domestic violence, drug abuse, unplanned teenage pregnancy and young people's inconsistent vulnerability to STIs and HIV and AIDS. These remain major apprehensions in Life Skills programmes at school (Citaristi, 2022; Ogutu, 2021; Bhana, 2016; Oginga et al., 2014). This is because, these programmes emphasize altering individual behaviour while overlooking the social backgrounds in which these young people are located (Ogutu, 2021; Bhana, 2016; Oginga et al., 2014; Wanyonyi, 2014).

In Kenya, the disconnect in Life Skills education has reflective consequences for youth growth and development. Life Skills education incorporates a range of competencies necessary for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. However, a lack of comprehensive integration of Life Skills education within the formal education system leaves Kenyan young people vulnerable to numerous risks (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2020).

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by coronavirus. The virus spreads mainly through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected individual coughs or sneezes. It is a respiratory disease hence older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions are highly at risk of infection because of their compromised immune system (World Health Organization, 2020). The first case of COVID-19 in Kenya was confirmed on the 13th of March, 2020 (Republic of Kenya, 2020). This prompted the immediate closure of all learning institutions starting from the 16th of March, 2020 to restrain the spread. Hence, more than 18 million Kenyan learners were to remain in their homes and communities (Republic of Kenya, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 is demonstrated by an increase in socio-ecological risks on young people in Africa (Ajayi et al., 2020; UN Women & Snyder, 2020), explicitly sexual gender-based violence, drug abuse, unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) (The World Bank Group, 2020c). In Kenya, many of the young people faced numerous socio-ecological risks during the lockdown period (Wadekar, 2020).

There are gaps in research exploring learners' experiences of the school-based approaches to matters connected to socio-ecological risks (Butler et al., 2022, Ogutu, 2021; Oginga et al., 2014). Essentially, schools as institutions delegated with the responsibilities of addressing such problems are ill-informed about learners' experiences, interests and needs. They have a predisposition of assuming the learner as being innocent (Chandler, 2022). In this study, 'learners are addressed as potential authorities and knowledge producers on matters surrounding their social worlds' (Pattman, 2015). The use of a socio-ecological approach allows for the enquiry of learners within their social contexts and assists with understanding shared relationships between individuals and their social settings.

The researcher believes that we are critically underserving learners by not paying attention to the human side of their well-being. During teenage hood, learners are developing a sense of self, an understanding of the world around them, and expressions of acceptance for those living within it. Therefore, when we do not pay attention to them or rather undermine their natural growth, we neglect to educate the whole learner. As a result of such a failure, there is a need to comprehend how teachers and learners can come up with a more critically comprehensive and emancipatory curriculum that creates the conditions for learners to feel safe, informed, confident and empowered in their socio-ecological setup. By virtue, the stakeholders need to devise ways of responding to the needs of the unheard, marginalized and overlooked learners in the school community.

Against the backdrop of major socio-ecological issues in the country, including gender and sexual violence, young people's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, high levels of teenage pregnancy, abortions and drug abuse, a capability enabling education and the ability to respond to socio-ecological risks, need to be enhanced in young people whilst they are in school, in order to transform them into cherished and responsible adults in society. Therefore, this study embarked to unravel the multifaceted trap of socio-ecological risks as perceived by learners amidst the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. By exploring the interconnectedness between societal constructions, environmental issues, and individual experiences, the study aimed to expound the complex mechanisms that shape risk perceptions and inform adaptive behaviors. Thus, the need to look into these socio-ecological risks faced by the learners and how capable learners are in managing their lives with guided support.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic largely hit and interrupted several magnitudes of our lives, predominantly the education sector. The impact of COVID-19 was demonstrated by an increase in socio-ecological risks on young people more especially in Africa (Ajayi et al., 2020; UN Women & Snyder, 2020; MOE, 2020), specifically with risks experienced such as drug abuse, sexual gender-based violence, unintended teenage pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases (The World Bank Group, 2020c). Young people in Kenya faced new risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Reports indicate that most teenagers faced these socio-ecological problems due to ignorance and lack of preparedness to deal with crises (Lewis et al, 2021; Flowe et al., 2020; Wadekar, 2020; Soni & Bhalla, 2020). COVID-19 aggravated some of the tough situations and presented new challenges for which learners were ill-prepared (Mbushi et al., 2022). This explains worsened cases of socio-ecological risks among young people during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

The influence of COVID-19 on school activities and family well-being has been researched on (UNICEF, 2021; Lewis et al, 2021; Flowe et al., 2020; Wadekar, 2020; Ministry of Health, 2020; World Bank, 2020; WHO, 2020). There is a gap in research on learner experiences, perceptions and coping strategies regarding socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Thus, it is crucial to hear and support learners' voices on these matters. The vision of Kenyan education is to provide quality, relevance and the overall efficiency of education to the learners. Giving learners a voice in decision-making to articulate their needs and ideas advances the efficiency of policies and programmes and give them a chance to contribute to their delivery. Therefore, involving learners in a study using participatory visual methodology was an important exploration to find ways of contributing to prevention

strategies and supportive strategies that could decrease risky behaviours during crises and always. Moreover, actively involving learners in decision-making regarding their socio-ecological matters allows them to select and decide on what knowledge and skills they need and would like to attain. This promotes a sense of agency, and their freedom to choose what they value being and doing as a significant element in enhancing learner capabilities. Therefore, learners provide enriching knowledge on what they feel they require in their school programmes, what they would like to be guided on; issues that teachers, curriculum developers, implementers and policy makers may not be aware of. These matters are valuable in developing and enabling a more effective curriculum that covers the value of learners' wellbeing and other life skills.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and generate supportive strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To investigate how socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya.
- ii. To explore how learners perceive the socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
- iii. To explore learners' coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

1.5 Research Questions

The main research question was:

What were learners' experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?

1.5.1 Secondary research questions

This study was guided by the following secondary research questions:

- i. How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?
- ii. How do learners perceive the socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
- iii. What are learners' coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is justified on the grounds that it addresses the knowledge gap on socio-ecological risks on learners. Thus, enabling the strengthening of learners' capability programmes in response to the socio-ecological complexities they experience. While it focused on exploring ways and opportunities of collaborating with young Kenyans to shape school-based knowledge of socio-ecological issues, it is crucial for addressing the long-term consequences of the pandemic on the learners. Moreover, the findings from the study could inform educators and social service providers in designing interventions towards positive behaviour changes and the protection of learners from any social harm.

1.7 Study Significance

The study provides a better understanding of socio-ecological risks faced by young people during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, while seeking solutions to avert the same in future. This research involved the experiences of the learners regarding socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This made this study significant to learners as it explored how they can be guided to realize their capabilities on socio-ecological issues and how they can construct positive identities within their environment towards social change. This participative approach allowed learners to be involved in determining what affects them, tapping into their own experiences, while making them heard to match their lived experiences. This study is significant to teachers as the knowledge gained is useful in their classroom delivery of issues that touch young learners in their socio-ecological environment. To the schools, the study is significant in the promotion of peer support among young people as a move to reduce socio-ecological risks among them. To the parents and the community, the data produced will guide them in assisting young people in coping with life during pandemic times and always. The study is also significant to the curriculum implementors, in that, the findings of this study are expected to inform policies and interventions in curriculum modification that are inclusive of learners' voice and pandemic related topics. The model developed could be utilised in teaching to strengthen Life skills programmes by including the learner voice. The study also contributes to the literature in the field of education and related disciplines

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study

1.8.1 Scope of the study

This study was located in teaching and learning in Kenyan secondary schools. The problem was drawn from an educational perspective, particularly in exploring socio-

ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Thereafter, participants generated supportive strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times. The study was carried out in three selected schools in Kenya within Uasin Gishu County. Kenya is situated in sub-Saharan East Africa. It is bordered to the north by South Sudan and Ethiopia, to the east by Somalia and the Indian Ocean, to the south by Tanzania, and to the west by Lake Victoria and Uganda.

The participants in the study were Form 1 and 2 learners aged 15-24 years taking Life Skills education curriculum. These schools have both male and female learners from diverse social backgrounds, hailing from different parts of the country. As well, teacher and Parents Association (PA) representatives from the respective schools were sampled for the study.

Literature was drawn specifically from the body of knowledge of risks facing learners in socio-ecological settings, Life Skills education programme in Kenyan schools and young people's coping strategies during crises. A qualitative approach was used, located within a critical paradigm and positioned as a phenomenological study. Convenient and purposive sampling was utilized to select participants from the three schools. Cellphone, individual unstructured interview, memory account, drawing and focus group discussion were used to generate the data with the participants.

1.8.2 Limitations of the study

During the data generation exercise, some learners were psychologically tortured while describing their experiences. The researcher had to take a counsellor's role and encourage them to be emotionally stable in order to be expressive. Again, some participants had a difficulty in drawing while others were unwilling to draw. Therefore, the researcher assured them that there are no right or wrong drawings in that a drawing

is just an expression that is also captured in a caption. Lastly, some schools were not cooperative and the researcher had to try approaching the next available schools with the same characteristics.

1.9 Assumptions

The study assumed that:

- i. The participants were honest and truthful during the data generation.
- ii. The participants involved represented the entire learner population in the region.
- iii. The study assumed that the conceptual model developed from the generated data and the recommendations made could be helpful in strengthening learner voice and emancipation.
- iv. The data generated will be helpful in generating supportive strategies for learners to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks offer philosophical guides and relations to research; and position the enquiry within the discipline in which the researcher is positioned (Collins & Stockton, 2018). The theoretical framework for this study resides in Freire's (1970) empowerment education theory which focuses on encouraging individuals to become vocal about their needs and those of the community.

The theory as was employed in this study is aligned with the study's viewpoint in that it treats knowledge as constructed, re-constructed and designed at varied periods in the social setting (Butler, 2018). Freire (1970) argues that learners are considered empty

banks that remain open to receive from teachers, and this inspires oppressive attitudes and practices in society. Therefore, Freire advocates for a more world-mediated mutual approach to education that inspires the co-creation of knowledge. Freire advocates for dialogism as a tool to free the colonized through the use of collaboration, unity, organization and cultural blend (Freire, 2018).

Freire's (1970) education model strove for empowerment as a goal of education. He criticized traditional education for assuming learners as empty agents who receive knowledge from teachers. A vital characteristic of critical pedagogy is to overcome disheartening life conditions by raising consciousness of the power relations ingrained in society.

The educational philosophy of Paulo Freire recommends that education purposes at developing critical thinking by offering the people's situation to them as a problem so that they can distinguish, think about, and act on it. During the dialogical engagement between the teacher and the learners, the life experiences of the learners are to be highlighted through which the learners begin to recognize each other as sources of knowledge. While producing and appraising their learning resources, learners engage in the decision-making process in class, which in turn results in their own decision-making outside the classroom (Bovill, 2020; Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2020).

Freire (2018), in his seminal work, advocates for learner empowerment in decision by raising their consciousness to critique and challenge oppressive social conditions. Similarly, Shih (2018), critically assesses Freire's model and advocates for an autonomous and critical education practice where learners' voices and opinions are weighted. He highlights that curriculum planning should be an exclusively people-centered process. Ayoub et al., (2014), explored Freire's principles of curriculum

planning; and spotlights learners' active participation in the educational plan. They believe that curriculum should be purposefully planned and all the stakeholders in the teaching and learning environment should be involved in the process. It is imperative for the education system to identify the knowledge and experiences that learners bring to the engagement of the curriculum development, and to draw on these lived experiences when addressing societal problems in teaching and learning (Wood, 2016). Freirean critical pedagogy focuses on tapping into silenced voices and determining why these voices have been suppressed (Sathorar, 2018).

The application of Freirean theory in this study mirrors on making teaching sessions more realistic and involving. This is because of the focus on what the learners really need to talk about, letting them discuss their issues of interest while helping them to move forward critically and consciously. Thus, enabling learners to change the structure of their society. The learners take a centre stage in their learning as a move to empower them and enable them to transform their life conditions in their socio-ecological environments. Freire's theory aims for transformative education that goes beyond transmitting knowledge to fostering personal and societal transformation. In exploring socio-ecological risks, educators can encourage learners to critically reflect on the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic systems and explore ways to create more sustainable and just societies post-pandemic. By adopting a learner centred teaching approach, learners are heard and emancipated to act as change agents towards transformative education.

Through problem posing-education and questioning the problematic issues in learners' lives, have enabled them to learn to think critically and develop a critical consciousness. This is useful in improving their living conditions and taking necessary

actions to build a more just and equitable society. In the study, the learners were encouraged to contribute to their own learning by using the posed problematic issues that they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in their communities, and with the guidance of the teachers and researcher, they were encouraged to make emancipatory decisive ways of challenging the oppressive social conditions they face in the societies. The learners were encouraged to act in a way that enables them to transform their societies which is best achieved through emancipatory education.

This approach aims at changing the point of view of the education stakeholders through which they are used to looking at different social problems. This is because, the real-life problems the learners face are meant to be understood and diagnosed by them while reaching possible solutions to those problems. Freire emphasizes on the importance of developing critical consciousness, which involves understanding the socio-ecological context of one's reality. In an event of future pandemic lockdown, learners are encouraged to tackle real-life problems by using critical consciousness to analyze how socio-economic inequalities, government policies, and systemic issues exacerbate their risks and vulnerabilities.

In conclusion, the study focused on modern-day learner in their world, and understanding them within that world. Therefore, an enquiry into their socio-ecological formation needed to be investigated. Freire's theory offered a framework for understanding learners' perceptions of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown through problem-posing education, dialogue and praxis, and conscientization. By engaging learners in critical reflection, dialogue, and action, educators can empower them to navigate the complexities of the pandemic risk impacts and contribute to shared efforts towards resilience and social transformation. The

provision of a comprehensive description of the learners' well-being was presented through the socio-ecological influences on their livelihoods, while being guided by Freire's empowerment education theory; and, the use of the participatory visual methodology in generating data about learner experiences during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

1.11 Conceptual Framework

This is a metacognitive, reflective and operational element of the entire research process (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). It is a graphic or written depiction that describes, the main issues studied including the key concepts and their supposed relationship (Hughes et al., 2019).

Figure 1.1 indicates how the issues in this study relate to one another. Learner well-being in their socio-ecological setting is established through an enquiry of their experiences as a move to find solutions to their own problems. This is described in Figure 1.1.

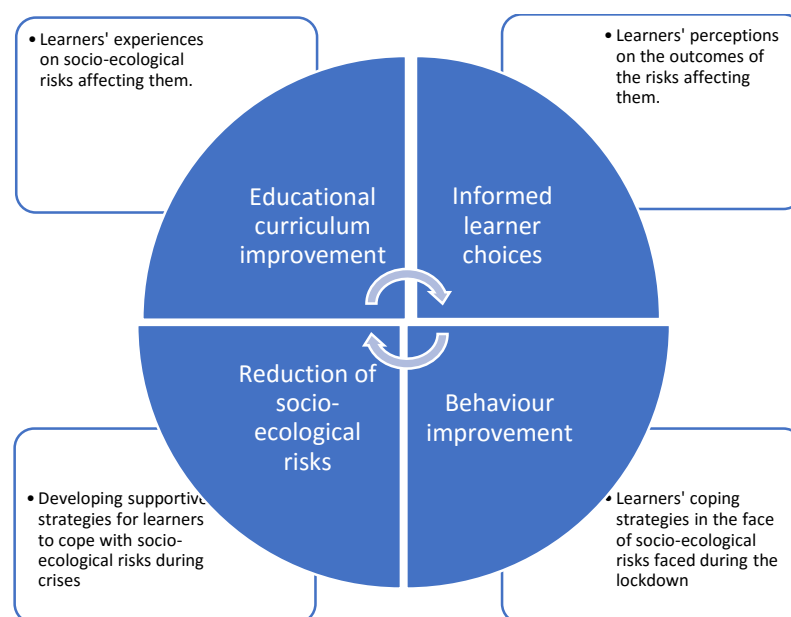


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework adapted by researcher

1.12 Operational Definition of Key Terms

Key terms recognized as important to this research are: young Kenyans, young people's experiences, learner voice, participatory visual methodology and socio-ecological risks.

Young people's experiences:

This study interchangeably used the words 'young people' and 'learners. Young people's experiences refer to the diverse encounters that individuals in the younger age undergo as they navigate different aspects of life, including education, relationships, societal expectations, and personal growth. These experiences shape their perspectives, beliefs, and identities, influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Rosenfeld et al., 2021). Understanding how and where young people give meaning to their socio-ecological issues, was critical to this study. The participants in this study were school-going young people aged 15 to 24 years of age, in their teenage stage. The physical changes connected to puberty, the commencement of sexual maturity, and the social expectancy that young people make choices, prompt a reconsideration of earlier certainties. This is a time when joint identities, sexual identities, and personal identities are all investigated. Hughes and Jones (2022) consider that young people's responses to these challenges are intensely influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they live.

Socio-ecological risks:

Risk is defined as 'a state that could be dangerous or have bad results' (Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary, 2015, p. 1297). Risk in the study refers to those issues that predispose young people to unpleasant and unwelcome situations as a result of particular actions. Socio-ecological risks refer to multifaceted challenges and threats

faced by individuals at varied levels of the environment such as neighbourhood, community, schools, and social systems; that place young people at the centre of a series of social systems influencing young people's lives (Smith et al., 2023; Muchacha & Mthetwa, 2015). These risks occur as a result of interactions between social, economic, and environmental factors. Risks have become prevalent in such a way that many are unseen, present in things that are apparently harmless. Learner socio-ecological risks highlight the interconnectedness between individual learners and other factors, including environmental stressors, social inequalities, economic disparities and, community dynamics, all of which can affect learners' well-being, academic performance, and overall educational experiences. These thus draw an emphasis on the need for holistic approaches to addressing educational inequities and promoting learner well-being (Mertens et al., 2020). This study draws insight from Mertens et al. (2020), as they argue that in the developing world there are risks that are more conspicuous, and that the responses to such risks should be to prepare learners to be able to negotiate and live with these risks. This guided the study while exploring the way in which learners are equipped to strengthen their capabilities in dealing with socio-ecological issues.

Learner's voice:

Learner's voice refers to the dynamic participation and viewpoint of learners. It emphasizes the importance of learners' contributions, enquiry, and reflections in shaping their own academic and social experiences. Voice highlights the impression that learners are not passive beneficiaries of knowledge but rather active agents in generating their understanding (Gillett-Swan et al., 2024). According to the Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (2015), "voice" refers to an expression of an attitude or opinion. This involves the active participation and input of learners in matters that directly affect

their education, well-being, and overall school experience. This concept emphasizes the importance of listening to and valuing the perspectives, opinions, and concerns of learners themselves when making decisions about educational policies, practices, and environments. For this study, voice means what young people (learners) aged 15-24 years are required to express about the socio-ecological risks they face. This is in line with Ashby (2023) who posits that actively involving young people in research work might help bridge gaps between them and older people. Learner's voice is recognized as an avenue for a chance to empower learners to share meaningfully and collaboratively in cultivating their experience of life encounters in school (Gillett-Swan et al., 2024). Such encouragements in school setup promote learner engagement in learning. Their involvement and participation in this study made them agents and sources of information because of how they are perceived as capable beings, who can be inventive and initiate new meaningful ideas. Therefore, identifying and strengthening learner voice can lead to more meaningful and effective educational practices that better meet the diverse needs and ambitions of learners.

COVID-19 pandemic:

COVID-19 pandemic refers to the global outbreak of the infectious coronavirus disease, SARS-CoV-2. This new group of viruses was named coronavirus (corona denoting the crown-like appearance of the surface projections) and was later officially accepted as a new genus of viruses. The virus spreads chiefly through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected individual coughs or sneezes (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic arose in late 2019 and swiftly spread worldwide, resulting in extensive illness, death, and substantial societal disturbance. The pandemic led to extensive efforts by governments, healthcare systems, and communities to alleviate its

impact through measures such as social distancing, mask-wearing, vaccination campaigns, and public health interventions.

Curriculum:

A curriculum in this context refers to the academic content that comprises of courses offered in specific fields in postgraduate education in universities, the learning experiences, related objectives, methods and practices involved and the evaluation processes.

Participatory Visual Methodology:

Participatory visual methodologies have been used as tools to provoke marginalized and omitted people's voices, to make their voices heard on social and developmental matters. They consist of diverse artistic forms of communication, such as drama, photography, film, drawing, design, creative writing and music. According to Ratnam (2023), participatory visual methodology involves using visual tools and techniques to engage participants actively in research, permitting them to express their viewpoints, experiences, and stories through images, photographs, videos, or other visual media. This approach purposes to empower participants, particularly marginalized groups, by providing them with a platform to share their accounts and co-create knowledge. By use of collaborative procedures, participants and researchers work together to produce powerful stories (Brown et al., 2020). Including young people in these participatory visual methods is generally presented as a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of young people from passive participants to active, knowledgeable social agents gifted to contribute to the construction of information that is not simply dependent on the spoken (Ratnam, 2023; Brown et al., 2020; Lomax, 2012). This study used participatory methodology with the aim of recognizing that learners have their own community-

based and local knowledge that researchers need to tap from in order to understand learner needs.

Learner experiences:

This refers to what learners encounter in the socio-ecological setting. They involve the various ways in which learners engage with and acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Learner experiences are essential to the educational process, prompting how learners perceive, relate with, and retain new information, eventually influential their academic success and personal development.

Learner perceptions:

Learner perceptions refer to how learners view and understand their experiences, including their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about different aspects. These observations can significantly impact their motivation, engagement, and academic success. Understanding learner perceptions can help teachers adapt their teaching methods to better meet learners' needs and improve educational outcomes.

Coping strategies:

Coping strategies are techniques and methods that individuals use to manage stress, challenges, and difficult emotions. These strategies can be broadly categorized into adaptive (positive) and maladaptive (negative) approaches. Understanding and utilizing effective coping strategies can enhance emotional resilience and overall well-being.

Supportive strategies:

Supportive strategies are values or recommendations intended to help individuals navigate challenges, manage stress, and foster well-being. These strategies can be applied in various contexts, including education, healthcare, and personal development.

1.13 Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1

This chapter introduced the study by briefly detailing the following: overview and background of the study, problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research objectives and question, significance of the study, justification of the study, limitation of the study, assumptions of the study, scope of the study, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and the skeleton structure of the research.

Chapter 2

In this chapter the researcher explored the theoretical foundation of this study, situated the study within the existing body of knowledge on education and youth in their socio-ecological setting.

Chapter 3

This chapter provided an in-depth description of the research design and methodology. The researcher justified the use of visual participatory methodology as the choice for data generation for this study. The sampling strategies and data generation methods were outlined and discussed. Finally, the procedures for data analysis, ethical measures, and trustworthiness measures employed were discussed.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, the researcher presented the results generated from all methods used for generating data. The results using drawings, memory work, unstructured individual interviews and cellphilm were presented. Lastly, focus group discussion sessions were presented, aimed at following-up on issues generated from the four data generation methods (drawing, memory work, unstructured individual interviews and cellphilm). A discussion of the findings in detail under themes that were identified during organising

and coding were presented. To substantiate the discussion, verbatim texts from the participants were included.

Chapter 5

In this final chapter, the researcher summarized the study, generated a model, discussed the theoretical contributions in the study and drew conclusions. Recommendations were made from the findings of the study.

1.14 Chapter Summary

The study focused on exploring learners' experiences on socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. In this chapter, the study problem was outlined, paving way for the background of the study as well as outlining the objectives and the research questions of the study. A theoretical framework that was deemed fit for this study was explained stating its relation to the study. The purpose and the significance of this study were clearly stated in this chapter. The aim of the study was to provide a framework that could be used to enhance learners' experiences in the socio-ecological setting; as such, drawing on the views of learners aged 15-24 years. The next chapter provides work researched by other scholars on the topic and a highlight of the gap in the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature reviewed in this section aimed at putting across a theoretical perspective of learner experiences, perceptions and supportive coping strategies regarding socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Before engaging in a review of existing literature on socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, this chapter provides various definitions of conceptualizing young people and risks. When unpacked, they encompass several perspectives such as socio-ecological risks in Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, conceptualizing COVID-19 pandemic and schooling, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on young people globally and in Kenya, the Kenyan national goals of education, Life Skills education programme in Kenya, and, COVID-19 pandemic supportive coping strategies. The literature was explored on the basis that there were concerns of increase in risky behaviours amongst young people, more so in Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This happened despite the provision of Life Skills education programme in schools. These factors were explored to discover the influence in giving learners a voice in decision-making. This would enable them articulate their needs and ideas while advancing the efficiency of policies and programmes. At the end of this chapter, identified research gaps were highlighted.

The researcher took a learner-centred approach to this study to foreground the voices of learners. Young people often face significant struggles in getting their voices heard and appreciated (Young et al., 2023; Haynes & Tanner, 2015). Frequently, their voices are absent from discussions about them. Voice and agency, which include one's ability to describe and act upon goals, are key components of youthful empowerment (Mazwi,

2020). As such, learners are the authorities on their own practices, and we cannot fully understand their experiences without taking a young people-centred approach.

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of seeking to enact learner voice practices. By elevating learner experiences in culturally responsive and sustaining ways, it creates space for learners to think deeply about their communities and bring various locally based, social issues to light. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis brought to the forefront what diverse educationalists have already known for a long; an indication that there is an urgent and continuing need for people and institutions to attend to young people's needs in the community. Even when the crisis has ended, this urgency remains.

Studies reported increased sexual activity during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. As well, there were alarming cases of rape, early marriages and sexual violence leading to abortions, contracting sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies, with one area in Kenya reporting that 4,000 young girls became pregnant during the pandemic lockdown (Soni & Bhalla, 2020). Based on these issues experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, they draw an understanding of the versatility of sexual offending, which means that offenders alter their offending behaviors to match the offending opportunities that arise (Speed & Richardson, 2020; Woodhams & Komarzynska, 2014). Therefore, comprehending risk behaviour among young people remains critical for prevention interventions universally (Brown et al., 2024; Ralesego, 2019).

2.1 Conceptualizing Young People and Risk

Literature on young people's risks reflect a discourse that conceptualizes risk as something bad to be avoided. The risk rate varies enormously for each young person, while it is possible to make generalizations, there will always be disproportions between

individuals. People's vulnerabilities to different risks will change as they develop and grow (Lunneblad et al., 2023; Jemmott et al., 2015).

At the developmental stage, their brain operation is enormously close to that of an adult and so they can master abstract thinking and advance theories to explain and make sense of things (Lunneblad et al., 2023). Byron (2008, p. 38) explains that: 'There are no longer the inherent restrictions of brain development that lead to difficulties with evaluating information or making judgments. Similarly, Michel (2020) asserts that, as they grow, young people advance their coherent and cognitive skills which assist them in understanding risks and dangers. Their identity construction is not only affected by physiological changes, but also by social and cultural aspects. Observing young people as social development advocate that, 'the meaning of age and how it is experienced is a result of the interaction between biological processes and the social, physical, political and economic environment' Byron (2008, p. 33). Thus, considering young people as a social process allows value to be positioned on young people, and implies that the young people matter. Reaching young people with pre-risk prevention involvements may help create ultimate forms of safer behaviour and avert high-risk behaviors in the future (UNAIDS, 2020; Jemmott et al., 2015).

Since the world becomes progressively interconnected, so do the risks people face. When facing risks, individuals go through a multifaceted process in determining how to tackle those risks (WHO, 2020). A choice of approach depends on behavioral characteristics and complex interactions among people. The presence of various risk factors contribute to the mental health of youth and efforts could be taken to promote positive mental health and avoid or lessen mental health problems. Young people with mental health conditions may face challenges in their homes, school, community, and

social relationships (Lunneblad et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, for most young people, mental health distress is sporadic, not permanent, and most can effectively navigate the challenges as a consequence of a mental health disorder with treatment, peer and specialized support and services, and solid family and social support network (WHO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income, or gender but its consequences hit hard the most vulnerable being the young people. Along with the extensive chances the digital age brings, come a diverse range of risks and harms. There were also risk factors associated with the use of technology. Young people were not only at risk of adult mistreatment; they could also obtain sexual or intimate pictures of their peers and share them with or without the person's consent (Lunneblad et al., 2023). Digital developments mean that bullying is no longer at school levels only but also at the community spaces (Raymond et al., 2023); cyberbullying was used to hurt and humiliate their victims with the click of a button during the pandemic lockdown. This caused harm and led to an increase in risks of re-victimization of those affected (Englander, 2023).

2.1.1 Young people ‘at risk’

Through a risk lens, some young people can be perceived to be ‘at risk’ or ‘a risk’ (Stanford 2011). People who are ‘at risk’ are observed in relation to predisposition, while those who are ‘a risk’ are considered in terms of their dangerousness. Risk can thus be tailored and attached to people rather than contexts. Such risk thinking informs how people understand each other, and therefore vulnerability and dangerousness become major ways in which people are considered and categorized. The ways in which

we view other people in relation to risk are important in the background of young people as a group, as they are more often framed as ‘at risk’ (Duke, 2020).

Young people are linked with being ‘at risk’ for a variety of reasons, such as age, alcoholism and drug and substance use, sexual activity, mental health matters, self-harm and suicidal behaviour and other social complications (Papalia et al., 2021; Addae, 2021; Zuleika et al., 2021; Duke, 2020; Usher et al., 2020). Hence, they are often viewed as a risky population, either by description, or by virtue of the world they live in (Addae, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, young people felt that their homes were no longer safe havens for them and desired they were in school over home (Peterman et al., 2020). The pandemic challenges presented unpredictability and chaos in homes (Daks et al., 2020) and most of the young people faced social seclusion and loneliness during the pandemic lockdown leading to further trauma to some of those with more vulnerability (Thayer et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2020; Divala et al., 2020; Senghore et al., 2020). The seclusion faced by the young people led to emotional instabilities prompting devastating effects to them and their families (Bundervoet et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The risks faced by the young people pushed the disadvantaged learners to the brink of deserting school prematurely (Zuleika et al., 2022; Miller, 2020). For instance, the feelings of shame and guilt significantly contribute to girls dropping out of school due to teenage pregnancy (Ruzibiza, 2021; Laski, 2015) which may have long term consequences linked to a wide range of emotional responses for those affected (Potard, 2020; Else-Quest, 2014; Aruda et al., 2010). In risky situations, victimization plays a major impediment in managing to get out of risk. Studies have investigated risk factors

for young people victimization resulting from family conflicts, sexual violence, alcoholism and drug and substance abuse, poor parental guidance and monitoring among other issues (Kisaakye et al., 2023; Assink et al., 2019; Galabo & Gempes, 2017). These challenges have triggered mental health challenges among the affected young people (Sanzana et al., 2023; Bradbury-Jones, 2020; Andreou, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to find ways that prevent young people from risks as well as solutions to problems caused by risks.

2.1.2 Capabilities in risk

From a psychological perspective, risk taking is a part of development, especially identity development, creating both positive and negative significances (Brown et al., 2024). Therefore, opting to take risks may have both positive consequences of developmental independence and negative consequences of exposure to danger (Smith et al., 2023). People believe they can comprehend and distinguish risks, as well as make choices to guard themselves from the risks. Brown and Penney (2014) highlight how the positioning of risk as a negative has consequences for the desirability or morality of voluntary risk taking. As Jones and Smith (2023) recognize, there is a tendency to adopt strategies that are self-conscious about risk avoidance as risks become more and more equated with danger. Discourses on risk and protection have given growth to the academic fields of risk management (Brown & Penney, 2014). Young people are encouraged to engage in youth programmes that motivate them. They become less at risk when they realize new talents, hobbies and passions. These activities range from cooking, music and art, sports and nature and engaging academic programmes (Pavarini, et al., 2020). Thus, developing transferable Life Skills usable at home and school (Dunton et al., 2020).

Teenage hood is a dynamic period of learning and transformation, whereby young people readily align their attention, motivation, and behavior with experiences they perceive to be affecting their lives (Sawyer et al., 2018). Accordingly, adults should assist young people collaboratively to ensure relevance to their goals, resources, and constraints; young people should also be involved in community developmental programmes as a way of empowering them to be capable of making individually sound decisions during crises and in times of need (Blakemore, 2018; Sawyer et al., 2018). To be effective, COVID-19 response to disaster programmes should involve capabilities aimed to mobilize communities of young people and encourage them to make meaningful contributions (Fuligni, 2020). In the design of such programmes, it is critical to think of young people not in terms of the problems that they may cause through their behaviour but rather in terms of their ambitions, need for experimentation and connection, willingness, sense of agency and enthusiasm they depict elements of positive social change (Hlad et al., 2022; Fischhoff & Broommell, 2020).

For young people, capabilities are likely to be effective when all factors supporting behaviour change are incorporated. These factors include creating peer role models for responsible behaviours, primarily through social media influencers, peer to peer talks, effective guidance, and counselling programmes, emancipatory decision-making programmes, and other sources of information. An extensive campaign with peer influencers engaging in responsible risk preventive behaviours, coupled with positive peer responses, could be a highly effective strategy (Sawyer et al., 2018). Peer-to-peer communication is most likely to be effective, factoring in that young people obtain most of their information and exposure to peers electronically, was heightened amid the threat of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Effective prevention programmes also create prospects for the active engagement of young people with a clear justification as to why

they should engage in healthy behaviour (Dunton et al., 2020). It is important to factor in encouraging precise perceptions of risks and benefits, informed decisions of risks mitigation and self-efficacy. Thus, recognizing needs for autonomy and respect, while offering considerable promise for the strategy of effective programmes to promote healthy behaviours for young people to reduce risks during crises (Fuligni, 2020).

2.1.3 Capability approach to reflect on the purpose of education

Innovation and creativity can only happen when people are skilled enough to know how to operate with different technologies (Hsieh et al., 2021). According to Michura (2019), educated individuals always find a solution to their problems with the help of better techniques. Furthermore, Unterhalter et al. (2023) explain that being educated is a capability, which empowers the realization of real-world cognitive skills that are obligatory for achieving other important functioning, such as participating in the process of decision-making, or engaging in public debates. This argument justifies that such an approach could be used to evaluate the purpose of learners' experiences in their own learning, and explore the possibility of its approach to enhance learners' positivity to life and freedom to negotiate for the accomplishment of the life they value or have reason to choose, regardless of their socio-ecological settings (Kotoh et al., 2022; Iddy, 2021).

Michura (2019) elaborates on the concept of context specificity, arguing that entities such as governments, schools and communities need to prepare ecological capacity building curricula through research in an ontologically defensible way. This means considering the context of the learners, including its history, culture, activities, and capabilities. This is necessary as people differ, and what might be the perfect cherished

life for one person, might not be the valued life for every other person (Kotoh et al., 2022).

Regarding the purpose of education, Pippa et al. (2021) emphasize that education for sustainable development in relation to capabilities approach, should aim at helping individuals of all ages to better understand the world and to act on the understanding of the world in which they live. Pippa et al. (2021) further argue that education should address the complexity and inter-connectedness of complications such as health and population issues including poverty, consumption, environmental degradation, conflict, and violation of human rights. By sharing their emotive selves in pieces of art, young people can use that as an emancipatory way of helping each other boost creativity during their free times and to avoid risks (Pavarini, et al., 2020). It is also worth noting that engaging in such activities has a long-lasting positive impact on the young people and those affected (Iyengar, 2023; Wang et al., 2021; Ballard et al., 2019). It is through peer-to-peer counselling sessions, taking part in decision making and making their voices heard that young people would produce robust capacity to overcome difficulties through their collaborations (Ungar & Theron, 2020; OECD, 2020; Outley & Blyth, 2020). Moreover, education needs to address these issues by not only providing information, but also offering the capacities needed to appreciate and use the information, to create agency and attitudes supporting behaviour that leads to sustainable development (Pippa et al., 2021; Kalra & Emmanuel, 2019; UNESCO, 2013).

2.1.4 Being young today

Globalization is liable for a variety of radical changes and adjustments in the cultural, social and economic domains. It has increased universal interactions,

familiarized societies with greater diversity, and has merged local with international social and cultural identities (Massey et al., 2021). The change in societal background due to modernism has transformed young people's perceptions and increased their desire to fit in the present-day world. They have, for instance, changed their identity, behaviours, attitudes, norms, and roles to suit their own personal desires and that of their societies in the modern context. Most of these changes have increased their exposure to risks and the subsequent consequences (Zajda, 2021; Beyers, 2013). Similarly, Hlad et al. (2022) contend that the contemporary context has exposed young people to varied risky ventures predisposed by availability of internet. This has exposed them to sexual content including pornographic materials which subsequently shape their developing sexuality (Crabbe & Flood, 2021). Negotiating between their new and old morality often results in confusion of what is acceptable and what is not. Thus, the gap between the youth and adults discussing young people must be addressed with urgency by adapting the modern education programme to cater for the young people's needs.

2.1.5 Learners voices

Cubero-Pérez et al. (2023) argue that, learners need to be considered as intermediaries of their own lives. Alternatively, Jones and Hall (2022) advocate that prevention efforts and policies should come from peers and other sources reliable with that group. One of the significant outcomes of learner-learner or learner-teacher collaboration is the learner's growing awareness in the learning and educational process, leading to an increase in motivation and engagement (Corrado, 2020). This leads to the concept of teaching and learning together when teachers are learning from the learners and learners become active contributors of the process, informers, and change agents in partnership (Unterhalter et al., 2023). Such partnerships between

young people and adults place learners in a desirable position, which gives them the chance for their voices to be heard and acted upon. Besides providing learners with avenues to communicate their thoughts and feelings, learner voice is also about learners having the power to bring about changes which improve their experiences at school and in the community (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2023).

While research has been growing on learner voice in the international space, it is limited in Kenya and other African countries. Even though leadership as a concept is well-studied, research on young people leadership development is limited. This is particularly so in Kenya where learner leadership rarely features on the educational agenda and the voices of learners are often, ignored (Corrado, 2020; Mabovula, 2009). In research, learner voice is understood to be an interactive, dialectical process which engages the human agency of all members of the society. Based on dialogue and strong relationships, it is transformative and can offer opportunities for all young people to learn in school communities that are socially objective and intensely democratic (Pippa et al., 2021; Corrado, 2020). Thus, it is ethical in nature and its moral purpose is to promote the core values of social justice, democracy, and equity in the social institutions of schools. Because of the dialogical nature of leadership, the voices of learners are integral to any discussion on learner voice. International literature refers to the voices of learners as ‘student voice’ and the concept is used to describe the range of ways in which learners can participate in decision-making in schools, and the kinds of decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers (Jones & Hall, 2022; Corrado, 2020; Haynes, & Tanner, 2015). Learner voice is about true democracy within institutions of learning, and it is a potential catalyst for learner agency. Learner voice initiatives can widen the scope of who has a voice in schools and can even lead to learner participation in developing young people’s reform efforts. However, literature

indicates that schools tend to teach learners to be passive participants in a democracy rather than leaders. Teachers and parents generally speak on behalf of learners and often misunderstand or disregard their perspectives. Mabovula (2009) claims that, when learners are given a voice, it is often an approval rather than a commitment to democratic participation.

2.1.6 Youth participatory research and learner voice

Youth participatory research builds from theories of critical literacy to focus learner voice in policy-making about issues related to young people's lives, including their experiences across settings of schools and communities (Corrado, 2020; Jarkiewicz, 2020; Caraballo et al., 2017). Conventionally, education research and practice have positioned learners as passive vessels to be filled with knowledge although this viewpoint was critiqued by Dewey (1902) and Freire (1970). Enriching learner voice demands taking young people seriously and treating them as knowledgeable contributors to discussions about their experiences in schools and community at large (Jones & Hall, 2022; Jarkiewicz, 2020). The term 'voice' advocates not only young people presence and contribution but also the inspiration to influence outcomes (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2023). Caraballo et al. (2017) trace youth participatory research's roots to Freire's (1970) critical education pedagogy. According to Jones and Hall (2022), this pedagogy is grounded in the philosophical concept of dialectic materialism, which stresses that individuals can become devotedly cognizant of the settings of social disparity and transform these conditions through intervention. Hence, uplifting learner voice in participatory research can be seen as an action-oriented pledge to transformational struggle that requires reconfiguring power dynamics around people with knowledge and the capacity to act (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2023; Jarkiewicz, 2020). Youth can position learner voice by leading research, analyzing, writing up and

presenting findings about their work (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2023; Jones & Hall, 2022). Doing so provides opportunities for learners to develop socio-critical literacy skills and learn to use and claim space in their efforts toward social change (Corrado, 2020; Rodriguez, 2017; Caraballo et al., 2017).

A vital youth participatory research element is transformational change. Youth participatory research can result in changes in systems, adults, and participating young people. Well-implemented youth participatory research projects often conclude with action-oriented presentations to relevant decision makers (Corrado, 2020). These interactions offer a rare, critical way for young people to inform policy (Kirshner, 2015), but this potential is not always realized. Youth participatory research projects' policy impacts vary widely, partly due to entrenched biases against young people as legitimate academic actors, ambiguity about proposed actions, as well as limited devices to ensure youth participatory research evidence informs decision making (Ozer, 2016; Kirshner, 2015). Youth participatory research studies lead to smaller-scale, school-level changes more often than organizational and community-level changes (Shamrova & Cummings, 2017). Changes in participants also occur, such as adults' perceptions of youth power, increased youth empowerment and positive youth development (Jones & Hall, 2022; Shamrova & Cummings, 2017; Kirshner, 2015). Conditions that increase the likelihood of research use in policy making are: building trust, strong researcher-practitioner relationships; triangulating research with local, practice-based expertise; providing timely, useful, and locally-relevant research; and including practice recommendations (Tseng & Nutley, 2014; Palinkas et al, 2014; Asen et al, 2013). Youth participatory research projects have many of these conditions. Youth participatory research is: conducted in collaboration with schools and academic practitioners, responsive to local issues, and double up into recommendations for

action. Additionally, youth participatory research can leverage learners' personal status to enhance study validity (Kirshner, 2015) and this is particularly helpful when studying sensitive topics. Local data, practical suggestions, and valid learner perspectives obtained through youth participatory research can be used to modify or create new policy.

2.1.7 Factors influencing young people's decision making in times of risks

Young people's cognitive decision making is like adults' cognitive decision making in a number of ways including the processes of encoding frequency of observed events and adjusting to risk consequences (Smith et al., 2023; Fischhoff & Broommell, 2020). Young people have more knowledge about some risks than adults especially on topics addressed in school programmes (Fischhoff & Broommell, 2020). Like adults, the decision-making competence of young people reflects the extent of their prior opportunities to master relevant skills (Clay & Parker, 2018).

Nevertheless, young people's decision-making abilities are not as mature as those of adults in ways that often lead young people to take risks in situations in which adults might find it easier to behave prudently (Brown et al., 2024; Reyna et al., 2011). It is important that young people make their decisions that enable them to evade risks or rather tackle risks while guided by adults. Importantly, young people are no worse than adults at perceiving risks but are more likely than adults to focus on the potential rewards of risky decisions and to trade off risks for rewards (Broommell, 2020). Consequently, educating young people about the risks and how to deal with them will emancipate them from such risks (Cubero-Pérez et al., 2023; Outley & Blyth, 2020; Reyna et al., 2011). It is important to pay more attention to the immediate consequences of the young people's decisions than to the long-term ones, which makes it difficult to

encourage young people to ignore the prospect of an immediate reward and attend to more distant outcomes. Social pressure, which varies in strength across situations, can also increase the chances of young people acting against their better judgment. Furthermore, as compared to adults, they often have less control over their social environment. Psychological research also suggests that teenagers are also less loss averse, more tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty, less able to incorporate negative consequences into risk perceptions and more precise in their thinking of decision options (Jarkiewicz, 2020; Reyna et al., 2011).

Young people's decisions are influenced by their fellow peers. In early adolescence, young people become progressively oriented towards peers and dependent on peer evaluation of them, especially peers who engage in courageous and sensational behaviours (Reyna et al., 2011). Their decision making is adversely affected in the presence of peers and may be described as driven by affect. Another contributing factor to this heightened peer-influence process is that parents generally engage in less monitoring and control of their children, thus allowing young people's increased exposure to risky contexts (Defoe, 2016; Reyna et al., 2011). Under conditions of external constraint, young people's decision making includes declining adult constraints and increasing peer exposure. They are particularly sensitive to social rewards, and especially to the rewards of socializing with peers, which results in a heightened need to affiliate with agemates and to act in ways that garner the admiration of their friends (Blakemore, 2018). Furthermore, they are influenced by their closest friends, extensive friendship groups and online peers. Given that social molding also promotes social reception, young people who desire acceptance from peers may adopt the behaviours of those peers to be adored or acknowledged (Liu et al., 2019; Defoe, 2016; Robinson et al., 2019).

Research suggests that individuals adopt the behaviour of others when unsure of the appropriate course of action and when they hope doing so will result in acceptance. Therefore, young people are influenced by the choices they publicly observe others make (Robinson et al., 2019). As well, environmental factors do affect young people's decisions making and are largely age dependent because progressive changes for youth are dynamic and varied. The most important environmental factors for young people are parents, peer groups, schools, and the community (Viner et al., 2012). Young people consistently report that most of their social interactions are electronically mediated. It is thus important to consider peer interactions within social media outlets and online social activities. Indeed, young people are more likely to receive information, and perhaps to be influenced by new ideas and attitudes, on digital media as compared to print media (Englander, 2023). Emerging literature suggests that online social peer networks are major sources of information as well as misinformation and significantly impact youth risk behaviours (Kisaaky et al., 2023; Soni & Bhalla, 2020).

Preventive interventions to reduce youth risk behaviors characteristically occur either in schools or within families. The focus of school-based interventions often is on education about risks of specific behaviours, development of social-emotional competencies and Life Skills, and related efforts to build positive supports through mentoring and school supports programmes (Zajda, 2021). Programmes like comprehensive Life Skills programmes may be successful in reducing risk behaviours. The focus of family-based interventions tends to be broad, including promoting healthy parent-child relationships, increasing parental monitoring, and helping parents access resources (Zajda, 2021; Jemmott et al., 2010). Education is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of effective interventions to reduce unhealthy risk taking amongst young people. Social-cognitive approaches that also incorporate practicing

skills, such as decision-making and role-playing resistance to peer influences, have shown some effectiveness. Interventions that largely focus on providing accounts of risk probabilities and consequences without explaining how these connect to background knowledge, mental depictions, and cultural values are likely to be less effective (Blakemore, 2018; Jemmott et al., 2010). Youth's failure to change the processes of risky indulgence can produce short-lived effects on the young people's emancipatory strategies (Reyna, 2011).

2.2 Conceptualizing Socio-Ecological Risks in Kenya During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Socio-ecological risks refer to risk issues that occur at diverse levels of the social environment such as neighborhood, community, schools, and social networks; that places the young people at the centre of a series of nested circles or social systems influencing the young people's lives (Smith et al., 2023; Muchacha & Mthetwa, 2015). The learners experienced several socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown that had dire consequences in their lives as discussed herein:

2.2.1 Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) exists in every society around the world and takes several forms. During a crisis, whether conflict or natural disaster, the risk of SGBV usually increases. Over one-third of women and girls universally experience some form of violence in their lifetime. However, this rate of recurrence is higher in crises, conflicts, and disasters, where vulnerability and risks are increased and most frequently family, community, and legal safeguards have broken down (Flowe et al., 2020; WHO, 2020).

SGBV encompasses a wide array of indicators. Some of these include physical violence, such as assault or oppression; psychological violence, such as verbal abuse; sexual abuse, including rape; harmful practices, like child forced marriage and female genital mutilation; socio-economic violence, which includes denial of resources; and sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (Flowe et al., 2020; Davies & True, 2015). Research has revealed that teenage girls are predominantly vulnerable to neglect in emergency backgrounds, where they may find themselves in a gap between child protection services and those designed for adult women (Harvey, 2021; Flowe et al., 2020). SGBV has a long-lasting consequence for survivors, their families and community at large. Impacts can range from physical harm to long-term emotional distress and even suicidal ideations. Instances of rape and sexual assault can result in unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy and childbirth complications, and the transmission of STIs, including HIV and AIDS. Universally, one in three women experience physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by either a partner or non-partner in their lifetime (WHO, 2020). Consequently, eradicating SGBV structures among the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in conjunction with strategies aimed at attaining gender equality (Wenham et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic prompted concerns for worsened SGBV due to economic disruptions and consequent household stress, compounded by social and travel restrictions (Harvey, 2021; Flowe et al., 2020).

Kenya has a long history of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which is exacerbated during times of nationwide crisis (Chagema, 2023). While the actions taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 undoubtedly curbed the spread of the disease, they appeared to be compromising the comfort and well-being of individuals. During the lockdown period, there was a significant increase of reports of the upsurge in domestic and sexual violence (Chagema, 2023; Rockowitz et al., 2021; Flowe et al., 2020; Mutiso

et al., 2020; Memiah et al., 2020). The absence of teenage girls from school, tied with the absence of auxiliary safe spaces or shelters, was associated with increased vulnerability to sexual violence from family members and others such as guardians, neighbours, and other community members. Young people were more likely to be attacked than adults during the day (Barchielli et al., 2021). This could be attributed to the way that both young people and adults were spending their time during the pandemic lockdown. The impact of SGBV on adolescent girls and young women, especially those who are unmarried, was found significant. However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the specific effects of COVID-19 on this population (Flowe et al., 2020; Mutiso et al., 2020). The national domestic violence hotline reported increased calls between February and June, 2020 (Soni & Bhalla, 2020). Such reports prompted a government enquiry on the rising SGBV cases. In 2021, the Kenyan Ministry of Health successfully provided HIV preventive services to many of the young individuals who had experienced SGBV (Chagema, 2023). This emphasizes the importance of high-quality and timely data in understanding and combatting SGBV in Kenya.

2.2.2 Teenage pregnancies, abortions and forced early marriages

The practice of early and forced marriage obstructs girls' education, emotional well-being, and overall health. This practice inevitably denies young girls of school age their right to education, which is essential for their personal progress, training for adulthood, and meaningful contribution to future well-being of family and society (WHO, 2017). Prior to the pandemic, early marriage was a huge and escalating concern in Eastern and Southern Africa where one in three girls aged 20-24 years are married before their 18th birthday (UNFPA, 2020). According to the Ministry of Health records indicate that over 328,000 girls in Eastern and Southern Africa got pregnant in the first year of the

pandemic. According to UNFPA (2020), adolescent pregnancies were because of inadequate capacity to negotiate for safe sex and without consent, lack of protection against sexual violence, and the lack of access to contraceptive information and services to prevent unplanned pregnancy during the pandemic lockdown. As schools reopened, some girls did not re-enroll due to lack of school fees and majorly unintended pregnancies. Furthermore, some of the 15 to 19-year-olds were married off during the initial stages of COVID-19 while others got married because of pregnancy (Iddy, 2021). Some of the girls confessed that they would not have gotten married if there was no pandemic and that it was not their decision to get married (Ruzibiza, 2021).

The prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriage among adolescent girls in Kenya continues to pose problems for the girls, limiting their ability to complete school and maximize their potential (MoH, 2020; WHO, 2017). Almost one out of every five girls aged 15-19 years old is reported to be either pregnant or has had a child already. Additionally, an estimated that approximately 14 percent of all births in Kenya befall teens aged between 15–19 years (MoH, 2020), with the majority being unplanned. The capability to offer basic needs for the children affects the pregnancy rate amongst young people. The lower the ability the higher the number of adolescent pregnancies (Usher et al., 2020). Research indicates that the pandemic and financial constraints were contributory factors why adolescents opted for early marriages. Notably, adolescent pregnancy undermines achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, hence, it is imperative for the country to embrace a human centered approach to better address this issue since it derails a country's economic pathway (Ministry of Health, 2020).

During the COVID-19 period, Mandera County accounted for the highest percentage of teenage pregnancies, followed by Nyandarua County. Baringo's average adolescent

pregnancy rose by 4% between 2020 and 2021, while Kirinyaga recorded an average rise of 2.7% in the same period. According to the report, there was an increase in adolescent pregnancy rates in Kisii County from 26.7 per cent to 28.3 per cent during the pandemic period while Bomet County also recorded a spike in adolescent pregnancies by 1.5% between 2020 and 2021 (NACC, 2021). It is however distressing that the Ministry of Health revealed that between January and February 2022, they handled 45,724 cases of pregnant teenagers aged between 10 and 19 years (Standard Newspaper, April 8th, 2022). It is worth noting that the stark upsurge in teen pregnancies can be attributed to the inability of young girls to access any kind of reproductive health care after any form of sexual coercion during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was primarily due to the government's decision to redirect efforts toward flattening the COVID-19 curve, an indication of the government's unpreparedness to tackle emergency situations associated with pandemics (Ministry of Health, 2020).

2.2.3 Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a procedure involving the partial or total removal of female external genitalia, or other harm to the female genital organs, for nonmedical reasons (WHO, 2020). The implementation of FGM law and its execution remain a challenge as stated in the National Policy for the Eradication of FGM, 2019 (Mutual et al., 2021; Mohamud et al., 2021). The emergence of COVID-19 greatly impacted on the progress made both globally and nationally in eliminating FGM (Musa et al., 2021). In Kenya, it is projected that four million women and girls have undergone FGM. Of this, 11% are young girls aged between 14-19 (UNFPA, 2020; MoE, 2020). Pandemic lockdowns executed by the pandemic covertly drove to FGM practices making young girls more vulnerable (Riley et al., 2021). Most of the teenage girls were locked out of the support systems that were critical in addressing their issues. Shuttering

of protective spaces such as young people's safe shelters and safe homes, as well as the long school closure also played a critical role in the escalation of gender-based violence and FGM (Riley et al., 2021; Musa et al., 2021). In addition, the local community took advantage of the lack of surveillance and law enforcement during lockdowns (UNFPA, 2020; World Bank, 2020). Economic hardship also contributed to the rise of FGM in Kenya. According to a report by the World Bank, the unemployment rate in Kenya experienced a twofold increase, reaching 10.4% in 2020 with an average decline in income by 3.3% during the same period. This report indicated that women and youth were hardest hit, making some of the people who had previously abandoned the FGM as a financial venture to revive the practice to supplement their income (Esho et al., 2022; World Bank, 2020). The loss of livelihood also pushed families to marry off their teenage girls in exchange of money and other domestic supplies.

In some Kenyan communities, girls who have not undergone FGM are regarded as "lesser" and deemed misfits in the community, which often encourages them to undergo the practice to be united with the rest in the society. The circumstances were dire and even more complicated for the young girls at the onset of COVID-19 onwards (Esho et al., 2022). The Kenya Health Information System reported 5,558 youth pregnancies in Narok County during the lockdown compared to 4,928 in the previous year. Notably, FGM is a direct pathway to pregnancy (UNFPA, 2020). Female genital mutilation, like adolescent pregnancy, early childhood marriage, forms of gender-based violence and other socio ecological risks affects the path of young girl people's future (Esho et al., 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to advocate for proactive measures to address these issues (UNFPA, 2020, MoH, 2020, World Bank, 2020).

2.2.4 Pornography materials

Pornography addiction may prompt young people to undesirable behavioral and emotional patterns and subsequently affect their psychosocial well-being. Sexual manipulation through pornography is sometimes perpetuated by those who take advantage of the psycho-social challenges experienced by adolescents (Crabbe & Flood, 2021). Furthermore, sexual exploitation through pornography may exacerbate challenges on young people when influencers employ negative impact on their minds. One of the challenges associated with sexual abuse is that young people may lack the capability to handle addictive behaviors consequent from exposure to explicit sexual content (Jensen-Schvaneveldt, 2021; Crabbe & Flood, 2021). This can result in undesirable consequences across various domains including social, psychological, physical, and economic aspects. Pornography dependence upsurges sexual activities amongst the young people. Typically, individuals are first exposed to pornography at around the age of 11 years, with a majority of consumers aged between 12-17 years (Massey et al., 2021; Njue et al., 2011). Pornography watching in Kenya is becoming extensive due to its accessibility and affordability. A survey by Njue et al., (2011) on pornography among the young people in Kisumu, stated that a third of the participants affirmed that their sexual behavior increased after watching pornographic content. M'itiiri's (2007) research on pornography amongst young people in modern-day churches in Nairobi found that pornography affected most Nairobi families as 65% of the study participants acknowledged exposure to pornography during their leisure time.

The young people's exposure to pornography increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as their access to the internet increased due to the provision of computers and smartphones purposed for online learning (Daily Nation, 22 January, 2021). This is

because most young people did not have the knowledge or skills to keep themselves safe online and to distinguish and respond to apprehensions.

2.2.5 HIV and AIDS in Kenya during the COVID pandemic

In 2019, Kenya had the joint third-largest HIV epidemic in the world (alongside Tanzania) with 1.6 million people living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2020). In the same year, 25,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses. Although the current death rate remains elevated, there has been a decrease in death rate since 2010, when the death rate was at 64, 000 people (UNAIDS, 2024). The first case of HIV in Kenya was detected in 1984. By the mid-1990s, HIV was one of the chief causes of ailments in the country, putting vast demands on the healthcare system as well as the economy. In 1996, 10.5% of Kenyans were living with HIV, although over two decades, this rate halved to 5.9% by 2015. This advancement is primarily due to the swift scaling up of HIV treatment and care (Kenya National AIDS Control Council, 2018). Reports indicated that in 2016, 64% of people living with HIV were on treatment, with 51% of those individuals achieving viral suppression (UNAIDS, 2020).

In recent years, Kenya has experienced a significant prevention success story in the region as evidenced by a substantial decline in new infections (UNAIDS, 2020; NACC, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought along setbacks in the success stories in Kenya. In 2020, roughly 5,000 young girls and young women aged between 15 to 24 years were facing new HIV infections on a weekly basis, with teenage girls living with HIV outnumbering teenage boys. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the economic and social disparities that drive such trends (Standard Newspaper, 8th April, 2022). SGBV, Poverty and food insecurity, stigma and discrimination, and teen and forced marriages, all raised the risk of HIV infection (UN Women & Snyder, 2020). In April

2022, the Health Permanent Secretary Susan Mochache revealed that every week, 98 girls aged between 10 and 19 years were infected with HIV due to SGBV (Standard Newspaper, 8th April, 2022). These factors have contributed to the regression in advances made in combating HIV and AIDS over the years. This calls for more intensive efforts and transformed approaches by the government, communities, civil society organizations and development partners so that this drawback can be addressed. It is imperative to place emphasis on innovations that target behaviour change among youth. Moreover, there is a need to analyze and assess the current strategies, strengthen what is working and modify what is not working.

Given the objective of the Kenya Aids Strategic Framework II to achieve a 75% reduction in HIV infections by 2025, there is a need to explore and develop interventions that would effectively contribute to realizing this goal. Additionally, these endeavours must place the young people must be at the centre (NACC, 2020).

2.2.6 Family associated risk factors

Family related issues ranging from parenting styles to family conflicts were experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. These issues had detrimental effects on the young people as they were exposed to a diverse range of risks in the socio-ecological environment. It is important to note that a healthy parent-child relationship has features of reciprocal caring and commitment, open and honest communication, clear and congruent expectations and emotional security and expressiveness (Shongwe et al., 2021; Yaffe, 2018). However, in some African families, parent-adolescent relationships lack these relational features. The most prominent three parenting styles are permissive parenting, authoritarian parenting, and authoritative parenting (Vasiou et al., 2023; Louw, 2018). Authoritative parents create

a conducive atmosphere in which their teenage children are encouraged to interact with their parents and share problems. This in turn enables young people to be at ease in their interaction with their family members and share emergent issues together (Maine, 2020; Lyons et al., 2015). Studies show that supervising and supportive parenting style results in youth developing behaviours that can protect them against unhealthy risky activities (Vasiou et al., 2023; Kilonzo, 2017; Dornbusch et al., 2016). Therefore, La Vita (2020) and Sturgeon (2008) suggest that parenting styles that promote autonomy and responsibility in teenagers, could be a factor equal to, or stronger than behavioural controlling in predicting risk-taking behaviour among teenagers. Vasiou et al. (2023) and Lyons et al. (2015) stated that when parents and guardians are authoritative in their parenting skills, the possibility arises that siblings are likely to display prosocial behaviour. Such siblings can influence youthful peers to avoid the development of less desirable behaviour, such as early sexual debut and teenage pregnancies, abortions and drug and substance abuse.

Permissive parents are low in both warmth and control and provide little emotional support to their teenage children. Such parents make minimal behavioural demands on their adolescent children and most of the time they have a tendency of neglecting and rejecting them (Vasiou et al., 2023; Maine, 2020). Parents with such attitude may lead their adolescent children into risky behaviour and other problems owing to a lack of parental support, management, and discipline (Reis et al., 2020). Homes characterized with permissive parenting may exhibit behaviours such as arriving home late, making it difficult to trace their whereabouts and know who their friends are; thus delinquency, gang behaviour, for instance, rape, drug and substance use, and juvenile crime may occur amongst them (Reis et al., 2020; Yaffe, 2018).

Authoritarian parents are parents who are high on demands but low on warmth and emotional support. These parents prioritize obedience from their children (Roşca et al., 2024; Vasiou et al., 2023; Yaffe, 2018). Such parents establish clear standards of conduct for their children, often based on religious, cultural, or political beliefs. Parents who practice the authoritarian style restrict the autonomy of their adolescent children and decide what is the appropriate behaviour is for them (Vasiou et al., 2023). Such young people may tend to become uncooperative, suffer from depression, have low self-esteem, low initiative, and encounter difficulties in decision making (Bhana, 2013). When excessive parental control occurs along with unfriendliness and punitiveness, young people may rebel against parents' ideals, eventually, these young people may end up leaving home (Vasiou et al. 2023), dropping out of school prematurely and facing economic hardships. Research indicates that when young people have left homes prematurely or do not stay with parents, they may easily be influenced by peers to engage in risky behaviours such as alcoholism, drug and substance abuse, antisocial and unsafe sexual behaviours (Reis et al., 2020).

In dysfunctional families that often face domestic conflicts, there is a notable strain on relationships and family functioning. Such families are often characterized by tension and compromised communication marred by scuffles and misunderstanding (Walsh, 2015). Such disrupted families characterized by eroding or strained relationships may be less able to provide social bonding to their children. Children from such families often become susceptible to peer manipulation due to family problems; their sense of self-worth is more likely to be negatively impacted upon and their academic performance in school is affected (Vasiou et al., 2023). In dysfunctional families, parents and guardians may be reckless alcoholics, young people from such homes tend to mask their emotional scars by resorting to substance abuse themselves.

They affiliate with peers who are anti-social and violent and are prone to risky behaviours. It is worth noting that parental drug use results in chaotic family processes and limited attention devoted to important family matters (Yaffe, 2018; Walsh, 2015).

The given literature sheds light on the socio-ecological risks that arose because of domestic related issues as experienced by young people during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

2.3 Conceptualizing the COVID-19 Pandemic

Kenya confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on 13th March 2020 and the cases continued to gradually escalate and spread across the country. To limit the spread of the disease in learning institutions, the Kenyan government abruptly closed all schools and institutions of higher learning between 16th and 20th March, 2020. Additionally, the ministry of health set policy that intended to lessen the burden of contagious disease including the outbreak of COVID-19 (Nation Media Newsplex Team, April 29th, 2020).

2.3.1. COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 is a transmittable ailment caused by corona virus. This new group of viruses was named corona virus (corona symbolizing the crown-like appearance of the surface projections) and was later officially accepted as a new genus of viruses. The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Hence, during the hit of the pandemic, it was important that people practiced respiratory etiquette such as coughing into a flexed elbow, washing hands recurrently and wearing facial masks (WHO, 2020). Being a respiratory disease, older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease, or diabetes are at higher risk of infection because of their compromised immune system (World Health Organization, 2020).

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) was first detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health emergency concern on 30th January 2020, and a pandemic on March 11th, 2020 grounded on its effects of fast spread across the world (WHO, 2020). The first case of COVID-19 in Kenya was confirmed on 13th March, 2020 (Republic of Kenya, 2020). This provoked the abrupt closure of all learning institutions starting 16th March, 2020 to curb the spread hence more than 18 million Kenyan learners were to remain in their homes (Republic of Kenya, 2020). The breakout of the pandemic did not only lead to unexpected closure of all learning institutions disrupting the learning process but has also triggered a lot of uncertainty on when learning would resume. This implies that learners, guardians and parents were caught unaware. This was an economic, social and a psychological unpreparedness. While the efforts by different governments were admirable in controlling the spread of the virus, the risks connected with confinements and lockdowns were not fully considered (Memiah et al, 2020; Flowe et al., 2020).

2.3.2 COVID-19 pandemic and schooling

Education, training, and research is a key platform for overall socio-economic revolution globally. Conversely, major challenges emerge, in enhancing and ensuring quality, equity, access, and relevance in education and training (Neema-Abooki, 2022). The most recent challenge globally is COVID-19 pandemic outbreak; it affected education sector globally, resulting to the closures of schools, colleges, and universities. Institutional closures affected not only learners, teachers, and families, but also had extensive societal and economic consequences. Institutional cessations in response to the pandemic brought out a lot of economic and social issues (UNESCO, 2020). In reaction to institutional closures, UNESCO and various governments recommended the utilization of distance learning programmes as platforms that institutions and instructors

could use to reach learners distantly and limit the disruption of education. This undertaking was already marred with numerous challenges (UNESCO, 2020a). Businesses and schools' closures resulted to many and diverse challenges. These challenges included physical and psychological health risks, family confinement, widespread job and income losses, isolation, and economic vulnerability (Olingo, 2020). The pandemic lockdown brought about tension in homes since families were unprepared to face the challenges. Piquero et al. (2020) argues that increased risks of violence between parents or guardians during COVID-19 lockdown made it difficult for them to meet the children's needs.

In matters of education, the Kenyan government developed an online approach to aid the continuance of learning remotely. However, the lockdown and lengthy institutional closures had long-term difficulties, particularly for the marginalized and most vulnerable young people who already experienced barriers accessing the online education (Ngwacho, 2020; MoE, 2020). Schools play a significant part in the protection of learners, especially young people in poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities. This is because the schools they reside in, protect them from the risks that they would have otherwise faced in the communities (Piquero et al., 2020). Muzungu (2020) says that the closure of schools and places of worship, which act as safe havens for many young people meant limited access to reach trusted adult figures who often can detect early signs of abuse. It was proven that protracted closures of schools heightened with restricted movements with serious challenges around space among households intensified cases of exposure to pornographic materials, drug and substance abuse, increased rape, Gender Based Violence (GBV) among other risks (Massiot et al., 2022; Olingo, 2020; MOE, 2020; UNESCO, 2020b). During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, pornography consumption was perceived as a helpful coping

behaviour to overcome pandemic-brought dullness and fear of the unknown (Grubbs, 2020; Lehmiller et al., 2020). MOE (2020) and UNESCO (2020b) also posit that school closures intensified with constrained movements, exacerbated cases of exposure to pornographic materials among the young people. Domestic violence heightens during times of crises, including epidemics (Sety et al., 2014) and can lead to other severe cases associated with violence. It is worth noting that violence in the homes led a rise in suicidal cases during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Depression, anxiety, isolation, and decreased social support associated with COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns possibly contributed to the increased suicide risk in youth (Hill et al., 2021; Hawes et al., 2020).

Disadvantaged, at-risk, and homeless learners faced risks of discontinuing with their education after the closures ended. The influence will often be a life-long shortcoming from lost chances (Baker, 2020) as institutions are always viewed as hubs of social activities and human interactions. When institutions are closed and for that purpose for a long time, several learners and youth lose out on social interaction that is crucial to learning and growth, this was experienced during the lockdown (Wade et al., 2020). Additionally, prolonged closure of schools led to child labor; school dropouts; early pregnancies and early and forced marriages all which may lead to low transition rates of learners in the education sector (Ruzibiza et al., 2021; Roje et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020b).

2.3.3 COVID-19 pandemic and Education

Education is supposed to give the beneficiary an intellectual approach to life, a search for truth, a sound sense of judgment, a deep concern for the welfare of humanity,

a great sense of responsibility tied with earnest pledge to work in the service of self and one's community (Neema-Abooki, 2022).

Education plays a key role in enabling learners protect themselves from different forms of risks. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the young people in Kenya faced heightened risks in the socio-ecological settings. This exposed a weakness in the Life Skills programmes in school that ill equips learners to face unprecedented risks in their day to day lives (Ndirangu et al., 2022). Owing to inefficient knowledge of Life Skills education and lack of preparedness, young people became victims of unprotected sexual intercourse, leading to increased exposure to unintended pregnancy and HIV and AIDS, suicide, abortions, peer influence into drug and substance abuse among other risks (Ndirangu et al., 2022; Wado et al., 2020). Moreover, adolescent girls' absence from school, coupled with the lack of alternative safe spaces or shelters, was associated with increased vulnerability to risks in the community including domestic and sexual violence from family members and others, including guardians, neighbours, and other community members (Rockowitz et al., 2021). Survivors of Sexual Violence in Kenya Network noted that COVID-19 altered patterns of sexual violence against young people. First, youth sexual violence victims are now aged 12 on average compared to 16 years of age previously. This finding is supported by evidence at gender-based violence recovery centers in Kenya who noted that survivors attending hospitals for SGBV violations during COVID-19 were younger and mostly below the age of 16 (UN Women & Snyder, 2020). These findings thus suggest that the learners were caught unaware and involved in risky issues more because of inadequate knowledge on preventive and protection skills during times of crises. It is important that the learners are taken through a comprehensive education that supports them through life challenges in and out of school.

Learners hailing from advantaged backgrounds, enthusiastic to learn and supported by their parents and guardians, found their way in online learning as alternative learning opportunities. Those from underprivileged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down (Schleicher, 2021). This crisis uncovered the many shortfalls and inequities in the education systems right from access to the broadband and computers needed for online learning, and the supportive settings desirable to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs (Ngwacho, 2020).

The utilization of digital aids during the COVID-19 pandemic transformed education and learning. While the educational community made intensive efforts to maintain learning continuity during the pandemic lockdown period, learners had to rely more on their own resources to continue learning remotely through the internet, television, or radio (Lewis et al., 2021). Teachers also had to acclimatize to new pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching, some of which they may not have been trained. Precisely, learners in the most marginalized groups, who did not have access to digital learning resources or rather lacked the resilience and engagement to learn on their own, were at risk of being left behind (Ngwacho, 2020). The use of technology also increased the scale young people sexual abuse and exploitation. Young people sex offenders increased access to them through unguarded social media profiles and online forums. Technological developments allowed different offenders and trafficking circles to escape recognition through encrypted platforms and the construction of false identities aided them to track multiple victims at ago (UNICEF, 2021; Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; Roje et al., 2020).

2.3.4 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the young people globally

COVID-19 had devastating impacts on people's physical and mental health, and on sexual and reproductive health worldwide. The risks faced by the learners in their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, are other pandemics that exist in all societies at varying degrees of prevalence are severe (WHO, 2020). The young people globally were at an increased risk from the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown because of the risky circumstances and socio-ecological contexts in which they lived (Gewirtz-Meydan & Finkelhor, 2020; Roje et al., 2020). There were increased SGBV risks due to secondary impacts of COVID-19 pandemic including forced early marriage, risk of human trafficking to sexual offences, and engaging in unsafe sexual practices. Failure to offer support to the victims resulted in unplanned or forced pregnancy, unsafe abortions, inadequate pre-natal and post-natal care for pregnant and breast-feeding young mothers, physical injuries going untreated, increase in STIs including HIV and AIDS, self-harm and suicide (Shipeolu et al., 2020).

The pandemic lockdown came along with online sexual harassment against women and young people amid the enhanced community confinement due to COVID-19, and according to sources from diverse contexts such as Europol, the U.K.'s National Crime Agency, the Swedish Police Authority and others, there was an upsurge in online young people sexual exploitation during COVID-19 lockdowns. In Canada, research indicates that there were increased rates of violence in some regions resulting from the imposition of a national lockdown. In China, there was a three-fold increase in domestic violence compared to the same period previously in 2019. According to statistics, those cases were majorly related to COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Relief Web, 2020; UN Women & Snyder, 2020).

COVID-19 responses in Africa were documented as having unintended social consequences of intensified poverty, extensive hunger and food insecurity, young people indulgence in risky behaviours, as well as domestic violence (Divala et al., 2020; Senghore et al., 2020). Of the one billion young people exposed to various forms of risks globally, nearly one-quarter lived in Africa at the time (Relief Web, 2020). There were increased cases of young people abuse in Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. These abuses included physical and sexual abuse, neglect by parents and guardians and murder cases. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the help desk typically received about 100 calls per day, reporting diverse forms of violence against young people whereas during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, about 1,300 calls a day were received (Muzungu, 2020; Save the Children, 2020). School closures increased the risks of late detection and underreporting of young people's abuse since such issues are usually detected and reported in time by the educational personnel in learning institutions (De Cao & Malte, 2020). The closure of schools and places of worship, which act as safe havens for many young people meant inadequate access to reach reliable adults who often can detect early signs of abuse. Given the fact that the reporting networks and referral pathways were severely affected by the lockdown. As well, the pandemic worsened the living conditions of young people, putting them at an increased risk of different forms of abuse (Muzungu, 2020).

2.3.5 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the young people in Kenya

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, schools and learning institutions in Kenya were closed in March 2020 until January 2021, except for the candidates that resumed in October, 2020 (Nasong'o, 2022). For most young people, schools are spaces for learning, safety, and development. Reports from the media, indicate that many children and the youth in Kenya were idling in the community spaces, with little

management from their parents and guardians, a state that exposed them to abuse and other risks (Maina et al., 2023). Maema (2020) posits that since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, issues related to sexual and reproductive health were on the rise in Kenya. COVID-19 pandemic lockdown brought about increased levels of alcohol and drug use in Kenya thus exposing young people to varied risks such as domestic conflicts and SGBV in their homes and communities (Jaguga, & Kiburi, 2020). This brought about

Research indicates that, people with depression and anxiety signs reported the highest increase in alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 lockdown, (Weis et al., 2021; Sallie et al., 2020; Pollard et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020). According to National Control of Alcohol and Drugs Authority (NACADA) (2020), when young people are not engaged and their movement is reduced, they are susceptible to experiment on alcohol, drugs, and sexual immorality. A study in Busia indicates that, there was increased parental negligence as 82 children were found partying in a house and drinking, with risk of exposure to sexual abuse, drug, and substance abuse, among other risks. The study further indicates that, many young people attended evening funeral parties that exposed them to sexual and drug and substance abuse during the pandemic lockdown (African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), 2021). It is unfortunate that while the government worked on ways of reducing further spread of the virus, the containment directives exposed young people to increased and worsened vulnerability to sexual exploitation, pornographic addiction, and drug abuse (Chagema, 2023; Rockowitz et al., 2021). The rise in teenage pregnancies reported during the COVID-19 lockdown period is a source of worry for the Government and stakeholders alike as it exposed the state of government's unpreparedness to tackle risks associated with pandemic lockdowns (Ngwacho, 2020).

Busia, Kajiado and Nairobi counties recorded the highest cases of teenage pregnancies in the period January to June 2020 (ANPPCAN, 2021; KHIS, 2020). This confirms that young people were closer to sex predators, such as, motorbike riders and others lurking in families and community spaces.

The global pandemic disrupted normal routines compelling people to adjust to new situations. Due to school closures and lack of interaction with social workers, teachers and other learners in the school, many young people found themselves subjected to new situations (Ngwacho, 2020). They were either confined at home by parents and guardians or exposed to the community with strangers. Heightened by the mounting sense of hopelessness and helplessness, these prompted young people to increased exposure to pornography, use of drugs and sexual indulgence with the likelihood of being pushed to become addicts (Chen et al., 2022; Clay & Parker, 2020). This made most of them vulnerable, pushing them into challenging situations, such as, criminal gangs, suicide, child labour, child trafficking and sexual exploitation and drug and substance abuse (ANPPCAN, 2021; Kim et al., 2021).

The increase in young people's risks in the communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period points to weaknesses in the community young people protection system that would need to be addressed. This study thus, sought to assign responsibilities for young people protection and defense on the young people themselves, by finding ways and solutions that make them capable to manage their own lives more especially in times of crises.

2.4 National Goals of Education

As education has over time remained a basic right for children, learners are supposed to be taught, guided by the national goals of education (Ministry of Education, Science

and Technology, 2019; Wango, 2011). In order to assist learners cope up during and after crises, the Kenyan education system should always strive to prepare learners guided by the national goals of education. Kenya has its set national aims that help in focusing learners into productive citizens. The Kenyan education system can be analyzed using the national goals of education outlined in the Ominde commission of 1964 (Mwaka et al., 2013) as given:

- i. **Foster nationalism, patriotism and promote national unity:** Kenyans belong to different ethnic groups, races and, religions, but these alterations do not need to divide Kenyans for they need to promote harmonious living and interaction. It is a principal duty of education to support young people attain this sense of nationhood, eliminating conflicts and by encouraging positive attitudes of common respect, which empower Kenyans to live together in harmony, and foster patriotism in order to make a positive influence on the life of the nation.
- ii. **To promote the social, economic, technological, and industrial needs for national development:** Education should prepare the teenagers of the country to play an effective and productive role in the life of the nation. A social needs education in Kenya should prepare learners for variations in attitude and relationships which are required for the smooth progression of a fast emergent modern economy. Education should support our young people to adapt to this transformation. Economic needs education in Kenya should produce citizens with skills, knowledge, expertise, and personal qualities that are required to support a growing economy that is in need of domestic experts. Technology and industrial needs education in Kenya ought to deliver the learners with the needed skills and attitudes for

industrial advancements. Kenya identifies the speedy industrial and technological changes taking place especially in the developed world. We can only be part of this development if our education system purposefully focused on knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help prepare the young people for these varying global trends.

- iii. **To promote individual development and self-fulfillment:** Education should offer openings for the fullest development of individual talents and personality. It should help its beneficiaries to grow their budding interests and abilities. A dynamic aspect of individual advancement is character building.
- iv. **To promote sound moral and religious values:** Education should afford the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will boost acquisition of sound moral values and help learners to grow up into self-disciplined, self-reliant, and integrated citizens.
- v. **To promote social equality and responsibility:** Education should promote social equality and foster a sense of social accountability within an education system which delivers equal education opportunities for all. It should give all learners varied and inspiring opportunities for shared activities and corporate social services regardless of gender, ability, or geographical environment.
- vi. **To promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures:** Education should instill in the Kenyan young people an understanding of past and present cultures and their effective place in the present-day society. The children should be able to blend the best of

traditional values with the changed requirements that must follow rapid development to build a stable and modern society.

- vii. **To promote international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations:** Kenya is part of the global community; a part of the complex and interdependent network of people and nations. Education should, thus, lead the young people to accept membership in this international community with all the duties and responsibilities, rights, and benefits that this membership involves.
- viii. **To promote positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection:** Education ought to inculcate in the young people the value for good health in order to avoid indulging in actions that lead to physical or mental ill health. It should foster positive attitudes towards environmental development and conservation. It should lead the young people to value the need for a healthy environment.

Teachers should always strive to teach the learners while basing on the national goals of education so that quality learners that transmits to practicability in life situations is achieved.

2.5 Life Skills Education Programme in Kenya

World Health Organization (WHO) (in Murthy, 2016, p 57) posits that Life Skills are “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviours that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Whereas, Life Skills have been identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as enabling factors in supporting health promotion action, through the development of personal skills, notably through educational settings. Therefore, giving it a definition as “the abilities for

adaptive and positive behaviours that enable individuals to effectively deal with demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 1994).

Education ought to lead to positive change of behaviour. One effective way of inculcating positive change in behaviour among the young people is by providing Life Skills education. The teaching of life skills education was introduced in Kenyan schools in 2008, in order to equip learners with the adaptive abilities for effective living (Magutah et al., 2018). The most significant Life Skills which are applicable across societies include decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress (Prajapati et al., 2017). The Life Skills cut across the four key pillars of education and life that involve learning to know, to do, to live and to be (Ndirangu et al., 2022; Prajapati et al., 2017). ‘Learning to know’ comprises more than the basic learning skills of literacy and numeracy but also initial skills that are important for learning such as, analytical skills, critical thinking and problem-solving. ‘Learning to know’ has a strong relation to skills that support academic outcomes. ‘Learning to do’ stresses the attainment of skills required to practice a profession and consequently can be supposed to refer to but not confined to the attainment of skills for employability. Such skills include teamwork, resilience, communication, negotiation skills, and creativity. ‘Learning to live together’ refers to the necessity to develop and progress with an understanding of others, respect for human dignity and diversity and a responsible and active citizen. Requirements for this social dimension include tolerance, responsibility, participation, acceptance, and integrity. The last pillar, ‘learning to be’ is an individual dimension related to all-round growth of each individual and it emphasizes on the development of human potential (Ndirangu et al., 2022; Prajapati et al., 2017; Suminar et al., 2016).

In Kenya, there has been an upsurge of socio- ecological risks that have greatly harmed the lives of young people. Some of the issues they face comprise social problems like drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual abuse and sexual indulgence and domestic violence (Imburgia, 2023; Ndirangu et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2020; Gewirtz-Meydan, & Finkelhor, 2020). It is quite unfortunate to note that if our society reflects the education system at the present time, it means there is a need to probe the education system with a view to offer solutions to the community at large. This can be realized by offering quality Life Skills education lessons in schools (Mertens et al., 2020; Waiganjo & Waiganjo, 2018). Young people are expected to be creative members of the society because of their physical and academic capabilities (Prajapati et al., 2017) so far this still stands a challenge as they are not as creative as they should to be. Thus, the need for learner emancipation as a tool to enable them participate in shaping their lives by means of their capabilities.

UNICEF (2012) posits that all young people must be exposed to an education system that offers them with skills and knowledge that are developmental, values and attitudes that inculcates ability to work, be responsible and participate whole round in the community. This enables young people to take control of their own lives and tackle arising issues as they go by with learning. Thus, ensuring that learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and Life (Prajapati et al., 2017). UNESCO (2009) reveals that basic education is vital so as “to offer relevant learning and Life Skills with an intention of having an impact on the quality of life”, p. 11. The recognition that Life Skills are vital in enabling utilization of technical skills at all periods of life has pushed many countries to pledge educational transformations that infuse Life Skills education. UNESCO (2017) similarly stressed the importance of Life Skills education taught in the school curriculum as a goal to

accomplishing the sustainable development goals. When quality education is offered, it fosters skills, values, and attitudes useful to address issues that arise in the society (Ndirangu et al., 2022). It is the responsibility of the teacher to inculcate these skills in the learner while they are in school. The teacher should purposively teach Life Skills in order that schools can produce responsible citizens equipped to take up their roles in national development. An inherent challenge in the 8-4-4 system of education in Kenya is that Life Skills Education is a non-examinable subject and the teachers do not take it seriously (Waiganjo & Waiganjo, 2018). This therefore calls for learner emancipation and voice in inclusivity of Life Skills curriculum in order that they are equipped to tackle issues as they arise.

Life Skills education in Kenya should be taught at the primary and secondary levels of education. By focusing on Life Skills education at both levels of education, the knowledge can be sustainable for use later in life (UNICEF, 2012). The school is an ideal place to offer Life Skills education programme and therefore the learning institutions school take the subject as serious as other subjects taught in as much as it is not examinable. The Life Skills education socializes the learner, therefore being an important agency for social change (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), 2017; Dinesh & Belinda, 2014). Basic Education Curriculum Framework developed by KICD compiled a report that raised a concern about the Life Skills education that learners received that was deemed inadequate and that schools should offer a more structured curriculum (KICD, 2017). The failure in the effective delivery of Life Skills education has led to emergence of social problems in the communities thus leading to family disintegration, increased crime rate, suicide cases, rape, loss of integrity among other issues (Ndirangu et al., 2022; Chagema, 2018). The increase in social risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown is a clear indication that the

Kenyan young people critically lack Life Skills basic competencies to function as responsible and informed citizens (Ndirangu et al., 2022). Teachers should be competent enough to scaffold learners in order to prepare them for any eventualities they face in the world.

2.6 COVID-19 Supportive Coping Strategies

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown came along with dramatic loss of human life worldwide as well as an unprecedented challenges to public health. The social disruption on the young people caused by the pandemic is devastating, many of the young people faced risks associated with unpreparedness to tackle emergent issues in the socio-ecological backgrounds. It is therefore important that young people are guided into developing supportive coping strategies that would enable them face challenges in future in case of crises.

2.6.1 Coping strategies when faced with risks

Coping involves individuals use their cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage emotional and environmental stressors; and adaptive coping involves confronting challenges directly and reasonably in a task-oriented way (Mack, 2023; Dunn et al., 2011). Problem-solving efforts involve active involvement in alleviating stressful circumstances by seeking and utilizing advice, assistance, and relevant information from peers, teachers, parents or guardians (Yendork & Somhlaba, 2014). Problem-focused coping enables young people to increase their self-esteem and self-regulation to buffer them against risky behaviours, and to respond to traumatic life events such as rape, abortions, death of loved ones and abuse. Teenagers that use problem-focused coping tend to view their lives in more positive terms, even when troubles seem overwhelming. Very often, they broaden their mental focus, explore, and seek new

experiences for their personal growth (Rath & Nanda, 2012). Optimistic youth tend to approach adverse circumstances with hope, positive attitude, and strength (Jose & Brown, 2008). Emotion-focused coping involves regulation of one's thoughts and actions to relieve the emotional impact of stress (Carlo et al., 2012). Emotion-focused coping as an adaptive process to counteract stress, is reported to equip individuals with the self-control of emotions amid challenges by enabling such individuals to comply, manage and remain focused. Ojala (2016) found that the emotionally focused youth do not sit back and do nothing, instead they become optimistic and resilient in their coping actions. However, Garcia (2011) argued that young people are confronted by a wide range of stress-related risks such as depression, suicidal ideation, sexual abuse, HIV and AIDS infection, domestic violence, and sibling rivalry as they interact with their peers, educators and family members. These risks were evidently experienced by the young people in the communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Young people raised in families facing hardship were more projected to risks than those from stable backgrounds. Such learners may lack coping self-efficacy to complete their schooling (Singh et al., 2014).

Religious coping may increase hope, positive emotions, compassion, and optimism, promote personality integration and support healthy lifestyles. Counted et al. (2022) found that young people who participate in church activities report an overall higher emotional well-being as compared to adolescents who do not attend church. This may mean that such youth acquire spiritual skills that equip them to cope with adversities. Hardiness is a concept used to describe how well mentally and physically an individual reacts to a stressful situation like traumatic events such as sexual exploitation. Individuals with hardiness are more inclined to take charge of their immediate surroundings and feel confident that they would cope and deactivate the stressful

situation (Fischer et al., 2010). Individuals would approach stressful experiences by seeking to comprehend what is involved, how manageable they are with the use of available resources and how to make sense of or find the purpose of what they are encountering. Such individuals approach most stressful situations in a task-oriented way and view a particular situation as a catalyst for their personal growth which requires cognitive flexibility (Counted et al., 2022; Fischer et al., 2010). They have a sense of purpose and are often resilient. In the process of solving their crisis, such individuals actively determine the direction that will affect a favorable change by engaging in transformational coping, described by Compton and Hoffman (2013), as that a person facing a crisis would draw from positive social relationships with committed and reliable individuals to perceive the stressful situation as solvable.

The coping strategies concept was chosen for this study to help the young people cope and deal with risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. It represented the behavioural component of psychosocial well-being of the young people in the socio-ecological backgrounds. Coping was used in this study with young people to boost behaviour change and emancipate the young people to be resilient enough to face risks as they occur. It is imperative that young people need to be at the fore front in active decision making and communication on matters affecting them. Thereafter, conceptualizations of psychosocial well-being were considered and placed in context with young people behaviour, to engage with the broad investigation into the risk perceptions.

2.6.2 Hope and optimism in times of risk

The COVID-19 pandemic experience challenged the future thoughts and behaviour path of the young people as its conditions presented high degrees of uncertainty and

tested their optimism and future position (Daks et al., 2020). Positivity towards life should be embraced during such difficulties. This can be done by creating abilities to forge ahead, being hopeful and optimistic, while having confidence in achieving the set goals (De Jong et al., 2020; Caprara et al., 2012). Future positioning has many supplementary components, including intellectual, boldness and motivational goals influenced by several factors ranging from family, social setting, and the environment (Hamilton et al., 2017). A protective approach is necessary when faced with stressful events as it is a relatively steady trait across developmental processes that guide in facing major challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown presented young people with devastating consequences caused by lack of unpreparedness. In the face of uncertainty, adaptive coping skills are imperative signs of constructive alteration, and positive reconsideration of undesirable experiences can support such coping (Leslie-Miller et al., 2021; De Jong et al., 2020; Shing et al., 2016). Positivity is presented in the presence of positive emotions outweighing the negative ones as stress containment measures (Daks et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly interrupted all aspects of life, including those associated to characteristic growing indicators and brought about trials to thinking about life past the immediate present; young people are therefore well placed to analyze the impact on well-being during the pandemic lockdown. However, future-focused thinking can be a shielding aspect in the face of difficulties (Lalot et al., 2021). People who ponder a lot around their future may be better equipped when problems arise again and may be less susceptible to hopelessness. Future-oriented thoughts and feelings of agency in youth-at-risk (Leslie-Miller et al., 2021; Lalot et al., 2021) were constantly linked with improved well-being. Future-oriented thinking

becomes a useful skill during crises as it allows people to focus shift to anticipation of future happiness instead of current stress.

2.7 Research Gap

The literature reviewed in this chapter addresses several aspects of socio-ecological risks locally and globally. However, there are only a few studies reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects to learners in schools. Equally, there are few studies in the Kenyan context that have engaged the use participatory visual methodology as a data generation tool to strongly bring out learner voice. Little is therefore known on how learners could emancipate themselves during crises and how the Life Skills education programme can be strengthened to achieve effective delivery of matters affecting learners in their socio-ecological setting. While the views of learners could play a big role in providing an insight on how socio-ecological risks could be reduced or done away with, there are only a few studies in the literature reviewed above that have captured the voices of learners in Kenyan schools and how their perceptions and supportive coping strategies could inform policy making. This study intends to fill this gap by drawing on the voices of learners in the Kenyan context in order to get into the insights of their risks, perceptions and supportive coping strategies during crises and always. This provides an understanding of how learners voice could be heard and supported. Consequently, help in establishing how socio-ecological risks could be reduced with the guide of a comprehensive supportive Life Skills education programme in schools. Thus, meeting the objectives of national goals of education in Kenya, of which, one is to promote sound moral and religious values. This goal further states that education should afford the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will boost acquisition of sound moral values and help learners to grow up into self-disciplined, self-reliant, and integrated citizens.

2.8 Chapter Summary

Research has been conducted around the globe on issues that arose because of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Little to none has been done on the experiences of the learners in Kenya based on the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Therefore, this research aimed to address the plight of the marginalized learner experience as a move to address the issues they faced and still face because of the pandemic. This chapter introduced the key concepts of the study. As the study focused on contemporary young people in their world and understanding them within that world. The researcher explained their risk formation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their schooling while focusing on the limitations in the Life Skills curriculum. The curriculum hardly equips the learners on how to manage their lives in the society at the times of crises and always. The next chapter discussed the research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this Chapter, a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology followed to get data for this study is provided. This chapter provides a description and justification for undertaking qualitative critical participatory research with learners, teachers and Parents Association representatives to explore risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya within Uasin Gishu County. The justification for using multiple data generation methods, sample recruitment strategy, sample technique, analysis technique, procedures followed to ensure trustworthiness and ethical measures considered while generating data is provided. Finally, this chapter closes with a chapter summary.

3.1 Research Approach

The approach positioning this study was the qualitative method of research. This study was explorative in nature as it focused on understanding the subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations of participants within their natural settings (Casula et al., 2021). The study sought to explore socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Kenyan schools, perceptions of learners concerning those risks and developing supportive guidelines to tackle the risks. Therefore, it was appropriate to use a qualitative approach to comprehend issues being studied and how they relate to each other. Palys and Atchison, (2021) posit that qualitative research explores into the affluence and intricacy of human phenomena, embracing open-ended questions and apprehending the context-specific nature of social interactions. Yin (2015) opines that qualitative study is a method of exploring and understanding lived experiences of humans as they engage with their daily activities in

their natural settings. A researcher asks comprehensive and overall questions from participants, producing their detailed views in the form of words or images and the data produced is analyzed for description and themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

A qualitative researcher believes that the social world is different from the natural world as they use this knowledge to explore and learn about social phenomenon, in order to unpack the meanings created rather than being discovered by an individual. This builds on understanding about dimensions of social life of people's subjective experiences and meaning making (Leavey, 2017; Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research offers exceptional understandings into the social and cultural issues that shape individuals' views, beliefs, and actions, as well as the social constructions and power dynamics that impact societal developments (Åkerblad et al., 2021). Eventually, qualitative research contributes to a further comprehensive and nuanced understanding of human actions and societal issues, informing policy advancement, involvements, and social change in the social research (Wilson & Cariola, 2020).

Qualitative research invites the participants to speak in their own voices and acknowledges the changing nature of human experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Guided by this approach, the study looked at learners' voices in relation to socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and their capabilities, to interpret, contextualize and realize learners' viewpoints and how they behave in their specific contexts. A weakness with qualitative research is that it can easily be influenced by the biases of the researcher. As the researcher must be present in the process of data generation, there is a possibility that the participants' responses might be influenced by the researcher's presence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell, 2014). To cushion this possibility, the researcher took extra caution to remain objective during the entire period of data generation by being reflexive, noting down

field observations in a notebook and using multiple data forms with the goal of finding consistencies and inconsistencies amongst data sets (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

3.1.1 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a researcher's worldview to the research project as it guides one's approach to the world and nature of research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Creswell and Poth (2016) posit that paradigms are viewed as a researcher's set of beliefs about the research project whereby this informs the conduct and writing in qualitative research. This definition informs the choice made in this study as the research was conducted by a teacher who interacts with learners in schools and community environment as well as with the teachers and PA representatives. The current dominant paradigms range across post modernism, pragmatic, multi-pragmatic, interpretivism, positivism, post-positivism and critical approaches (Samuel, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The critical paradigm in which this study was positioned, is concerned with empowering and encouraging participants to interact, form networks and endeavors to understand the lived experience of individuals in relation to the phenomena being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Critical paradigm is focused on inequality, social justice, power, dialogue and social change (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as the researcher is not only out to generate data but also bring change on the participants and issues being studied. The research brings to fore issues of dialogue, social justice and reflection as the participants strive for emancipation thus fitting the study in this paradigm (Freire, 2018; Madison, 2011). This research addressed sensitive issues that affected learners in the communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Kenyan schools. This approach was suitable as it required sharing of personal experiences, which by essence could not be quantified by the participants and thus needed an appreciative listener to listen to their world views. The participants had different perceptions on how they view

their world, thus subjectivity played a major role in this research. A brief description in Table 3.1 is given on the assumptions of critical paradigm in which this study is situated within.

Table 3.1: Philosophical assumptions of critical research adapted from Lincoln and Guba (2011).

Nature of belief	Critical position
Ontological	Reality is shaped by cultural, gender and social aspects over time.
Epistemological	Knowledge is subjective with multiple truths.
Axiological	Social justice and power issues of the marginalized individuals.
Methodological	Dialogue, participatory and reflection.

During the researcher's interaction with the participants in the field, productive moments were encountered as the participants willingly shared their experiences using the multiple data sources. The paradigm accommodated the participants' shift to a transformation on issues of culture, gender, sexuality and power exploration as a move to finding voice in learning (Merriam, 2011, Mezirow, 2003). Therefore, this paradigm was suitable for the study as it strives for emancipation (Kemmis, 2018; Freire, 2018).

3.1.2 Research design

A research design is considered a structure of research (Akhtar, 2016) since it glues the entirety of the research components together. According to Kassu (2019) a research design is a blueprint that guides the researcher in collecting, analyzing and translating data. This study adopted a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell (2013) a phenomenological study explores what people experience and focuses on their experiences of a phenomenon and fundamentally arrive at a description of the nature of

the particular phenomenon. Van Manen, (2014) posits that phenomenological research design studies emphasize on a phenomenon to be explored with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon and the emerging patterns of meaning making that people develop as they experience a phenomenon over time. The data generated from experiences of individuals is read and reread to identify common phrases that are used to generate themes to be discussed to make meaning of a phenomenon being studied (Maxwell, 2013).

This design was fit for this study as the participants in the study were able to understand the socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and give a perception of how those risks affected their lives and offer suggestions on how to navigate solutions for such issues. Using the phenomenological design allowed the establishment of a comprehensive understanding of the risks faced by the learners and offered rich data from the participant experiences on ways of establishing solutions to their lived experiences. In the quest, the researcher was able to find the meaningful understanding of participants on the risky issues faced during the lockdown; and at the same time derive through reflection on what is still absent in the teaching of young people emancipation and preparedness during crises.

3.1.3 Study Area

The study was carried out in 3 selected secondary schools in Kenya within Uasin Gishu County. The county has a mixture of public and private schools as well as day and boarding schools. Uasin Gishu County was purposively selected because of its dominance in relatively having a balance of day schools, boarding schools, schools with learners from stable backgrounds as well as those from not well to do backgrounds. Moreover, the county was selected in that the key findings from the study might be transferable to other counties with similar contexts.

3.1.4 Study Population

Study population refers to a group of participants willing and available to participate in a study. The participants of this study included 15–24-year-old learners in Form one and two at selected secondary schools within Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Teachers handling Life Skills programmes as well as PA representatives in the same schools and selected classes, were selected for the study.

3.1.5 Sampling techniques and sample size

For this study, the convenient and purposive sampling methods were used to select participants. Convenience sampling is a form of non- probability sampling where the participants are selected grounded on their accessibility and ease to volunteer information to the researcher. By using this sampling technique, the researcher relies on the participants who are conveniently available to participate in the study (Etikan & Alkassim, 2016). The chosen participants were expected to be in schools that met all the requirements ideal for this study. The participants in this study were school-going young people in Form 1 and 2, aged 15 to 24 years of age, in their teenage stage. The physical changes connected to puberty, the commencement of sexual maturity, and the social expectancy that young people make choices, prompt a reconsideration of earlier certainties. This is a time when joint identities, sexual identities, and personal identities are all investigated. As well, the participants were chosen from classes in which Life Skills programme is taught. The Life Skills education programme is offered to Kenyan secondary school learners at Form One and Two classes. As indicated in the literature review, learners are expected to be taken through Life issues such as sexuality, HIV and AIDS and health related issues. However, young people continue to face significant sexuality, domestic and health related challenges; cases of early pregnancies, irresponsible sexual activities and STIs among boys and girls, suicide and mental health

challenges. Efforts have been made to address these problems but comprehensive and conclusive solutions have not been achieved, thus the need to inquire further.

Purposive sampling is a non-random method of selecting participants based on the purpose and the objectives of the study (Etikan & Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to determine the sample size. The setting and participants were deliberately selected to provide information necessary to address the given research questions of this study (Etikan et al., 2016). Purposive sampling must portray certain characteristics desired by the researcher, features of particular interest to the researcher to drive the sampling which are entirely at the discretion of the researcher to ensure a credible sample is used. As the study is small-scale and cannot be generalized, this type of sampling was used to choose convenient participants for the study.

Three schools were selected (Private and Public schools, two of single sex and one mixed sex) purposively. Economic backgrounds impact young people, and so, private schools mostly encompass learners from high socio-economic backgrounds, who have access to technology, and exposure to various information sources such as media and social networks, unlike learners at public schools who are commonly from lower socio-economic backgrounds and might not be privileged to voice as those from high socio-economic status. By selecting learners from different social status, it allowed the research to have a variation of data from the different types of groups. For instance, from the data generated, the participants faced different challenges based on their social backgrounds. Those from poor economic backgrounds faced issues such as lack of basic needs prompting them to engage in risky odd jobs to get money to meet their needs, whereas those from high social status had availability of internet that misled them to watch age-inappropriate materials unlike those from poor backgrounds. Learners were drawn from a pool and asked to join the research project voluntarily. Five learners were

included per school, and consideration of equal gender representation in the mixed sex school was made to avoid the research being biased. This allowed a collection of data that was inclusive of facts and opinions from all the participants, and not one sided. Three teachers in charge of Life Skills lessons and three Parents Associations' leaders in each of the participating schools, were selected for the study. The selected teachers and Parents Association representatives were interviewed by the researcher and their participation aided in data triangulation. So, in total, data was generated from 26 participants. Studies show that in standardized population the data saturation occurs between 5 to 10 participants while for a more diverse population data saturation could be reached between 10 to 30 participants (Tuffour, 2017; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Studies that have multiple data generation methods require fewer participants, moreover, small groups of participants do allow all members to share their thoughts and views in discussions as they are large enough to give diverse views (Fusch et al., 2018; Denzin, 2012). Thus, the decision to use that number of participants.

The researcher sought assistance of the relevant people in order to reach participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After obtaining ethical clearance and permission from the university, Uasin Gishu county and NACOSTI, the researcher visited the selected schools and sought permission from the school heads to conduct research with participants from the learning institutions. With the principal's permission, a list of names and contact details of the PA representatives for the form one and two classes were availed. The principals also directed the researcher to the teachers in charge of Life Skills lessons in the school, which in this case, the subject is always handled by the class teachers. The researcher conveniently chose the PA representatives and teachers with an aim of balancing the gender of the participants.

The teachers assisted the researcher in converging learners. The researcher explained the aim of the study to the learners and those who were willing to participate were asked to write down their names in a paper. The first five learners per school were chosen for the study. In the mixed sex school, learners were chosen keeping in mind a balance of the gender. Meetings were arranged with potential participants who responded positively. The researcher was able to attain the required number of participants for this study, that is, 20 learners, 3 PA representatives and 3 teachers from the 3 schools chosen. However, the researcher was open and ready to increase the number of participants in case there was still some new information to be gained after generating the data from the 26 participants. Nonetheless, data was already saturated after the sessions of generating data from the 26 participants.

In order to be part of the sample, a participant had to portray certain characteristics. For a learner, they should; (i) be a Form One or Two learner, (ii) 15-24 years of age (iii) be a learner in any of the selected schools (iv) be willing to share their experiences faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and (v) be male or female depending on the school they were in. For teachers, they had to; (i) be a full-time teacher in the selected school, (ii) be teaching Life Skills education in Form one and two, (iii) be willing to share their experiences of the risks they saw that learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and how the learners are coping in school after resumption (iv) be male or female. For PA representatives, they had to; be representatives of Form One or Two classes in the chosen schools, (ii) active participants in the school programmes, (iii) be willing to share their experiences of the risks they saw that learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and how the learners are coping in school after resumption (iv) be male or female.

3.1.6 Pilot study

In social science research like this, it is very important to conduct a pilot study before starting with data generation. In this study, the researcher tried out the data generation tools before using them in order to get an insight about their appropriateness and adequacy. Through the pilot study, that was conducted with different participants other than the actual selected participants for the study, the researcher identified potential challenges that might have occurred while using the data generation tools and resolved them for improvement purposes. The pilot study is particularly important in research in that it is useful in determining the best research methods to use in a study while at the same time troubleshooting issues in the research and defining whether a research project is practicable (Creswell, 2014).

In a nutshell, a pilot study assists the researcher in determining whether the research tools are accurate, unambiguous, or comprehensive for the participants in order to avoid any ambiguity that may arise during the data generation process and rectify or remove them to align them with the research objectives. It is worth mentioning that the pilot study was conducted at a selected secondary school in Kenya. The school shared the same characteristics as the ones that were sampled for data generation data for this research study.

3.1.7 Data generation methods

These are approaches used in research to obtain data in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To meet the objectives of the study, the researcher generated data using multiple data methods and sources. The following qualitative data gathering tools were used in this study; (i) Memory accounts (ii) Drawing (iii) Cellphilm (iv) Unstructured individual interview (v) Focus group discussion.

The study employed a participatory visual method (drawings, memory accounts and cellphilm), unstructured individual interview and focus group discussion as data generation methods. Using different methods allows the generation of satisfactory and diverse information which added to the relevance of the findings. The use of multiple methods facilitated the generation of numerous data that complemented and pointed out evidence leading to the answering of the research questions effectively and insightfully. The selected methods therefore answered the research questions. The drawings, memory accounts and unstructured individual interviews provided information on how the socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, while cellphilm were used to explore how learners perceived the socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Unstructured individual interviews were used to explore learners' coping strategies in the face of the socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown while the focus group discussion used, sought to provide reasons why learners responded to the socio-ecological risks using the strategies they employed as well as serve as follow up on the other data generation methods. At the initial stage of data gathering, participants were made aware that they could use any language suitable to them. Except for a few, most of the participants responded to the given research questions in the English language.

3.1.7.1 Participatory Research methodology

Creswell and Poth (2016) posit that qualitative research is considered as being inductive, emergent and shaped by the researcher's experience in gathering and analyzing the data. During the time of rapid and extreme change because of the pandemic, qualitative and participatory work generated operative, innovative, and context-specific evidence to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of people (Marston et al., 2020). Participatory research methods have been used as tools in which

participants are accorded a certain amount of agency during the research process in that the methodology involves provoking marginalized people's voices, to make their voices heard on social and developmental matters. Participatory research methodology uses multiple methods as a way of capturing participants' perspectives on the phenomenon of interest (Brown et al., 2020; Rogers & Bowd, 2020). The approach is characterized by the use of multiple interaction using a blend of visual and linguistic methods as ways of hearing out the marginalized groups. This methodology places emphasis on the importance of giving voice to the non-academic, communal knowledge of the people themselves to act upon and solve societal problems (Rogers & Boyd, 2020; Hansen et al., 2016). The benefit of using participatory research methods is their ability to transfer power to the participants in a more reflexive manner. Therefore, the researcher found this methodology suitable for this study.

Participatory research methodology was used in this study to reflect on what learner participants had to share in relation to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, how they perceived their experiences and ways they would most likely emancipate themselves in events they faced similar challenges. Participatory methodology paves way for participants to express themselves with ease as the methodology enables them to share knowledge in methods comfortable to share what would have otherwise been hard to navigate verbally.

According to Paul Freire's (2018), learners are seen as empty receptacles, receiving knowledge and wisdom from their teachers. He argues that education should be approached in a two-way manner between learners and teachers and should involve conscientization and reflection. Knowledge grown from conscientization, brings societal structural change as the oppressed become empowered (Freire, 2018). Thus, this study used participatory methods with the aim of recognizing that learners have

their own community based and local knowledge that researchers need to tap from to understand needs in learning concerning these issues. Learners were able to openly talk about the risks they encountered during the pandemic lockdown, perceive what those risks meant to them and offered suggestions on ways of moving forward and being prepared for future crises.

Utilizing participatory methods in this study allowed learners to reveal what it is that they wanted to learn, bringing out their marginalized voices at the same time, and in a manner that they could feel empowered and less pressured. Using this kind of methodology allowed prolonged engagement, persistent observations and data triangulation from the different data generation methods achievable through repeated data methods (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015; Flick, 2013). The prolonged engagement with the participants through participatory methodology allowed an investment of sufficient amount of time that enabled the researcher to build trust with the participants and therefore enabled them to respond with ease. Any bias that occurred in this process was mitigated through the triangulation of methods used to generate data (Rogers & Bowd, 2020). By using memory accounts, drawings and cellphilms to generate data in this study, it became easy to explore this sensitive topic with the learner participants by eliciting their thoughts and perspectives on multifaceted sentiments and issues (Dockett et al., 2017).

3.1.7.1.1 Memory accounts

According to Johnson (2018) memory work is a flexible methodological approach that is participant-focused and examines individual experience as it is embedded and instilled with social meaning. This method is useful in decolonizing research and giving voice to the participant. Ovens and Tinning (2009), posit that memory work is used to comprehend the participants' experiences and can generate emotional responses

which are vital in qualitative research. Memory accounts are very descriptive in nature as a participant does critical self-reflection of unpacking how one is being constructed and participates in constructing their world to reveal specific life occurrences (Potts & Brown, 2015; Ovens & Tinning, 2009). The more expressive the memory account is, the better insight that can be gained by the researcher regarding the phenomenon. The researcher can see the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the participant.

Many researchers argue that there is no difference between written accounts, narratives, and stories. In memory accounts, participants are asked to reflect and write about their personal experiences (Johnson, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Memory accounts are vital in education research since they occupy the reader in the life of the speaker by bringing the reader into the moment of the experience being described. This establishes a close relationship between the researcher and the participant (Johnson, 2018). According to Haug (2016) memory narratives provide a deeper understanding of life experiences through a narration of lived stories of the participants; well written narrative gives the reader a sense of what the speaker is feeling while building trust, setting aside enough time and letting things unfold naturally. They are appropriate for expressing the density and variation of life experiences (Rouzrokh et al., 2017). Memory accounts are also central in crossing cultural and generational boundaries (Creswell, 2008). Written narratives can also offer a common entry into experiences and capture an everyday, normal form of data that is familiar to the participants (Onyx & Small, 2001). Marshall and Case (2010) also state that accounts are used by participants to represent their experiences both to themselves and to others through short stories.

3.1.7.1.1.1 Using Memory accounts in the Field

In this study, Memory accounts were used with learners to generate data for the first research question: *How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?*

There was a total of twenty memory accounts from participant learners in the three selected schools in Uasin Gishu county. However, eighteen were analyzed in this study.

The following prompt was provided to each participant:

1. *Please recall any memories you have in relation to socio-ecological risky experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.*
2. *Using the paper and pen given, write down any memories you have in relation to socio-ecological risky experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The exercise takes 30 minutes.*

Thank you once again for your willingness to participate in the study!

I hope you had fun.

After seeking consent from the county offices and school principals to access the schools (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), as well as selecting the participants for the study, the researcher familiarized with the learner participants and intention for conducting research with them. They then, read through the consent forms and signed them before writing their accounts. Using the pen and paper that were provided, the researcher asked the participants to recall and write their experiences regarding the socio-ecological risks that affected them during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as descriptively as possible. The participants took about 30 minutes to expressively and openly put to writing their feelings. For the success of data generation exercise, the researcher made

every effort to establish a rapport with the participants. The written accounts gave rich data that was useful in understanding the varied risks the participants faced/experienced during the pandemic lockdown. This rich data was important in the next research question, whereby the participants were asked to perceive what these risks meant and investigate ways of generating solutions for the problems faced. Once the participants were done writing down their accounts. The researcher collected them and kept them for use later with an assurance that the data generated was confidential and would only be used for the purpose of this research. The same writing session was done with each set of participants in the three schools.

3.1.7.1.2 Drawings

Drawings are part of the visual participatory methodology which is not new in research and is being used today in social research. Data collected in form of drawings are captioned to provide meaning to the drawing made (Mitchell et al., 2011; De Lange et al., 2007; Khau, 2010; Leitch, 2008). While using this methodology, participants are engaged in making drawings then writing a caption. The caption is a brief explanation accompanying the drawing (De Lange, 2011). This method was selected to shed light on issues of learners' experience that are difficult to articulate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mitchell, 2008; Stuart, 2007). By using drawings (Mitchell et al., 2017), young people can also structure and facilitate their reflection on painful and often silenced subjects in a safer way. Stuart (2007, p.229) affirms that "within visual methodology, there is a vast body of work on the use of drawings as a form of expression, reflection and therapy". Therefore, the advantage of using drawing is that it is simple to do and gives the participants the opportunity to bring out the aspects of knowledge and experiences which could be hard to express in words (De Lange, 2011; Stuart, 2007). Leitch's (2008) study mentioned on the significance of drawing's capability to shed light on

participants' experiences that could have been hard to articulate if it were to be done verbally.

3.1.7.1.2.1 Using Drawing in the Field

In this study, Drawings were used with learners to generate data for the first research question: *How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?*

There was a total of twenty-two drawings from participant learners in the three selected schools. Some participants drew more than one drawing during the drawing session. However, eleven drawings were analyzed in this study as the remaining eleven did not have elaborate captions to answer the question as guided. The following prompt was provided to each participant:

1. *Using the paper, pencil and crayons given, draw a picture(s) illustrating how socio-ecological risks affected you during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.*
2. *Below each of your drawing(s) explain in writing what the drawing is about, what it means to you and why you chose that particular drawing.*

Once again, thank you for participating!

I hope you had fun.

After taking a short break after writing the memory accounts, participant learners were issued with blank paper and colourful markers and pens for the purpose of making drawings supported with statements (captions). Participants were also issued with prompts that guided and stimulated them to produce the drawing of what they would express concerning socio-ecological risks that affected them during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Participants were asked to produce individual drawings with descriptions of what the drawings represent. Drawings accompanied by written

descriptions as well as oral explanations (Mitchell et al., 2017) were used to probe the innermost feelings of how learners were affected by socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (MacEntee, 2020; Mannay, 2016).

Drawings were as well used to understand how learner participants interpreted their own drawings in relation to their experiences of socio-ecological risky issues faced during the COVID-19 lockdown. It was emphasized that the artistic value of the drawings did not matter, nor the quality of the drawing, but the information that the drawing depicted. For each drawing, learners were allowed to explain by writing, using a language of their choice (so as to be as expressive as possible) what their pictures portrayed to contextualize the drawings in relation to socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The drawing session lasted for an hour and each participant was allowed freedom and personal space and time to engage in drawing. Those that wished to refrain from the exercise were also allowed to do so. All the participants in the three school sets complied. The drawings were then scanned and saved and were discussed later in the focus group discussion.

3.1.7.1.3 Cellphilms

The study used cellphilms to generate data from the participants to address the second and the third research questions. Cellphilming is a participatory visual method which focusses on cellphone video production with research participants as a participatory visual research method (MacEntee et al., 2016). It is estimated that in 2013, about 96% people globally was covered by the mobile network (World Bank, 2015). Cellphones have widened their usability and this growing availability has influenced daily lives, habits, relationships, and societal structures (Goggin, 2013). Participatory video research allows marginalized communities use video equipment to identify challenges and explore potential solutions. The videos themselves are then used

to promote community dialogue and engage decision-makers in pursuing actionable change with the community's perspectives and experiences in mind (De Lange, 2012). Thus, cellphilm research can inspire a move away from an outlook of somehow liberating a participant towards a mindset of learning (Schleser, 2014).

3.1.7.1.3.1 Using Cellphilm in the Field

In this study, Cellphilms were used with learners to generate data for the second and third research questions:

How do learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

And;

What are learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

There was a total of 6 Cellphilms from participant learners in the three selected schools in Uasin Gishu county. Some groups combined a production of the second and third research questions in one shoot while some groups separated the shoots. The following prompt was provided to each participant for use in their group:

Steps in cellphilming

1. Produce a short film of about 5-10 minutes focusing on your perception of socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and ways of developing coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

Producing the cellphilms occurred in the following phases:

Phase 1: *Together in the group, participants used the flipchart and pens given to brainstorm problems related to how they perceived socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.*

Phase 2: *In the group, they listed all their priorities regarding how they perceived socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on a flipchart. After that, they voted using three sticky dots, for the top three issues they felt were most important to address based on the problems and their solutions (coping strategies), and about which they wanted to produce a cellphilm. Once each member in the group had 'voted', they discussed how best to create a group story.*

Phase 3: *In their group, they created a storyboard template on which to plan and execute a story and facilitate the process. With the other members, they were encouraged to have a maximum of six scenes for their films. Part of the analysis in this study focused on the storyboards produced in this phase.*

Phase 4: *The researcher then handed the participants cellphones and they set off to produce the films. They were allowed as much time as they needed to make the films. First, with the group members, they practiced acting their roles before filming using the 'No-Editing-Required' (NER) technique (Mitchell, 2011).*

In this study cellphilms were used to find out how participants perceive the socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown; as well, develop coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This method democratized the research process and gave participants liberty to share information with ease.

The participants philmmed a variety of clips from which they were shared using the researcher-owned cellphone camera. The exercise included an introductory explanation of basic principles such as using pause and record while operating a cellphone. The philms, ranged from three to ten minutes each. The initial philm saw the researcher taking practice clips to help participants familiarize themselves with both the action of

filming and the idea of being filmed. With the participant's permission, the researcher proceeded to make copies of the films for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to categorize the films under themes.

3.1.7.2 Unstructured individual Interviews

Interviews are brought about by verbal discussions with the objective of producing relevant information. It involves an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. (Yin, 2015). An interview involves having an interview guide which is a list containing a set of questions prepared to serve as a guide for the interviewer and interviewee in generating data about a specific phenomenon (Martin, 2016). The interviewer must have effective communication skills to manage an interview (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). These skills include clearly structuring the interview questions, listening attentively, pausing, and probing where necessary and encouraging the interviewee to be free to respond (Yin, 2015; Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). Gomm (2016) also proposes that for effective data generation through the interview, a researcher ought to make every effort to establish rapport and create a warm, friendly and a close relationship that makes the participant feel free to divulge all the information.

3.1.7.2.1 Using Unstructured Individual Interviews in the Field

In this study, unstructured individual interviews were used with the teachers and PA representatives to answer the first and third research questions:

How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?

And;

What are learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

The researcher began by having a general talk with the participants to break the barrier between them. The decision to use unstructured individual interviews was to find and probe for greater depth the possible answers to the research questions. Unstructured individual interviews improve validity because it provides the interviewer a chance to probe for deeper understanding and ask for clarification to avoid misconception (Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were done individually on a one-to-one basis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) with the 6 participants in this study: 3 PA members and 3 teachers. Each interview lasted between twenty (20) to thirty (30) minutes. The venues for the interviews were agreed upon by the researcher and the participants. The researcher sought permission from the participants to record the interview, each interview was recorded using an audio recorder (Denzin, 2017). The researcher took into consideration the skills suggested by Clough & Nutbrown (2012), which include; listening attentively, pausing and probing where necessary and encouraging the interviewee to be free to respond. The researcher therefore asked teachers and PA member participants to share their experiences. The participants freely highlighted the risks learners faced during the pandemic lockdown as well as giving suggestion on how young people were dealing with risks experienced during the pandemic lockdown.

3.1.7.3 Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion are small groups of people designed to come together to discuss an issue (Wong, 2008). They are useful in eliciting information from participants by enabling them to express their feelings and their thoughts about an issue in a comfortable atmosphere (Creswell, 2014). The participants are selected based on

the fact that they have something in common in relation to the topic, hence, their interpretations of the topic would be both deep and contextual (Greeff et al., 2011). Focus group discussions are advantageous as meanings and answers arising during discussions are socially constructed rather than individually created. It also provides access to both actual and existentially meaningful or relevant interactional experiences (Creswell, 2014). A limitation of focus group discussions is that sometimes the participants may not give honest and personal opinions about an issue being discussed; therefore, a researcher needs to create a non-judgmental environment so as to make participants feel at ease to discuss freely (Wong, 2008).

3.1.7.3.1 Using Focus Group Discussion in the Field

The focus group discussion was used with learners to discuss the generated data answering the three research questions in the study. The focus group discussions were useful in eliciting information from learners' written explanations on their drawings, memory accounts, and cellphilms (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This affirms with Robson (2011) who posits that images and narratives can be used to elicit information and stimulate new data emergence. Therefore, this method was used to let participants give a highlight of their drawings and memory accounts in discussing risks that affected them during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This method was used to discuss how learners perceived the socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This method was also used to discuss how learners sought to provide coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The participants converged in one venue which was organised by the researcher; and was convenient for all the learner participants in the study from the three selected schools. The researcher facilitated the discussion groups and as well took the responsibility of moderating the discussions. As a moderator, the researcher

remained firm and keen, but also friendly, in directing the discussion to the main focus and avoiding any derailment. Through reflective discussion, meaning regarding the visual depictions and films were developed within the group and discussions audiotaped. The recordings were later transcribed and analyzed. Field notes taken during the process were used to maintain trustworthiness of data discussed.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data generated in this study was analyzed thematically. Qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for, and explaining the data so as to make sense in terms of a participants' definitions of the situation (Creswell, 2014). The purpose is to make sense out of text and image data and change these into findings. It involves segmenting and taking apart the data then putting it back together while noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Chech and Schutt (2012) also defined analysis as the method used to explore and code written, aural and pictorial data and to discover relationships among the resulting categories. In essence, qualitative data analysis requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to the general, and linking several levels of analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research study being phenomenological, explained the lived experiences of the study participants concerning socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and participants developed supporting guidelines for the same. Data generated was analyzed to gain understanding of the meanings that participants made of their real-world situations, relating to the issue under inquiry. Figure 3.2 presents the steps of data analysis in qualitative research.

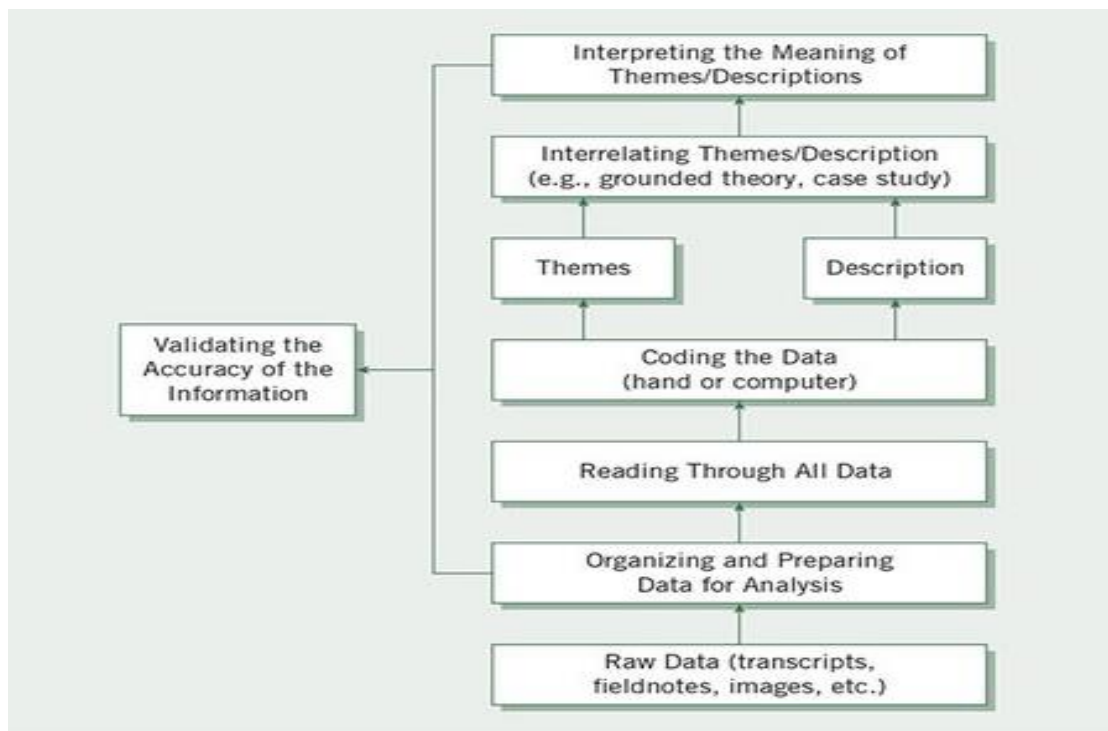


Figure 3.2 Data Analysis in Qualitative Research. Source (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method aimed at identifying patterns across qualitative sets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Coding is an important process in thematic analysis. The coding process begins with familiarization of the data by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is done by reading the transcripts as many times as possible to understand the data and the meaning attached in relation to research questions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022). After the familiarization and understanding of the data, initial codes are generated by putting some texts in brackets and writing a word (unit of meaning) in the margins which represent the texts in the bracket (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). The units of meaning are grouped into codes and categories which are then used to generate the themes that are presented and discussed as findings of the study (Nowell et al., 2017).

The advantage of thematic analysis is that it allows the themes to be drawn directly from the data (Creswell, 2014). This makes the findings tangible and concrete (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis also provides a rich description of phenomena from the generated data (Fuchs, 2023; Creswell, 2014). The identification and exploration of themes lead to advancement of knowledge within the social research (Byrne, 2022; Braun and Clarke, 2019). The method is not based on a specific theory and therefore, it is flexible and enables a wide range of analytical options (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The flexibility however, is also a weakness as it makes the work of the researcher difficult in choosing the aspects of data to concentrate on (Creswell, 2014). This weakness can be overcome by the researcher concentrating on the aspects of data that answers the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2014).

3.2.2 Working with Data

There is a need to interpret the data generated in a way that allows us to tell a comprehensible and coherent story about the phenomenon we are investigating. This is done through reiterative reading to ensure exhaustive engagement with the data, capturing vital details that enhance the density and quality of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). The study used multiple methods to generate data, thus, data was generated from various methods including: field notes, explanations of drawings, memory accounts, cellphilms and audio recordings of interviews, and focus group discussions. The field notes described the researchers' observations and contained all that was deemed worth noting as it served as a valuable tool for capturing fieldwork proceedings and organizing thoughts. Thus, supporting in preserving the researchers' budding understanding and enhancing transparency (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). These field notes together with audio-recordings were transcribed, typed and organized. The visual and written data from drawings, memory accounts and recordings from cellphilms were

also scanned and inserted into a Microsoft word document. The large quantities of the generated data were organised by type (focus group discussions, memory accounts, cellphilm, unstructured individual interviews and drawings) and by sites and participants. After preparing and organizing the data, the researcher had five sets of data relating to the three research questions ready to be analyzed thematically. For this study, the displayed data was interpreted allowing the researcher to make conclusions about the phenomenon being investigated.

The researcher employed the six steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2014) and Creswell (2014) to analyze the data generated from the tools discussed above. The six steps include (i) familiarizing with the data (ii) generating codes (iii) searching for categories and themes (iv) reviewing potential themes (v) defining and naming themes and (vi) presenting themes (see figure 3.3)

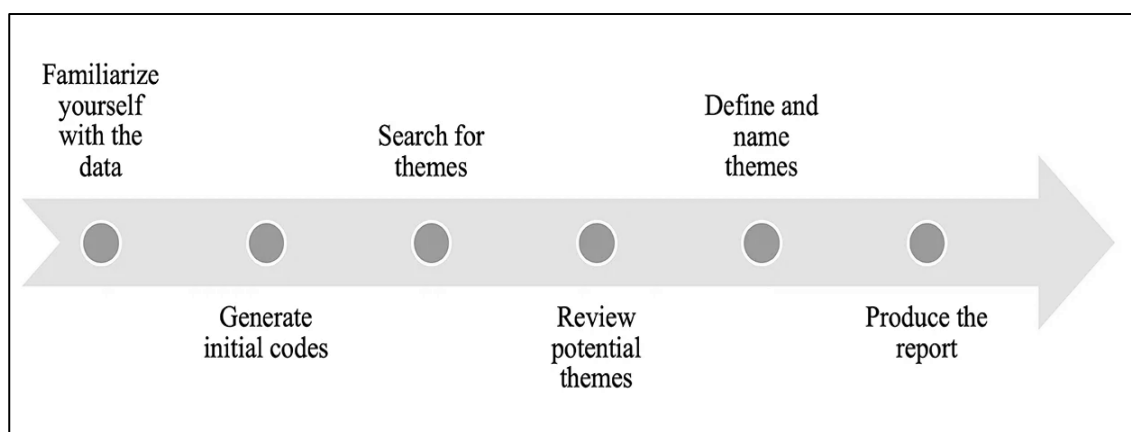


Figure 3.3 Six key steps in conducting thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data

Source: Adopted from Braun and Clarke (2014)

Step 1: Familiarizing with the data

A researcher should be very familiar with their entire data before going any further. The researcher took time to familiarize herself with the data. By engaging intensely with the data, a researcher can find key themes that later guide subsequent analysis (Fuchs, 2023). This was done by listening to the audio recordings several times,

watching the cellfilms time and again, as well as reading the captions written by the participants below the drawings and reading through the memory accounts. The audio recordings, from the interviews with the PA representatives and teachers and recorded films from the cellfilms, were played several times, until the researcher felt to have understood the extensiveness and profundity of the data content in search for meanings and patterns. During this data engagement, the researcher wrote down notes of some data patterns which emerged. The data was also transcribed and the researcher took time reading and re-reading the transcripts, to get a thorough understanding of the participants' views. The researcher did the active reading and at the same time jotting down key ideas that emerged from the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2019) active reading should be done concurrently with note taking.

Step 2: Generating codes

In this second step, the researcher systematically codes interesting structures, designs, or concepts that emerge from the data. After the familiarization with the data, which developed a deeper understanding of the data, the researcher generated the initial codes. This was done by reading again and searching for key words and phrases that represent the units of meaning (key words). The units of meaning were written down on the margins of the transcripts. This represented the initial emerging patterns of data (Fuchs, 2023). Coding was done in an inductive way by reducing and grouping the units of meaning into descriptive words or category names (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher ensured that the generated codes linked to sub-research questions of the study. A list of codes was generated and written in a large piece of paper for easy analysis. While naming the codes, the researcher used both descriptive and semantic labeling. According to Braun and Clark (2019) semantic labeling results from the data directly and the codes capture direct words used by the participants, while descriptive

labeling are researcher derived codes, they are created by the researcher based on their deeper analysis of the transcript.

Step 3: Search for categories and themes

In this step, a researcher organizes the generated codes into potential themes, aiming to identify emergent patterns. The researcher put similar codes together to form categories. Each of the categories identified represented a key idea. Similar categories were identified as well as their relation to each other. Thereafter, the researcher identified possible themes. This was done by grouping and organizing the categories with related ideas and assembling them into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). According to Creswell (2014) a theme is an idea that captures something significant that answers the research question. These original themes together with their corresponding categories, codes and data excerpts were gathered and put together to help in reviewing the themes in the next step.

Step 4: Reviewing the themes

In this step of thematic analysis, researchers cautiously review and polish the identified themes to ensure their precision in representing the data. The researcher critically reviewed all original themes generated in step 3 above to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern in answering each of the research questions. This was done by looking at the relationships, similarities, contrasts, check for overlaps of themes, links and differences (Fuchs, 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2019). During this review, the researcher refined the themes by merging some them, especially those which could not stand due to insufficient data support. Other themes were broken down into categories while others were reviewed or rather cast-off due to lack of consistency. An audit trail for each theme was also done to ensure that every theme was supported by relevant data

that could be tracked. In some cases, re-coding was done to review some themes that had not reflected the entire related data.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

During this stage, researchers emphasize on defining the content and deepness of each theme (Fuchs, 2023). In this step, the researcher took time to polish the themes further. This was to ensure that all the themes jointly; with the whole set of data, was comprehensible and answered the main and the sub-research questions. Each theme was checked to ensure that it was fitting into the overall account. After constant revision of the themes in reference to the data, the researcher finally defined the content and scope of each theme with final names for purposes of reporting in the next step (Creswell, 2019).

Step 6: Presenting themes

This was the final step of the thematic analysis process which was done in this study. In this final step, researchers integrate the recognized themes into an articulate narrative, intertwining together the perceptions and designs they have discovered (Fuchs, 2023). The role of the researcher here was to make a coherent and summarizing report. The presentation of themes was done in chapter 4, which is the next chapter in this study. Each theme and category were described with evidence drawn from the data in form of excerpts or quotations.

3.3: Summary of the data generation tools, participants and analysis technique

Table 3.2 shows a summary of how the data was generated for each research question, the participants involved and how the data was analyzed.

Table 3.2 Summary of the methods, participants and analysis technique for each research question

Research question	Data gathering method	Participants	Analysis technique
1. How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?	• Drawing • Memory accounts • Unstructured individual interviews • Focus group discussions	• Learners • PA representatives • Teachers	Thematic
2. How do learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?	• Cellphilms • Focus group discussions	Learners	Thematic
3. What are learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?	• Cellphilms • Focus group discussions • Unstructured individual interviews	• Learners • PA representatives • Teachers	Thematic

3.4 Trustworthiness

To ensure integrity, it is required to portray the trustworthiness of the research results by ensuring that the research findings are quality and worth paying attention to (Pilot & Beck, 2012). Trustworthiness ensures that there is a linking between participants' experience and what was observed and the generated data. For qualitative research studies to be of any repute, they should withstand the thoroughness of trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Burke & Soffa, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness in this study, credibility, conformability, transferability, and dependability criteria as identified by Lincoln and Guba, (1994) were employed. Here follows a discussion of these terms:

Credibility

Credibility the study refers to the assurance in the truth of the study and thus the findings, is the most important criterion (Polit & Beck, 2012). Anney (2014) also posits that credibility is the accuracy or authenticity of the findings as it refers to whether the researcher captured what they intended to capture in the research. The most important concern here is how others can know that the reported findings are genuine. Various methods can be used to establish credibility in research (Creswell, 2009). In order to ensure the authenticity and the accuracy of the findings in this study, the researcher used appropriate data generation tools. The memory accounts, drawings, cellphilms, unstructured individual interview and focus group discussion were considered suitable tools for generating data in this study.

During the interview and the engagement in drawing, memory accounts, cellphilming and focus group discussion, the researcher used probing questions to seek clarification for the purpose of credibility. Credibility was ensured by taking field notes and audio recordings during data generation to blend the participants data received. As

the study used different data generation methods, these methods were triangulated to justify and provide collaborative evidence between methods, participants and sites. The researcher also confirmed the accuracy of the data generated by employing member checking. This means, the data generated from participants was verified with them to ensure accuracy. Again, time spent with the participants in the engagement aided to develop an in depth understanding and experience and establish relationships of trust with participants in their settings as the researcher spent a lengthy time of research of about 2 months with the participants (Creswell, 2009). Lastly, the researcher provided a thick and rich account by explaining the context of the study, the participants and the resulting themes intensely and logically. The main purpose of doing so was to allow the reader to envisage the setting, thus making the account credible for the reader (Connely, 2016). While discussing the results, the researcher also used verbatim which could help the reader to understand what the participants were putting across.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the fact that the findings are a true representation of the participants' views and not the researcher's ideas. This means that the research procedures and findings are free from bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Biases may arise in qualitative research and it is the responsibility of the researcher to remain aware of the biases and to purposefully minimize and ensure that the findings emerge from the data generated and not their own preconceived concepts and predispositions (Connely, 2016).

For purpose of confirmability in this study, the participants' direct words (verbatim), interpretations and pieces were used to confirm the findings. Member check was also used as it guarantees the accuracy of the findings (Connely, 2016). This was done by sharing the data with some participants to reduce researcher bias by verifying the

accuracy of the descriptions and interpretations based on the data generated. Again, there was a provision of a detailed methodology. The use of participatory research methods and interviews on teachers and PA members contributed to the triangulation of data and reflexivity, making the methods useful in alleviating biases (Creswell, 2009) as being reflexive is important in maintaining trustworthiness. An audit-trail was also used. The data generated in this study has been organised, well kept in a retrievable form to make it easy for any interested reader to trace the data and the process of how the findings were developed. Ary et al., (2010) argues that an audit trail is the main strategy for demonstrating confirmability as it allows any reader to follow the course of the study step by step.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the researcher's findings can be generalized or rather applied to other similar contexts ((Polit & Beck, 2014; Ary et al., 2010). It is the degree to which the findings of a particular study can be transferred beyond the borders of that study (Shenton, 2004). In this study, a detailed description of the study, the research purpose, objectives, design, the relationship between the explored issue and the existing literature, the geographical location and sites, sample and sampling methods and duration of which data was generated is provided. In this way, replication of the research can be done by other scholars to confirm integrity in this study. Also, this can be used to make judgments and comparisons about similarity to determine whether the findings apply to other situations or contexts (Ary et al., 2010).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the constancy of the data generated, over time as well as variations tracked or explained if the study was replicated (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Polit & Beck, 2014). Dependability means that if the same conditions, and applying the

same design and participants were to prevail again in a repeat of the qualitative research study, comparable results ought to ensue (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). However, Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted that the phenomena investigated in qualitative research, are not static phenomena. It therefore brings a challenge in that the findings are normally tied to the contextual and cultural settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability procedures include debriefing, maintenance of an audit trail and keeping researcher notes of all field proceedings (Connely, 2016).

To ensure dependability in this study, a comprehensive data methodology was provided to make it possible for other researchers to replicate this research study. A detailed description of the procedures of data generation; enables a reader to develop a thorough understanding of the methods used and their effectiveness. It also enables future researchers to repeat the work even though not necessarily to gain the same results. Secondly, a coding agreement was used; which was done by selecting some verbatim transcripts and coding them separately, then having the same verbatim transcripts also coded separately by the researchers' peers and the results compared with what the researcher had already done for accuracy of the coding.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

To respect the rights, privacy, dignity and sensitivities of the research participants and the integrity of the institutions and localities within which the research takes place, ethical measures have to be considered (Babbie, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Babbie, 2014). Ethics in research implies conforming to the required code of conduct while carrying out the research (Creswell, 2014). Ethical considerations allow the researcher to protect the participants, develop trust with them and ensure integrity of the study (Babbie, 2014). It is the obligation of the researcher to bear the responsibility of being honest and precise in doing and reporting the research study. The researcher should also take

all possible precautions to guard the rights, needs, values and desires of the participants (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011). The American Education Research Association (AERA) outlines several issues to be observed throughout a qualitative study, this include: clearly explaining the research objectives to the participants both verbally and in writing; ensuring an informed consent before participation and the confidentiality of the participants and data; obtaining research permission from research boards and academic institutions; protection of participants from harm and explaining to them their rights throughout the research process (O'Brien et al., 2014).

In order to address the ethical issues in this study, several ethical principles had to be applied. In detail, these were achieved as follows:

Deception prevention and voluntary participation

Deception refers to misleading the research participants, purposefully distorting facts or suppressing data from participants (Fusch et al., 2017). The process of deception prevention and voluntary participant participation is done to ensure the participant can decline participation at any stage of the research. In this study, this was done by ensuring that the study objectives, the purpose of the study and the methods used in data generation were clearly explained to the participants prior to conducting research. The participants were allowed to consent voluntarily without coercion and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study anytime they felt uncomfortable to continue. It is worth noting that all the participants in the study consented at free will.

Avoiding of harm

A participant may be harmed in a physical or emotional manner. The vital rules concerning ethics in social research is that no harm should come to the participants because otherwise this could violate the rights of the participant (Creswell & Poth,

2016; Babbie, 2016). In this study, in as much as emotional harm to the participants of the study was hard to predict, both emotional and physical harm were avoided at all costs. The participants were made aware consistently of their roles and their rights including their right to withdraw from the study at any stage if need be. Participants were informed beforehand on the potential impact of the research, thus creating room for them to withdraw from the study if they so wish. The participants in the study ultimately participated without coercion. The researcher sought the help of the participating schools' professional guidance and counselling teachers that were on standby in case the participants encountered emotional harm. It is important to note that all participants did not experience harm of any sort during the data generation process.

Informed consent

The previous sections; 3.5.1 and 3.5.2, emphasized avoiding harming the participants and selecting them on a voluntary basis. These aspects form part of the informed consent. De Vos et al. (2021) stated that finding informed consent proposes that all conceivable information on the goal of the question; the expected duration of the participant's participation; the procedures which were followed during the explorations; the possible advantages, disadvantages, and risks to participants; as well as the credibility of the researcher, be concentrated to probable volunteers. In this study, the participants were allowed to consent voluntarily without coercion. After being taken through the objectives, purpose and methods used in the study, as well as being informed of their free will to either participate or step back from the study, consent letters were given to the participants as an agreement that they were volunteering to participate in the study. In the informed consent letter, the objectives of the study, data generation methods and the techniques used to produce data were detailed. Another letter was designed for the heads of the learning institutions where the learners schooled.

These letters were all written in English. Henning et al. (2019) posit that written consent letters are necessary resources for both parties and should be viewed as such. (Copies of this consent letter are presented in the Appendices).

Permission

The researcher sought permission to conduct this study from NACOSTI (National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation), Moi University-School of Post Graduate Studies, Department of Education in Uasin Gishu County, and the school principals of the three schools where primary data was generated. (Copies of the permission letters are attached in the Appendices).

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher ensured that there was honest and transparent communication with the participants throughout the study. To ensure privacy and confidentiality of the information and participants, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. Protecting participants' rights is imperative in social research. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the participants' rights, such as the right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality are upheld (Kessio & Chang'ach, 2020; Coffelt, 2017). Participants anonymity when conducting and reporting on a research study should always be respected as was in this study (Coffelt, 2017). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the following procedures were followed:

- i. Participants were advised not to provide their names on any data that they produced (Drawings, and Memory accounts, cellphilms and unstructured individual interviews). This was done to ensure anonymity. They were also briefed at the beginning of the data generation exercise that the schools' names would not be used in the writing up the findings. Instead, pseudonyms were used.

- ii. Participants for the Unstructured individual Interviews, cellphilms and focus group discussions were also briefed in advance about confidentiality. This was done to encourage them to keep information produced during that data generation process as confidential as possible.

Lastly, while writing this thesis, the researcher paid close attention on issues of plagiarism by ensuring that the work of other scholars used in this study was acknowledged.

3.6 Positioning Myself as a Researcher

I am a Master of Education (Research) holder currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Communication and Technology. I have taught English and Literature in several schools ranging from co-education to single sex schools. I am a Christian by religion. As a researcher, my research topic is very relevant because, I have been in the teaching profession and therefore saw the need to research on ways of making better the teaching of Life Skills education in our schools. My motivation to research on learner risks was informed by a number of factors, all of which I have faced in the teaching career and in the community alike. I have always felt that people; especially the young generation, should be guided in the simplest and most interesting way on how to navigate matters that directly impact their lives. I can attest to the fact that, minimal knowledge transmission on risk preparedness is taking place in Kenyan classrooms. For those who do, they prefer to offer it via the lecture method of teaching or rather giving students notes to read. Therefore, most of the learners end up getting the wrong or minimal information or no information at all on how to handle challenging situations that come by as they grow into adulthood. I therefore sought to explore learners' experiences of socio-ecological risks during the

COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and how they can develop supportive guidelines in an event of a pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic casted a long shadow over societies globally, impacting various facets of life. Among the most vulnerable groups are the youth, who faced unique risks that demanded comprehensive understanding and intervention. As a researcher focused on young people risks during this unprecedented era, I positioned myself with both responsibility and opportunity, aimed at unraveling the intricacies of challenges faced by young individuals and sought to collaborate with them in formulating effective strategies to mitigate them. There were diverse challenges faced by the youth during the pandemic. From disruptions in education to heightened mental health concerns and socio-economic vulnerabilities, a nuanced understanding of these issues is essential. Utilizing a rigorous and diverse methodology is paramount in understanding the nuanced aspects of youth risks. Through participatory visual methodologies, interviews, and data analysis, I probed deep into the lived experiences of young people, unraveling the complexities of their struggles that inform evidence-based interventions. This methodological diversity ensures a holistic understanding of the multifaceted issues affecting the young people. My primary objective is to bridge the gap between identifying these risks faced during unprecedented times, while providing valuable insights and implementing effective solutions.

Positioning myself as a researcher on youth risks interventions goes beyond identifying problems; it involves actively seeking solutions. I believe in collaborating with experts and stakeholders to contribute to the development of targeted interventions designed to mitigate the identified risks. These interventions range from mental health support programmes to initiatives addressing educational inequities, all aimed at fostering resilience and well-being among young people. Communication is key in

ensuring that the impact of my research extends beyond academic circles. Through publications, presentations, and engagement with the wider community, I strive to raise awareness about young people risks and the importance of evidence-based interventions. The true impact of research lies not just in the discovery of problems but in translating these findings into actionable insights. By working closely with experts, policymakers, and community leaders, the gap between research and implementation is bridged. This involves crafting evidence-based recommendations that can inform policies, support programs, and community initiatives tailored to the unique needs of young people. Recognizing the interconnected nature of youth-related issues, I will actively seek collaborations with organizations, policymakers, and advocacy groups. By participating in collaborative initiatives, it will contribute to shaping policies that prioritize the well-being of young people.

The ultimate measure of success lies in the tangible impact of interventions on the lives of young individuals. Regularly assessing and adapting strategies ensures that interventions remain relevant and effective. Looking ahead, my commitment extends to exploring emerging challenges and continuously refining intervention approaches to meet the evolving needs of the young people. Advocacy becomes a crucial component, amplifying the voice of young people and promoting societal awareness of their unique challenges. By actively advocating for youth-centric policies, an environment that prioritizes the well-being of the younger generation is created thus empowering and uplifting the young people in our society. This involves not only presenting research findings but also cultivating a narrative that emphasizes the importance of investing in the future through targeted interventions.

By involving young people in the research process, I empowered them to be active participants in shaping solutions to the challenges they face. Community engagement

serves as a two-way street, fostering trust and ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and genuinely meet the needs of the young people. As a researcher, my position in navigating young people risks during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown is multifaceted and dynamic. Through rigorous investigation, evidence-based interventions, advocacy, and collaboration, stakeholders strive to understand the challenges faced by young people and empower them to overcome adversity. By harnessing the collective expertise and resources of the research community, we can create a brighter future for the next generation in the wake of this global crisis.

3.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the methodology to generate data was explained and discussed. The approach of the study was outlined, and the sample selection method justified. More information was also given on the way the data generated was analyzed. The ethical considerations that were used in order to reduce threats to the trustworthiness of the study were also justified. In the next chapter the preliminary analysis of data generated from participants at sampled schools is presented.

Table 3.3: Summary of research design and methodology

Chapter sections		Position of study
i.	Research approach	Qualitative
ii.	Research paradigm	Critical
iii.	Research design	Phenomenology
iv.	Study area	Selected secondary schools in Kenya
v.	Target population	Learners, Teachers and PA representatives
vi.	Sampling techniques	Purposive and convenient sampling
vii.	Data gathering tools	Memory accounts, Drawing, Cellphilm, Unstructured individual interview and Focus group discussion
viii.	Data analysis	Thematic
ix.	Trustworthiness	Use of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability
x.	Maintaining ethics	Privacy and confidentiality, anonymity, approval by university, Uasin Gishu County Education office and NACOSTI, consent, objectivity, honesty.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and generate supportive strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times. The three research questions formulated to guide the study were:

- i. *How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?*
- ii. *How do learners perceive the socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*
- iii. *What are learners' coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

This chapter presents the findings for each of the three research questions. The data presented in this study is from many sources, including drawings, memory accounts, cellphilms, unstructured individual interviews and focus group discussion. It proceeds to outline the findings from the data generated in form of themes. These findings were later interpreted and discussed in accordance with the relevant literature that was studied in relation to the study.

4.1 Information of Participants

In this study the researcher worked with 20 secondary school learners, as well as 3 teachers and 3 PA members from each of the 3 selected Kenyan secondary schools within Uasin Gishu County. The schools selected are averagely populated and relatively situated in areas that are easily accessible by learners from diverse backgrounds. The

participants were referred to by pseudonyms and not their actual names and schools in which they are attached to. The learner participants information is written alongside the memory accounts and drawing presentations. Table 4.1 gives a summary of participant information in the study.

Table 4.1 Participant information

Participant	Position
5 Girls	From a girls' secondary school
5 Boys	From a boys' secondary school
10 Mixed sex participants (5 boys, 5girls)	From a mixed secondary school
3 PA	1 representing each of the three schools
3 Teachers	1 representing each of the three schools

4.2 Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the finding of the three research questions. A summary of the findings is first provided in a table at the beginning for every research question, followed by the discussions. The findings were generated from the data and the discussion recontextualized within the existing related literature.

4.2.1 Socio-ecological risks affecting learners during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya

The first research question sought to find out the experiences of learners about the risks they experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The research question was stated as follows: *How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?* The data on the experiences of the participants was generated using drawings, memory accounts and unstructured individual interviews as data generation tools. The participant learners first

began by writing memory accounts, guided by the issued prompts. There was a total of twenty memory accounts from participant learners in the three selected schools, however, eighteen were analyzed in this study. Two accounts were not analyzed as they were handed in incomplete by the participants. After taking a short break, participant learners were issued with blank paper and colourful markers and pens for the purpose of making drawings supported with statements (captions). There was a total of twenty-two drawings from participant learners in the three selected schools. However, eleven drawings that were analyzed in this study are presented. The remaining eleven did not have elaborate captions to answer the question as guided.

On different dates within the data generation time, the researcher interviewed the three PA and three teachers. The interviews were done individually on a one-to-one basis with the 6 participants in this study. This was done so as to generate data that supported the data generated from memory accounts and drawings.

The memory accounts and drawings used in analysis, and the captions associated with each drawing are first presented in this section. All the names indicated in the memory accounts and drawings are pseudonyms and are not real names of the participants. Thereafter, the findings and discussion in response to the question are presented. It is also important to note that from the captions written by the participants, typed summaries have been made without making any alterations.

4.2.1.1 Presentation of memory accounts

The participants were asked to write about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. It was a free writing exercise as they were asked to freely express themselves in pen and paper. The accounts illustrate how the socio-ecological risks

affected the learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also present similarities in their experiences as shown in the extracts obtained from each of the memory accounts.

4.2.1.1.1 Alexas

Alexas is a Form 2 learner at Hekima Boys School in Uasin Gishu County. He was born and brought up in Kisumu County. He lives with both parents and his 3 sisters and brother when schools are closed. He spent the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown season with his family in Kisumu. He shared his experiences during the lockdown as given:

MEMORY ACCOUNTS (8) ALEXAS

- 1 Please recall any memories you have in relation to Socio-ecological risk experiences during the Covid 19 Pandemic lockdown
- 2 Using the paper and pen given, write down any memories you have in relation to socio-ecological risky experiences during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown. ~~The exercise takes 30~~

NEGATIVE

- ✓ I almost got an accident while I was driving ~~me~~ a car. I was doing my family's ~~daily~~ daily duty when I almost had an head-on-collision with an incomming Tea-truck. I can still record it ~~into~~ in my cerebrum upto this date.
- ✓ My father was arrested on his way home for ~~pas~~ not obeying regards and extending ^{Past} ~~towards~~ the implimented Curfew time.
- ✓ I almost got into alcoholism due to influence from my peers when I was forced to mercilessly take ~~Cbusaa~~.

Positive

- ✓ I got time to perfect my reading and study skills towards our end year KCPE
- ✓ I also managed to get a chance in enhancing and developing my driving skills in more bigger and greater machineries

Figure 4.1: Alexas' memory account

4.2.1.1.2 Gaddafi

Gaddafi is a learner at Hekima Boys School. He comes from a middle-class family in Ole Kasasi in Narok county, Kenya. He lives with his parents and siblings during school holidays. Gaddafi was raised up in a religious household and admitted having very strict parents. He shared his memories in relation to his various experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown:

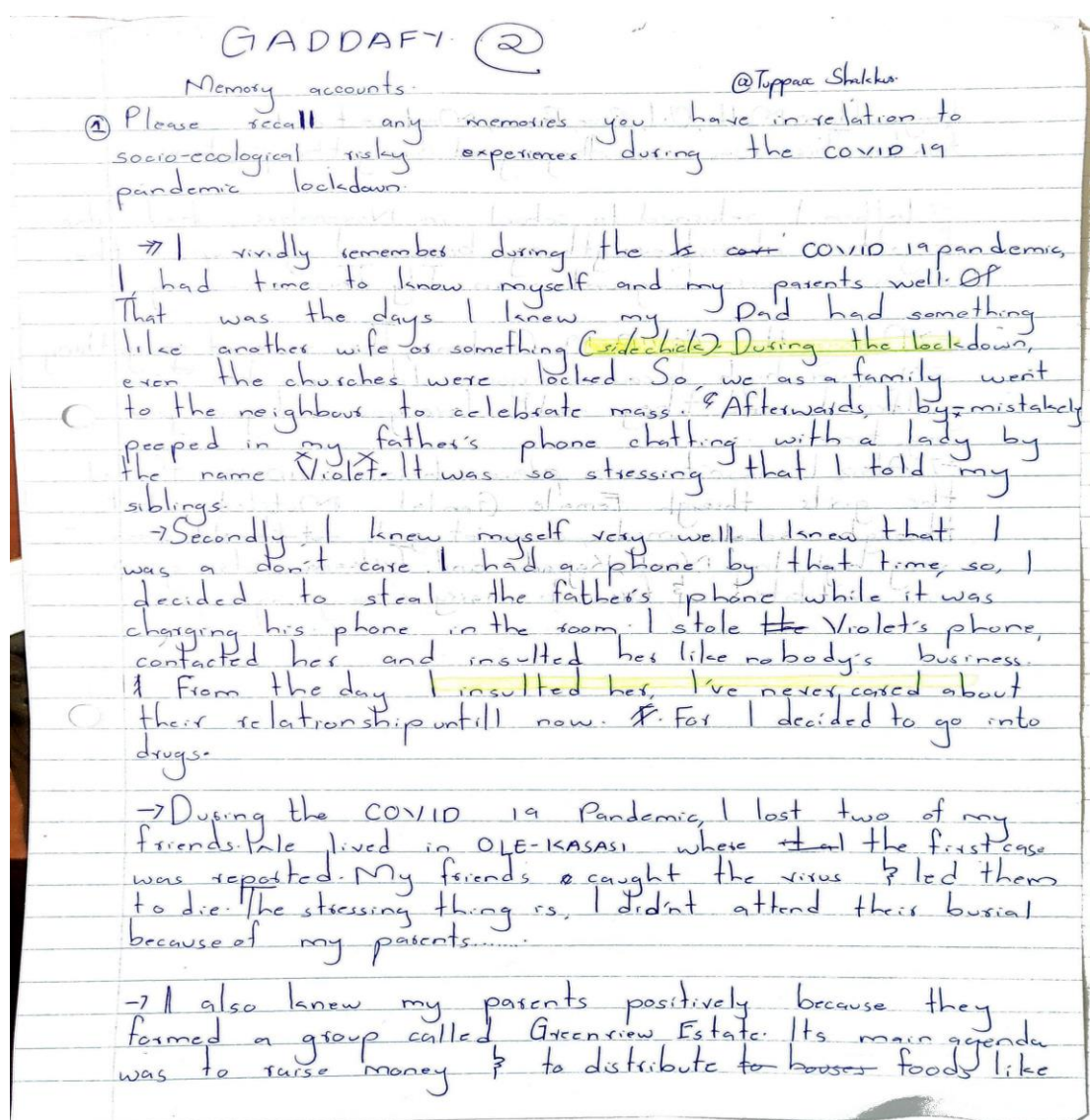


Figure 4.2: Gaddafi's memory account

4.2.1.1.3 Thored

Thored studies at Hekima Boys School. He comes from Nakuru town. He spends his holidays with his parents and 3 siblings. He believes that since he was given a good academic foundation by his parents, he really must reciprocate by upholding a good behaviour. Thored shared various experiences that the young people faced during the COVID-19 lockdown:

Thored (7)

Memory Accounts

Please recall any memories you have in relation to socio ecological-social risky experiences during the covid pandemic.

→ Thored I learn that:

- ① I learnt that one should never give up in life because it reached a point in life where I felt like dying. Cause life was harsher than death. To begin with money and all source of money became so hard. Increased poverty since people lost job.
- ② Personally I learnt to depend on my self only not even my parents. This is brought by the fact that a parent tell you "Umekuuwa mkubwa jitaubie chakub" and literally you a class 8 student.
- ③ I learnt that life is not what people (students) think is it. Life to some is unbearable especially after school. I know know in life this arena of life opportunity comes to those who yearn for it.
- ④ These boys who indulge in drug abuse not all of them went willingly some were pushed by life as to them what matter was surviving, so to me we ought to give them a second chance.
- ⑤ To me what matter is not life or death success or failure to what matter is doing the best that I can, cause even the briliest of students were apposed by the pandemic.
- ⑥ Life can make you do anything believe me it can especially to the poor, if reache I myself am a survivor of drugs abuse, up to the point of speaking I used to sell blood but never have I tested it, and what made me do this life.
- ⑦ The foundation of good academic is in primary students should not joke with primary life.
- ⑧ Teenagers should take life seriously and be forewarned from personally experience I joked with a girl and she got pregnant only to find out later that that pregnancy wasn't mine I was tricked.
- ⑨ Be grateful with what I have at hand since I may wake up tomorrow and won't be there.
- ⑩ The environment in which one is do influence one's behavior so now I will ensure my

Figure 4.3: Thored memory account

4.2.1.1.4 Traf

Traf is a learner at Amani Girls School. She comes from West Pokot County. She lives with her mother and two siblings over the holidays. Traf comes from a well to do family as she said that she was able to access online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. She further said that most of her peers used their gadgets for the wrong reasons instead of academic work. She gave a memory of her experiences as well as those around her during the lockdown:

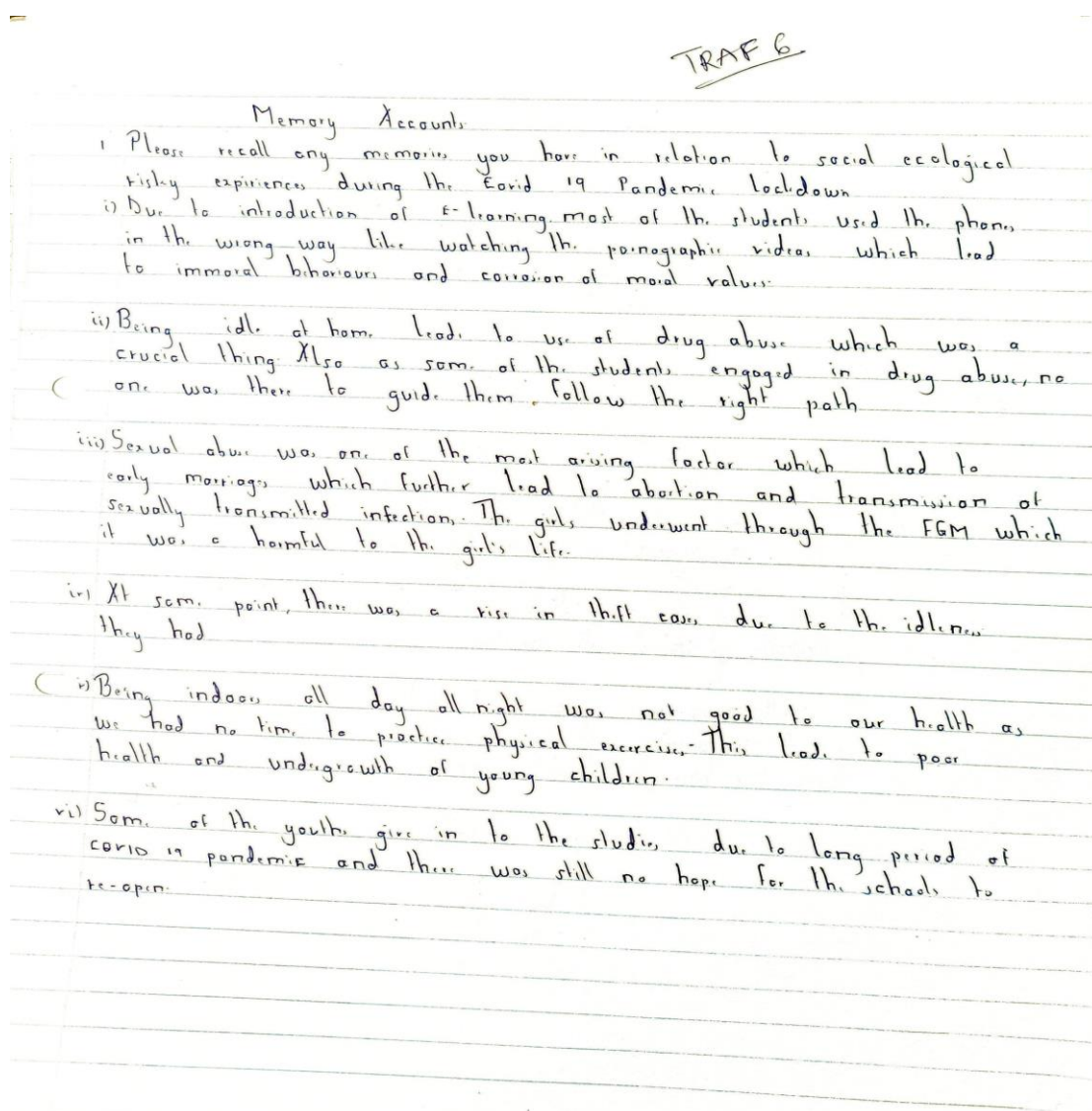


Figure 4.4: Traf's memory account

4.2.1.1.5 Wiseman

Wiseman is a learner at Hekima Boys School. His home is in Outspan in Eldoret town. He lives with his parents and siblings when he is not in school. Wiseman in his account, wrote several risky issues that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown:

Wiseman. (8)

1. ~~memory~~ ~~accounts~~ MEMORY ACCOUNTS

Please recall any memories you have in relation to socio-ecological risky experiences during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown.

- (i) Close contact - we were able to stay with our parents and learn many things which the teachers teach us.
- (ii) Bad Influence - By staying, playing with our friends & some we influence by friends to do compare themselves with other hence leading to theft cases. In order to be same in level of richness.
- (iii) Drug abuse - some get into field of drunks this was due to what parents drugs past 6 pm which make children follow what their parents were doing.
- (iv) Bad films/videos - This happen since parents were busy and not paying wif for children making children to be free to do any thing they want hence this lead to high immorality.
- (v) Habit - lockdown made children to develop habit where by the wake up late or sleep all day hence making a child not to work or being awake hence affect them most when they open schools.
- (vi) Studies - some of the student/pupils from rural areas where electricity is not available or where there is not ability to use online classes affect student/pupils from gaining knowledge to face coming national exam which was KCPE and KCSE.
- (vii) Violence/conflict - some of the families where every body want to give order/rules for example when the children want to do things which favour them while parents have different views hence lead to conflict.
- (ix) Comparison - During the covid 19 lockdown I compare myself with my friends whom they had undergo through initiation hence making me forget about my studies. I was forced to go to seclusion where I forget my studies.

Figure 4.5: Wiseman's memory account

4.2.1.1.6 Zack

Zack is a learner at Hekima Boys School. His family resides in a village in Uasin Gishu County. During holidays, he lives with his parents and siblings in the village. Zack gave an account of his first-hand experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown:

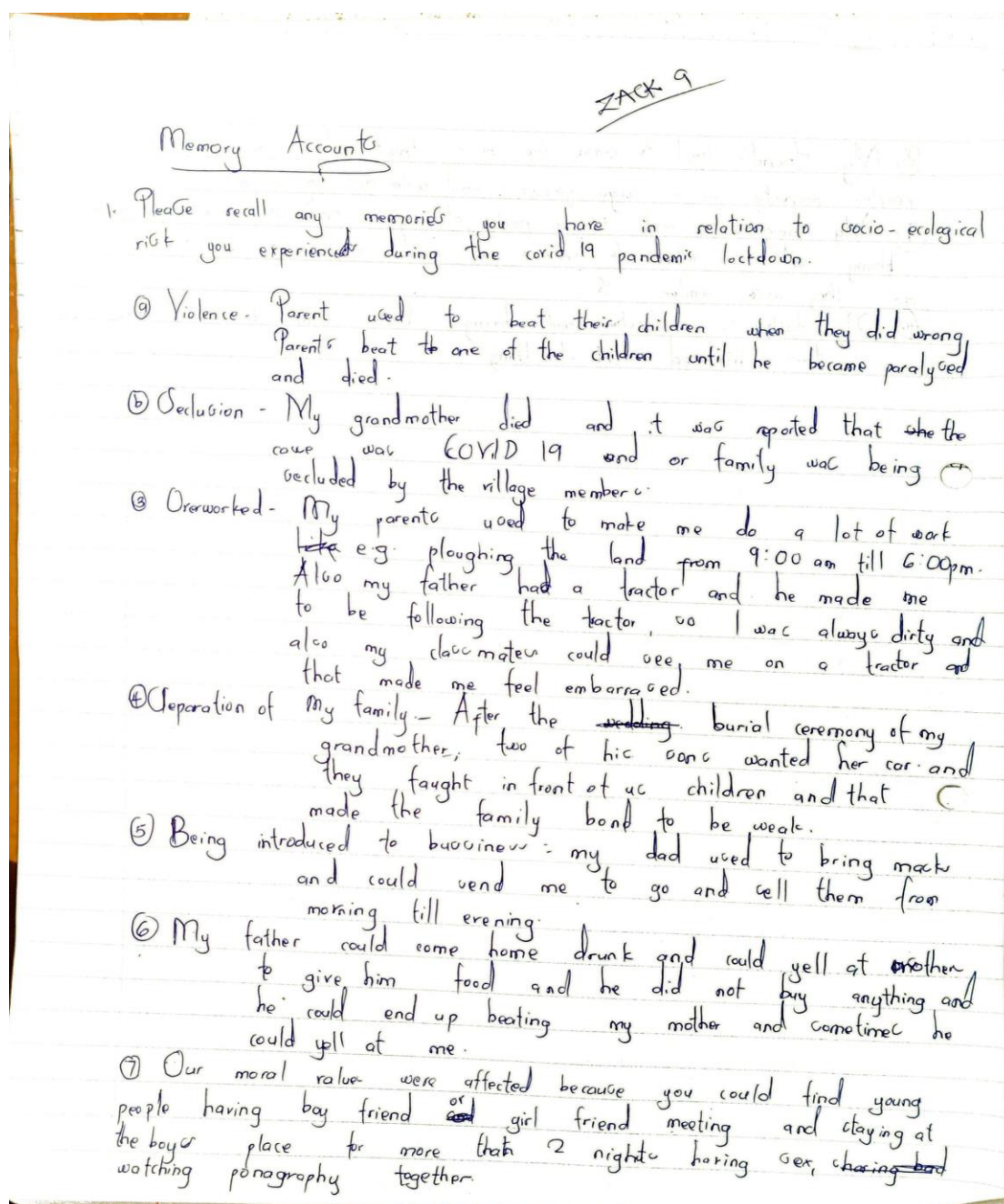


Figure 4.6: Zack's memory account

4.2.1.1.7 Justin

Justin is a learner at Elimu Secondary School. A mixed Sex Day school in Uasin Gishu County. She lives with a single parent and her siblings in a small estate in Eldoret. She comes from a struggling family. She faced several experiences during the lockdown heightened by the risky environment in which she lives in:

JUSTIN B.

PAGE NO.:
DATE: / /

please recall any memories you have in relation to risky experiences during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown

That year we had pass through many challenges. Our friends, families did not have time to visit each other. School was closed. Students were passing many challenges. Others they did not carry on with school because others had become pregnant. Others kept their hearts on mind that they could learn again because life would be bad to them.

Churches were closed, travelling people could not visit each other. The most challenge we pass through them was learners dropping school, others join to drugs. Our friends others pass we were so sad. Boys and girls having sex with young people. Others kill their brothers, sisters, friend and their parents because of drug abuse.

People were not doing their jobs in order to get money, others loss their jobs.

Figure 4.7: Justin's memory account

4.2.1.1.8 Liz

Liz is a learner at Elimu Secondary school in Uasin Gishu. She comes from a humble background in the suburbs of Eldoret town. She has been raised by a single mother of four having lost their father years back:

LIZ 12

Quiz

PAGE NO.:
DATE: / /

1. please recall any memories you have in relation for risky experiences during the covid 19 pandemic lockdown.

During the covid 19 pandemic I was so stressful ~~becare~~ because my mother was always drunked through out, she could just come at home and start to abuse me for no reason, she could even bring my late father's memories how he did never pay her dowry, she could throw me out of the house until there was a moment I was going to commit suicide and that moment the matatu came not at the road even if Covid 19 pandemic arrived in Uasin Gishu county her job was no more her relatives did not want to help her with anything but I kept on praying to the most high God to give me courage to overcome all my problem.

Covid 19 pandemic it has taught me how to survive in this world. I have learnt so many things during that moment. I could just take a little risk for my youngest brother, to provide him with a little food to eat in the evening & in the morning my mother would just make some strong tea for us after that she goes to find a hustle.

Figure 4.8: Liz's memory account.

4.2.1.1.9 Joyce

Joyce is a learner at Amani Girls school. During the school holiday, she lives with her grandmother, her mother, and siblings. Her family lives in Kapsabet town. She comes from an average household:

JOYCE 14

It was in April 4th 2021, the Corona / Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. We were asked by the government to stay in our homes for an unknown period. By that time my Cousin was staying in my other Aunt's house, he asked our aunt if she can come but our aunt told us that it was risky, so my grandmother told us that we should just let her stay with my aunt.

On 6th April 2021, my Cousin called my mom's phone, My mom answered and she heard my Cousin is crying sobbing, she asked her why she is crying but she couldn't talk. My mom including everyone else started worrying. We waited for her to call us again but she didn't. After 4 hours, the phone was called again, My Cousin told my mom that please help me, just please come and help me, "Why what is wrong?" said my mom. She told my mom that ever since she has been staying at my Aunt's house, My Aunt has been mistreating and misusing her. My mom asked her what she meant by that, she told my mom that my Aunt has been coming with full grown-up men and tell her to sleep with them so my Aunt can get money to pay the rent and to buy food. Before she could continue to say more the phone was hanged off. After a few days later we had that my Cousin killed herself by ~~hanging~~ stabbing her self in the chest but we really don't know if that is true up to now because when she was talking to my mom her phone was hanged off.

Figure 4.9: Joyce's memory account

4.2.1.1.10 Ben

Ben is a learner at Elimu Secondary school. Together with his family, they live in the suburbs of Eldoret town. The environment is an easy target of luring the young people into committing criminal activities. Ben admitted having been influenced by his fellow peers in the estate, during the lockdown:

BEN 15

PAGE NO. :
DATE : / /

Actually at that period, I remember that I had joined bad companies. My friends at that time they were already using drugs, use to have sex with different girls and I know that what was the main reason behind that was the freedom we were given by our parents.

We use to attend birthday and parties on weekends. And that is where I met a girl by the name Faith, she approached me and actually at that time I did not know how to refuse so, I agreed to be her boy friend.

A day reached that her best friend came into my house where I use to sleep and Faith saw her entering my house. As Faith she felt jealous and that made her take a bad decision.

That same ~~evening~~ ^{night} when I was about to take my dinner my friends approached me and told me bro you know what, "Faith has been caught by her mother trying to hang her self!" They told me. I felt like the whole world was against me. But thanks is to my Lord Allah (Subhanahu wataallah) the parents of that girl did not know where my mom lived. So the whole night the family of Faith was ~~ser~~ ^{sur} around my house.

I hide for ~~2 weeks~~ ^{2 fortnights} so that they may not catch me and took me to the police station. So the best thing I and my friends went to my house at 1 ~~00~~ ⁰² A.M midnight and took all of my belongings and escaped from there. Thanks to God they forgot about me and looking after me.

Figure 4.10: Ben's memory account

4.2.1.1.11 Glen

Glen is a learner at Amani Girls School. Her family lives in Kitale town, Kenya. She is being raised by her mother and has two siblings. Her mother struggles to make ends meet. Glen is in a boarding school having received support through her education by a well-wisher:

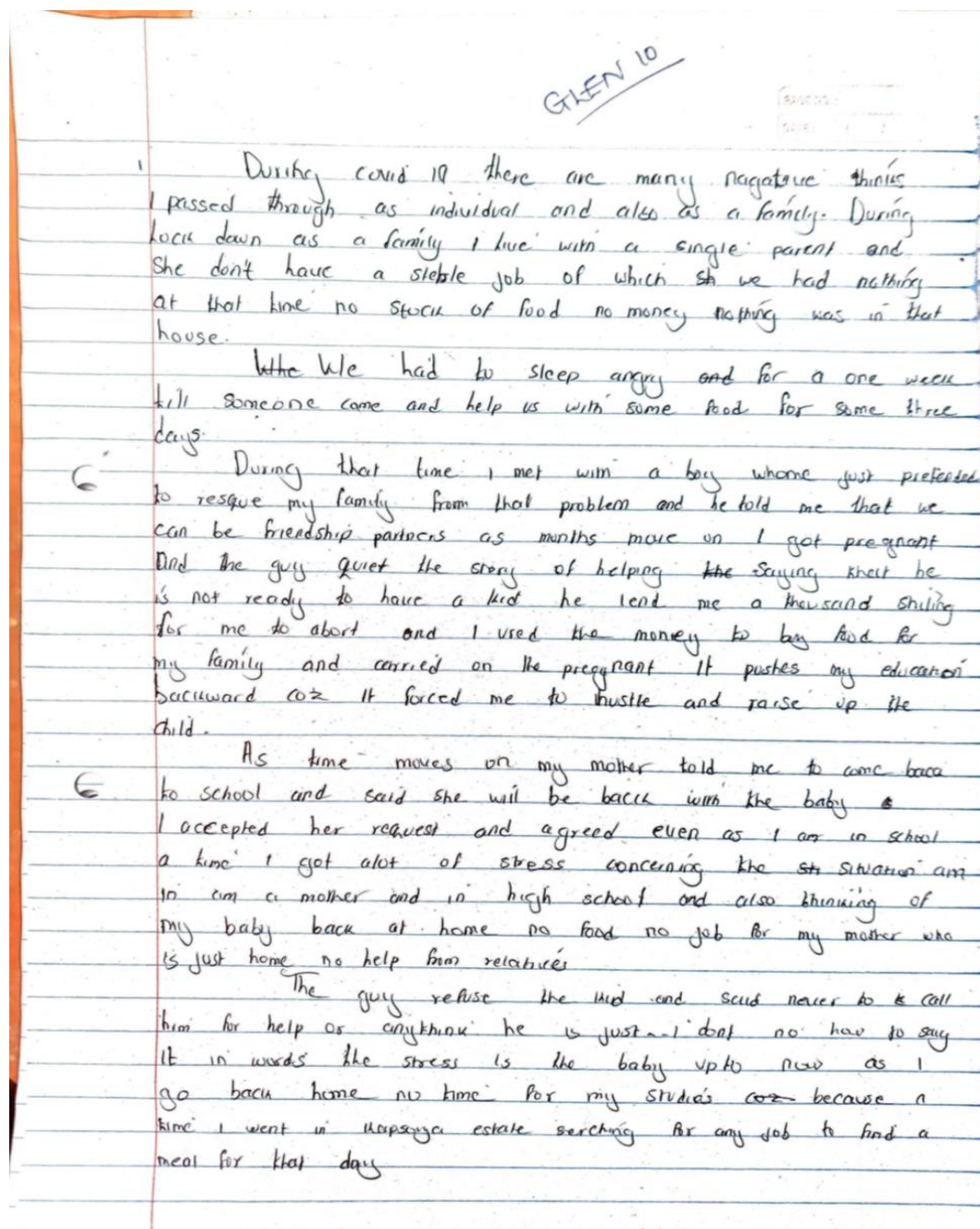


Figure 4.11: Glen's memory account

4.2.1.1.12 Arel

Arel is a learner at Amani Girls School. She lives with her parents and siblings while away from school. Arel experienced several issues during the COVID-19 lockdown as described in her account:

Memory accounts. Name: Arel

1. Please recall any memories you have in relation to Socioecological risky experiences during the COVID 19 Pandemic Lockdown.

- ✓ During that Pandemic lockdown, Many of my colleague neighbours were involved in drug abuse usage e.g miraa, Bhang and also (Kuber)
- ✓ Also many of young girls were impregnated and the ones who gave them did not accept the pregnancy.
- ✓ During that lockdown it affects some of the Christians who not actively participating in the church subjecting many people to be Pagans.
- ✓ There was also Shortage of food where the towns can be closed at around 6:00pm where the parents can struggle to get that little food.
- ✓ There was loss of lives especially the neighbours around, causing also a lockdown to the neighbouring houses either to talk or wish a greeting.
- ✓ Introduction of mask also savours the mature people and for the children it didn't hence causing a huge number of loss of children.
- ✓ During that pandemic most of the students become school dropouts hence being bode bode ridas.
- ✓ It also affect those students ~~due to~~ because of introduction of online classes, for those whose parents didn't have Smartphones and also lack of electricity.

Figure 4.12: Arel's memory account

4.2.1.1.13 Jane

Jane studies at Amani Girls School. Together with her siblings, she has been raised by both parents. She wrote several risky experiences she faced, as well as those of other young people in her community during the lockdown:

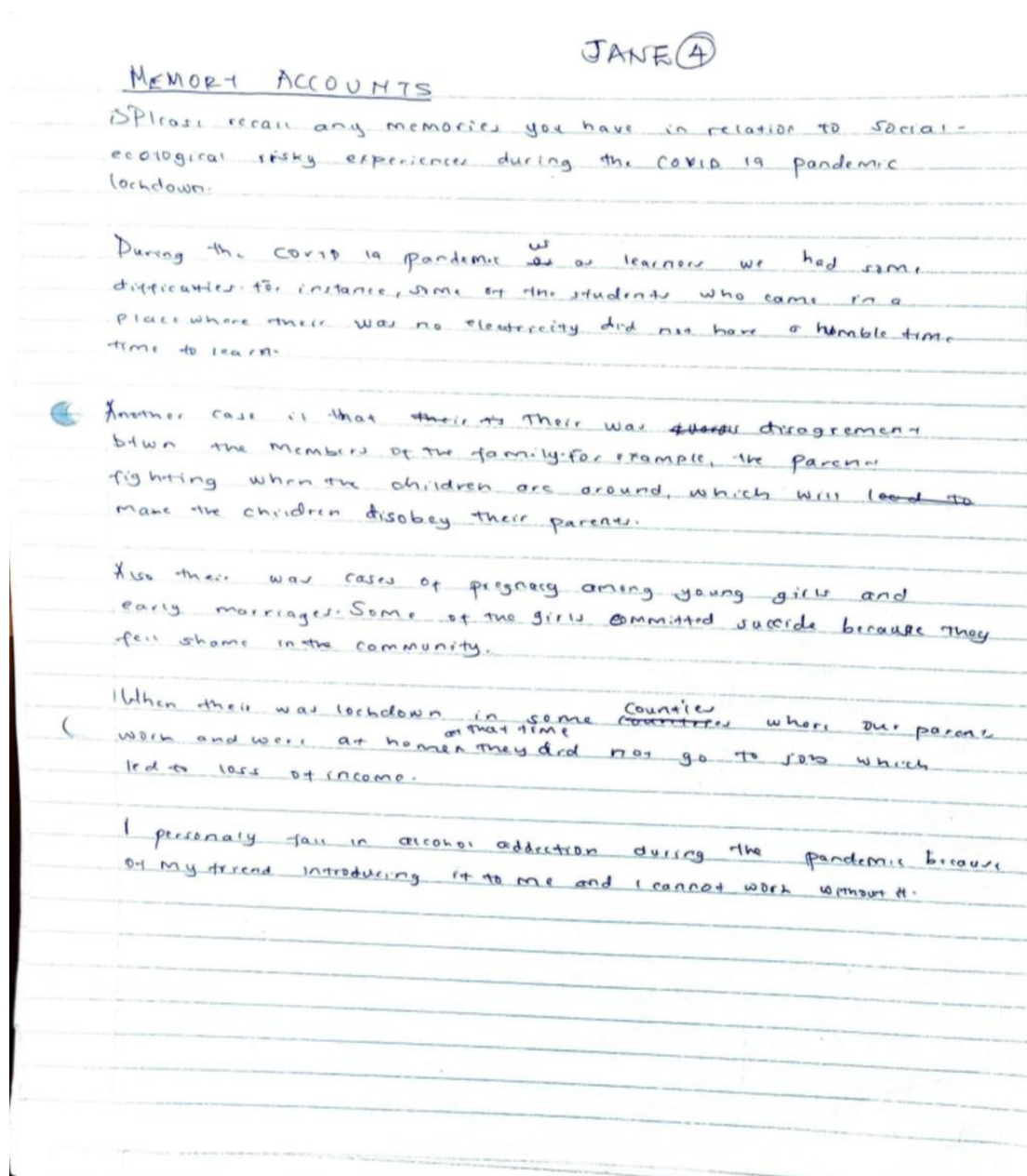


Figure 4.13: Jane's memory account.

4.2.1.1.14 Rean

Rean studies at Elimu Secondary School. She lives with her parents and siblings in the outskirts of Eldoret town. She admitted falling a victim of peer influence during the

pandemic lockdown and luckily reformed before it was too late. She gave her experiences in her account:

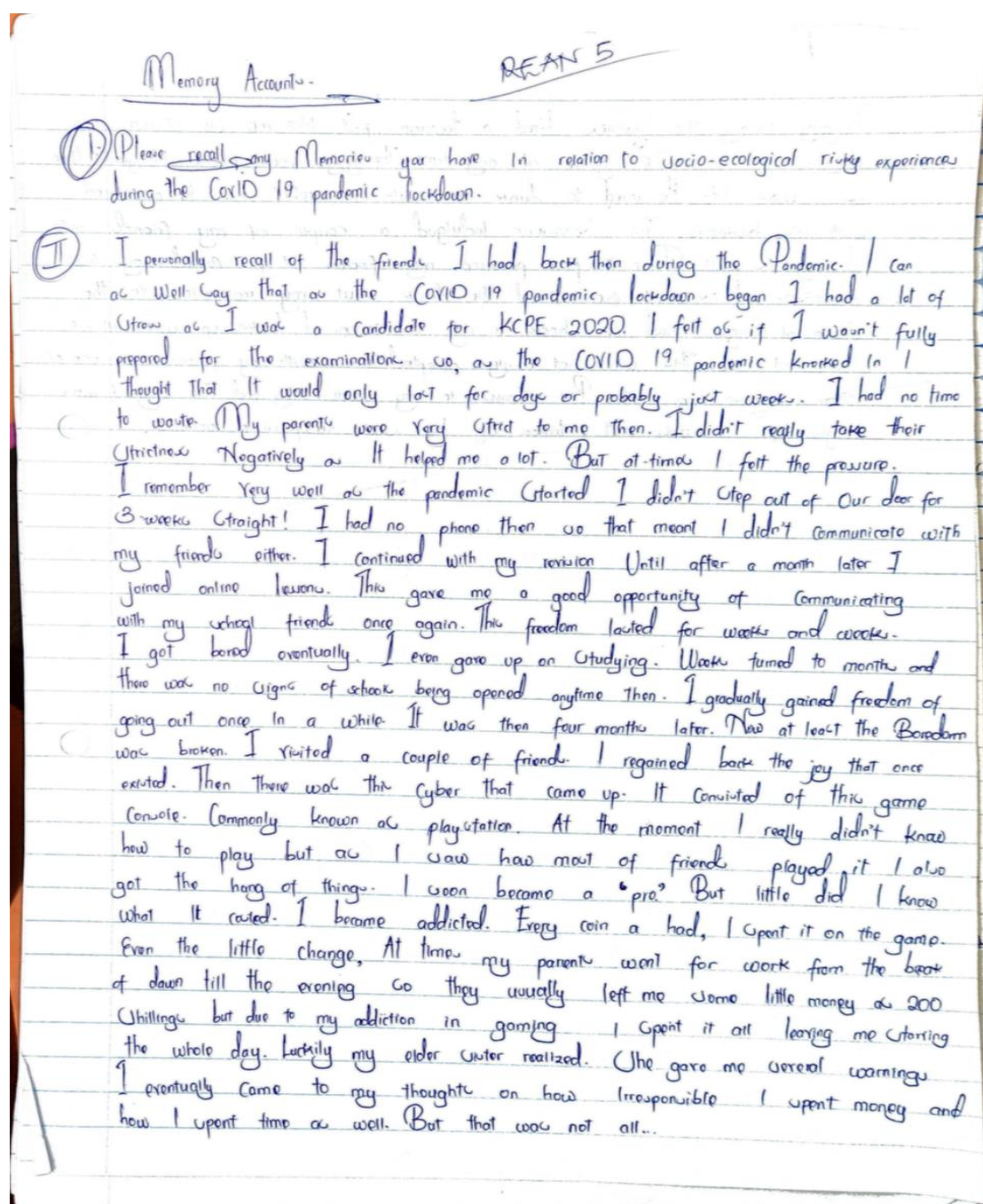


Figure 4.14: Rean's memory account

4.2.1.1.15 Roy

Roy is a learner at Elimu secondary school. She lives with her family in Eldoret town. She wrote that she had a lot of time to spend with friends during the pandemic

lockdown as her parents were stepping out to fend for the family. She narrated this in her account:

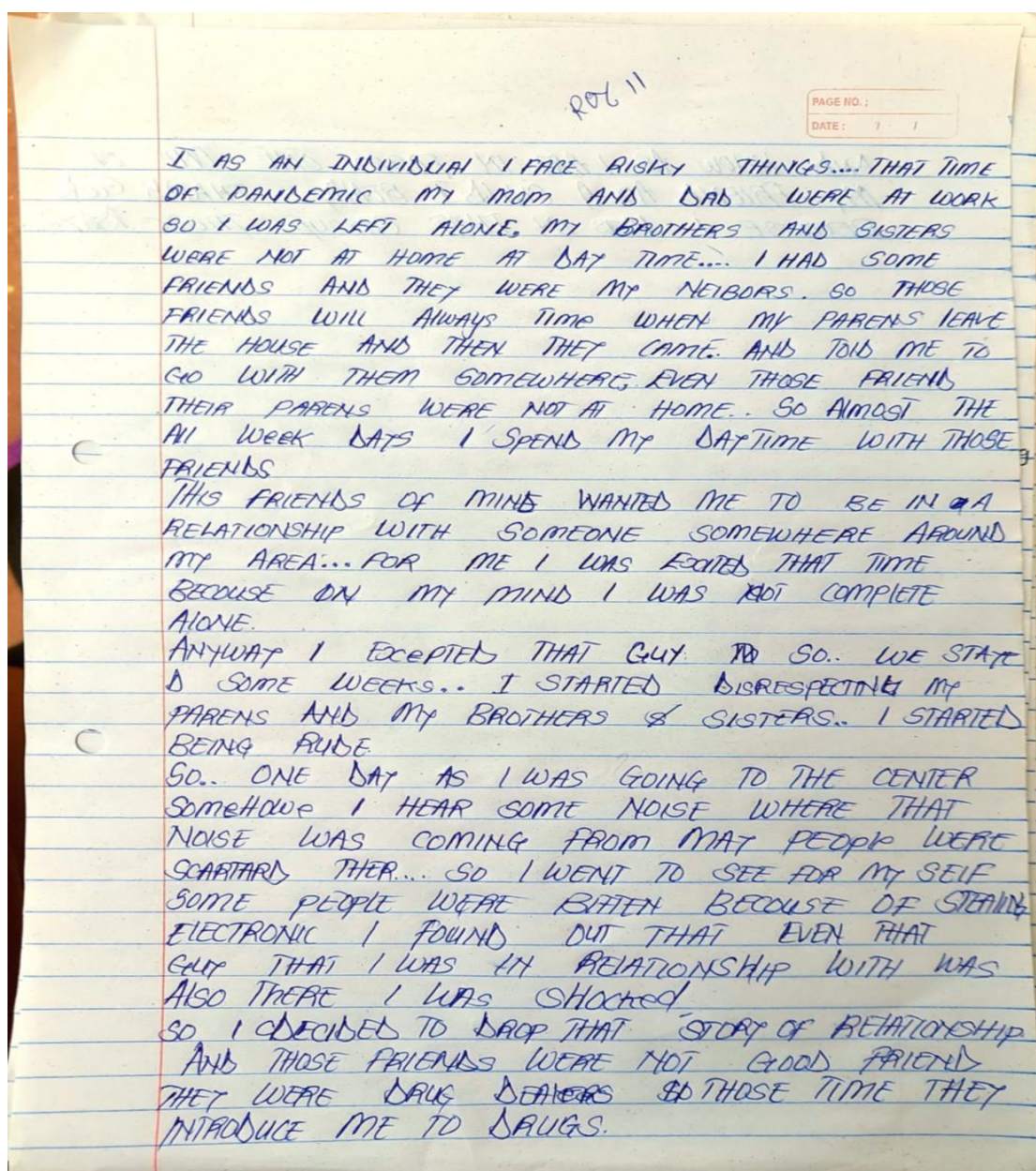


Figure 4.15: Roy's memory account.

4.2.1.1.16 Jeff

Jeff schools at Elimu Secondary school in Eldoret town. During the lockdown, he was living with his father and younger sister. In his account, he explained how his father's move to marry their house help made him devastated and he eventually ran away from home:

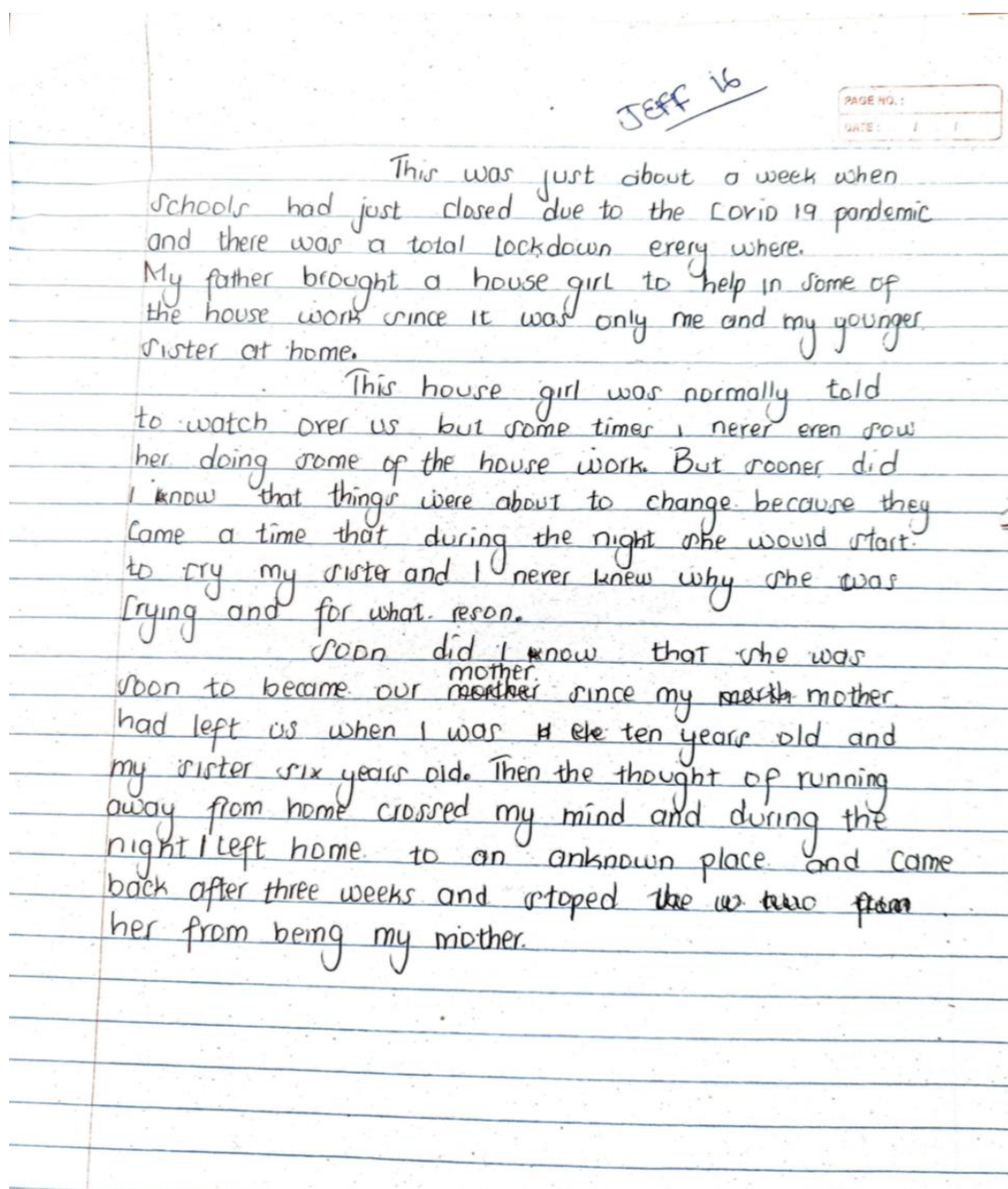


Figure 4.16: Jeff's memory account

4.2.1.1.17 Rich

Rich studies at Elimu Secondary School. In his account he said he was a victim of domestic violence since he lives with his mother, siblings and stepfather. He recounted that in his memory account:

Rich 18

PAGE NO.:
DATE: 2 / 11 / 2022

please recall any memories you have in relation for
risks experienced during the covid 19 pandemic lock
down

During covid 19 I was not happy at all
I had two brother who they are elders to
me I used to be with my mom who loves
his sons and daughter equally but when I got
home morning my elders brother used to take
bes with to my mom.

I used to fight with my brother everyday
at noon time the way I used to live home
is that they said that am not their brother
and my father used to say that am not his
son. So I felt that it me and my mother
and sometimes I feel like to move out of
that family but, I understood that my brother
they are not well because they like to use
Chaghara, cigarette, bhang, miraa (khat).

One day during covid I decided to go
out of our home because they even used
to say that I will be a meat for the
dog

Then after a week I back home
to protect my mother and my younger sister
so that they can still go to school
and for my life I decided to drop out of
school in search of food for my sister
for me to back to school it something
very hard but I tried.

Figure 4.17: Rich's memory account.

4.2.1.1.18 Lez

Lez is a learner in Elimu Secondary school. He lives with his mother and siblings in Eldoret town. In his account, Lez narrated that he was involved in unhealthy relationships during the pandemic:

LEZ 17

PAGE NO.:
DATE: / /

It was Monday when my "girlfriend" and I went for a drink. We talked about many things but after some minutes she got a call and she left in a hurry. She even forgot his bag but she carried her phone with him so I decided to follow her and I found out that she was ~~also~~ dating my best friend. They ~~kept~~ kept dating for some weeks but one Sunday afternoon they were caught together and the father's boy called the girl's mother. I was doing my job when immediately the father's boy called my mother and I. The father's girl came in a hurry and he was very angry with the other boy. So we were sent to the cells for a night and early in the morning our parent came to bail us out. From that day we were separated with each other. But the other boy kept dating the girl until high school but the girl found out and they broke up. But we still end up in the same school with the other girl who was dating my best friend who I did not date her. From now on days I don't like anything to do with girls. The girl is responsible for breaking my heart and I don't want anything or dating a girl. But now I think every body deserves a second chance and I have found a new girl but I even found out that she has a boyfriend and she was only using me to spend money on her but I know girls like money so I decided not to date another girl because one girl dumped me and I dumped another.

Figure 4.18: Lez's memory account

4.2.1.2 Presentation of drawings

In this section, the drawings that were drawn by the participants are presented. Each participant made at least one drawing, depicting their experience of using drawings to bring to fore how the socio-ecological risks affected them during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. During the drawing sessions, all the participants were asked to caption their drawing(s) presented in this section. The participants made a total of twenty-two drawings. However, eleven drawings that were well illustrated with captions were analyzed in this study are presented.

4.2.1.2.1 Traf

Traf in her drawing, depicts COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as a period that the young people encountered several risky issues. She had recounted similar experiences in her memory account. Traf's drawing brings to fore issues of drug abuse among the young people as well as alcoholism during the lockdown. In the drawing, the victim is beaten by the parent because for misbehaving making the victim commit suicide.

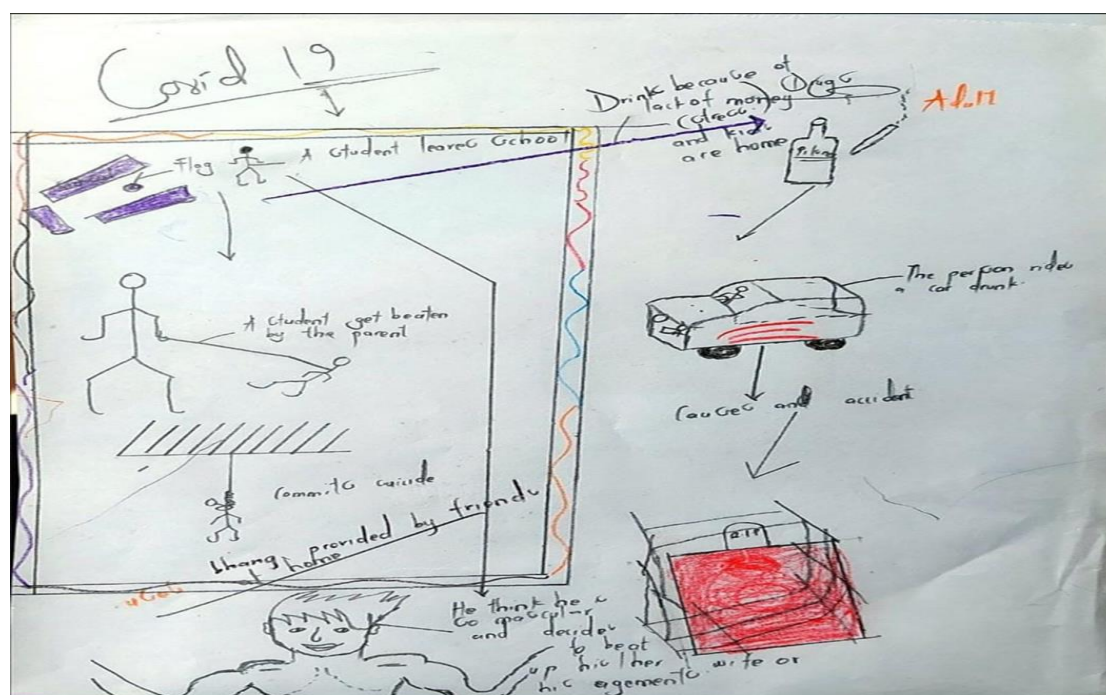


Figure 4.19: Traf's drawing.

Traf's experience is like to Arel's experience as illustrated in her drawing.

4.2.1.2.2 Arel

In her memory account, Arel mentioned several socio-ecological risks during the pandemic lockdown. These include abuse of drugs such as miraa and bhang, increase in theft cases by the young people and devastating effects of sex indulgence that led to pregnancy cases. In her drawing's caption, Arel wrote that she was too much addicted to drugs that her life was like a dark tunnel as shown by her drawing. Over time, she has come out of the mess as indicated by the candlelight in her drawing that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

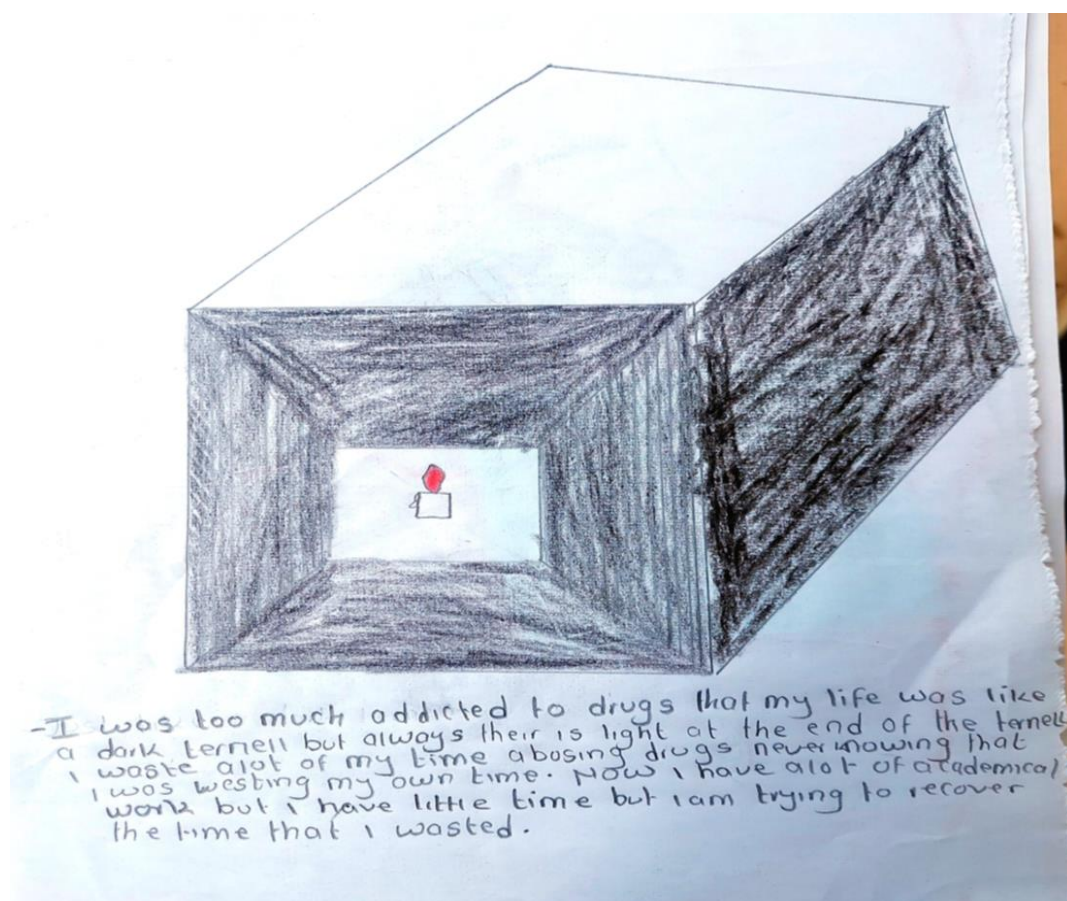


Figure 4.20: Arel's drawing.

Gaddafy shares similar experiences with Arel in his drawing.

4.2.1.2.3 Gaddafy

Gaddafy's drawing illustrates a broken life. He did not caption his drawing but rather did an oral explanation of it. His drawing shares similarly with his accounts of the

emergent issues during the pandemic lockdown. He said he had a broken life once he found out that his father was having an extra marital affair. That incident led to a domestic tension in their family, and it pushed him into abusing drugs. Gaddafy mentioned giving up in life and compared himself to the other young people that faced risks of FGM, STIs because of unsafe sexual practices and risks of early marriages.



Figure 4.21: Gaddafy's drawing.

Wiseman's experiences are similar to Gaddafy's as indicated.

4.2.1.2.4 Wiseman

Wiseman drew three pictures to illustrate his views concerning the socio-ecological risks during the pandemic lockdown. His first picture of two lions facing each other illustrates the psychological tension in their household since his parents issued strict rules to govern them. In his second drawing he explained that he needed to look for money. His third picture that he drew coins and notes meant that he was very important during the pandemic lockdown as he was admired by many ladies and girls thus making

him engage in sexual relationships. He eventually became a victim of STI and HIV and AIDS.

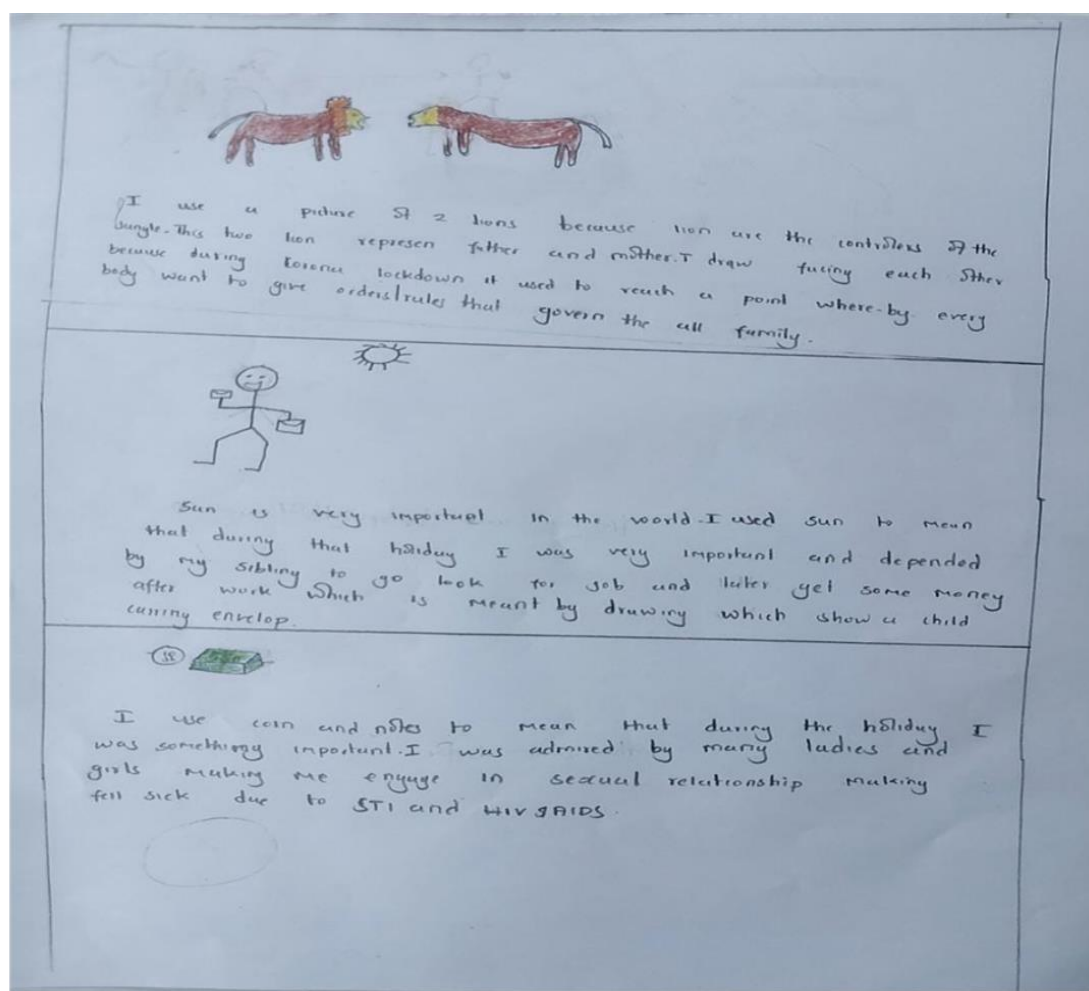


Figure 4.22: Wiseman's drawing.

Wiseman's devastating effects of sexual indulgence are shared by Ben in his drawing.

4.2.1.2.5 Ben

Ben admitted sneaking to indoor parties with friends during the pandemic lockdown. His drawing of a graveyard indicates the outcome of his risky behaviour whereby he indulged in a sexual relationship with a lady that was HIV positive. From his caption, he is yet to come to acceptance with what happened but takes medication. He commented that he is trying his best to make up for the lost time.

Roy shares similar experiences with Ben.

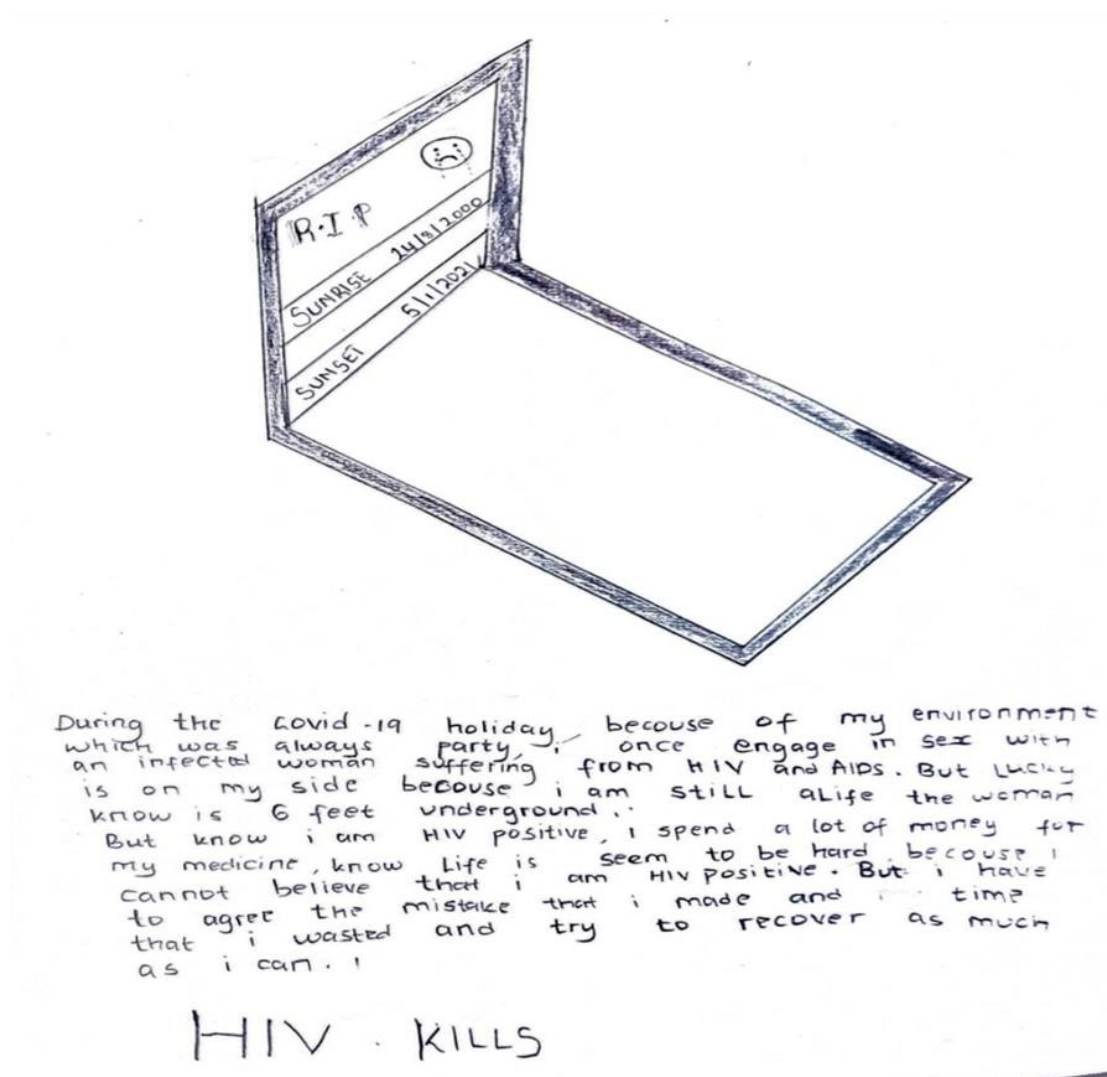


Figure 4.23: Ben's drawing

4.2.1.2.6 Roy

In her account, Roy mentioned being in a sexual relationship with a man and later own found out that he was a thug. She connected this in her drawing of a candle drip that indicates her life. She explained in her caption that she wasted so much of her time with bad company that she almost landed in the hands of the police. Just as Ben, she is trying to recover her lost time and has been through counselling.

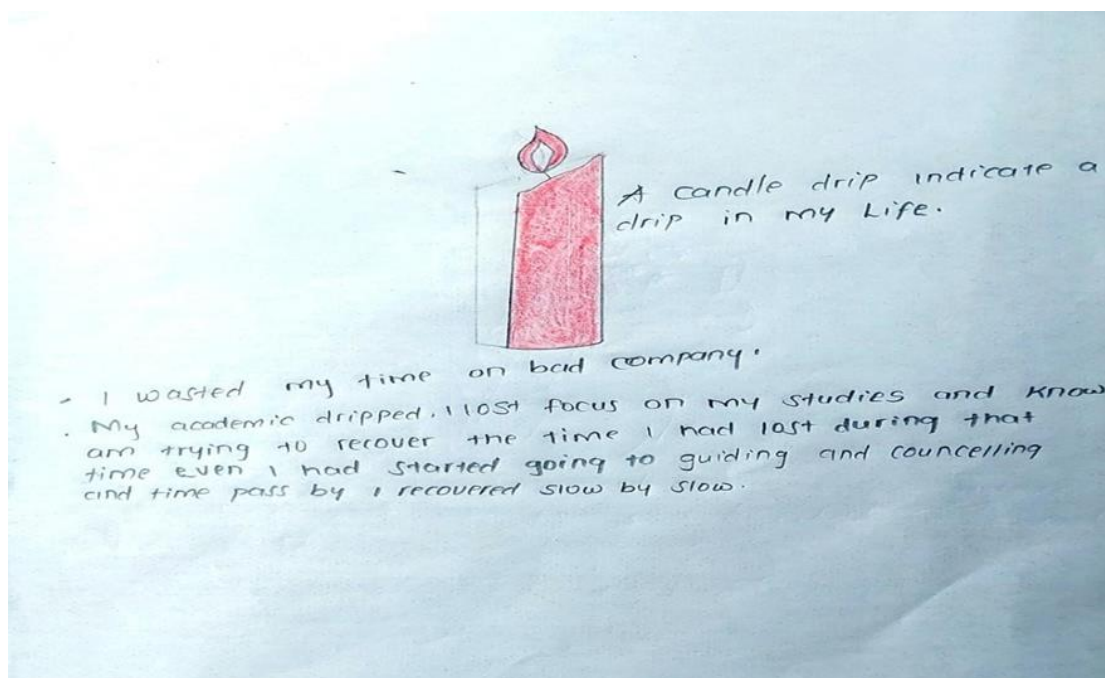


Figure 4.24: Roy's drawing

Ben and Roy's experiences have a similarity with what Justin faced during the pandemic lockdown.

4.2.1.2.7 Justin

Justin's memory account did not clearly depict her as the victim in the account as is in her drawings. She drew two drawings. The first, illustrating how she was sexually molested in a public service vehicle just before an attendant's timely intervention. The second drawing is an image of an eye. She explained that men looked at her lustfully. She fell into their traps and eventually contracted STIs. This led her indulge in drugs because of the stress of contracting STIs. She further became an initiate of an illegal FGM practice that was being conducted in their area.

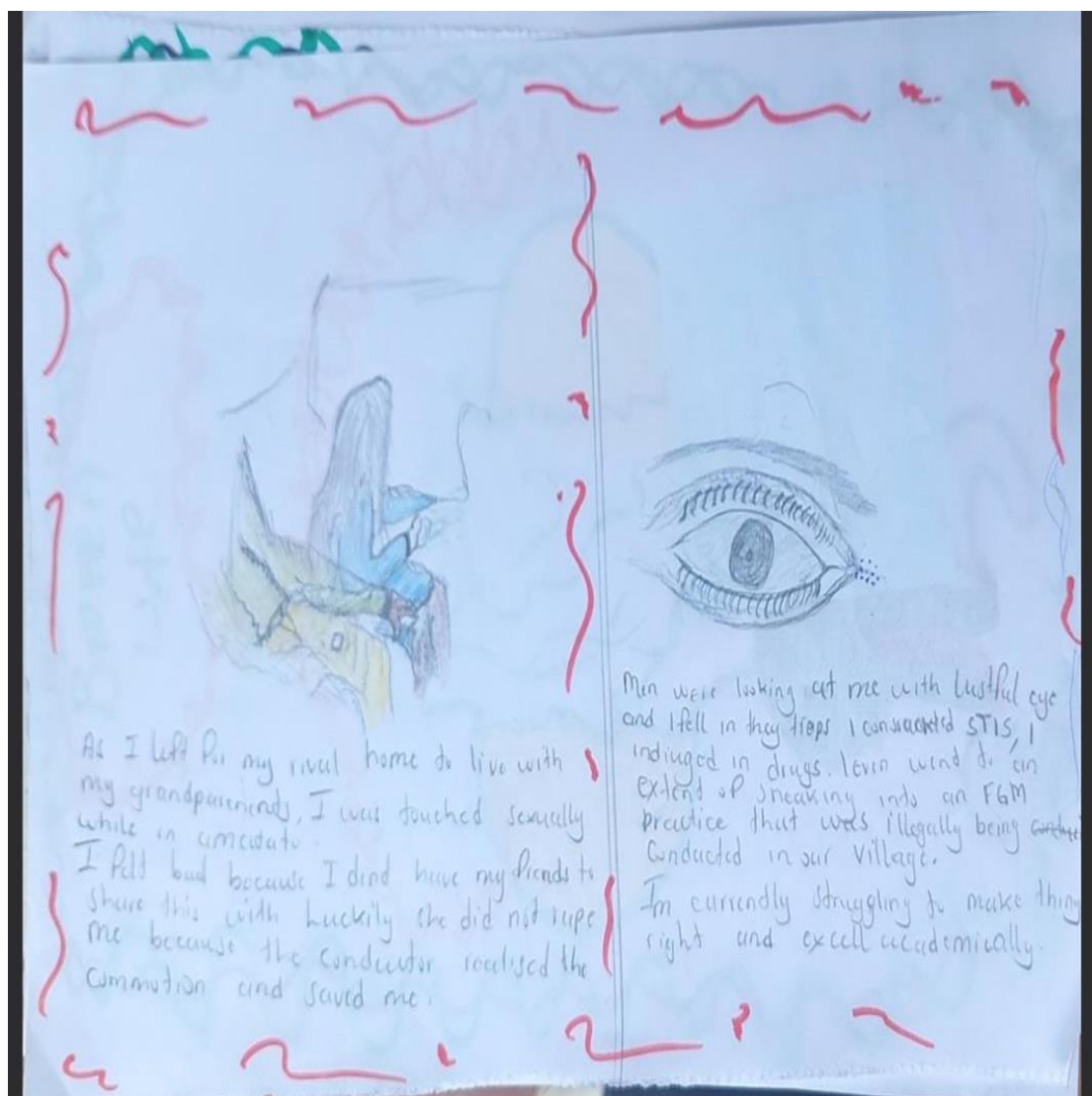


Figure 4.25: Justin's drawing.

The subsequent participants' drawings illustrate risks associated with sexual relationships.

4.2.1.2.8 Jane

Jane's drawing is that of a boy and a girl in a sexual relationship. She chose the picture because she said there was an increase in pregnancy cases during the pandemic lockdown and some of the girls affected could not continue with their schooling thereafter.



Figure 4.26: Jane's drawing

Glen shares a similar experience.

4.2.1.2.9 Glen

Glen's drawing of a bed and a red cross picture her experience during the pandemic lockdown. She mentioned that many girls became pregnant, and they were forced to drop out of school after the pandemic so as to take care of the babies. Glen was later lucky to get someone that took her back to school while her mother took care of her baby.

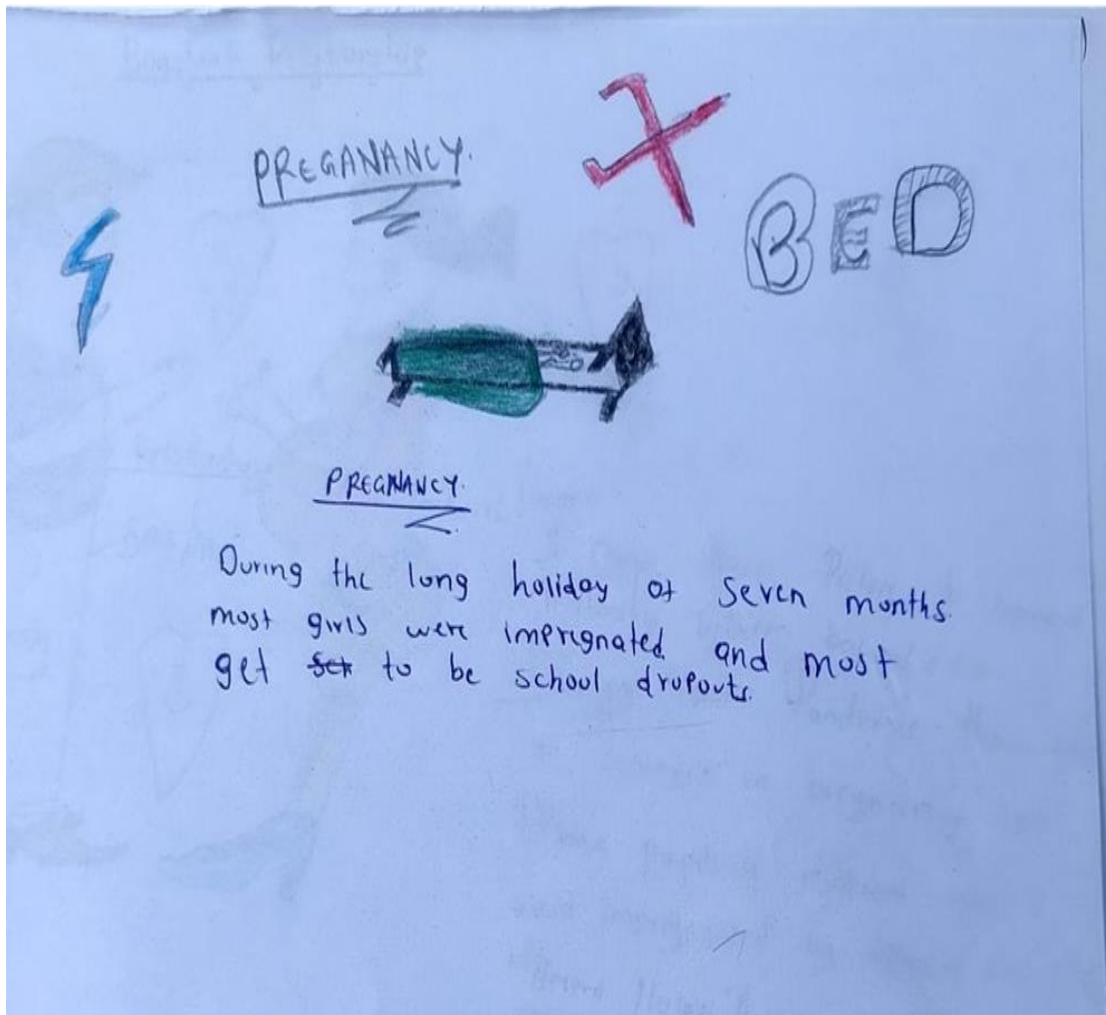


Figure 4.27: Glen's drawing.

Glen just like Larin received support from those that cared about them.

4.2.1.2.10 Larin

Larin whose mother was into drinking during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, drew two people hugging. In her caption, she narrated that she became pregnant and decided to abort. She later developed health complications because of the abortion that really affected her self-esteem. She mentioned that she was glad she received hugs from those that cared about her during that time.

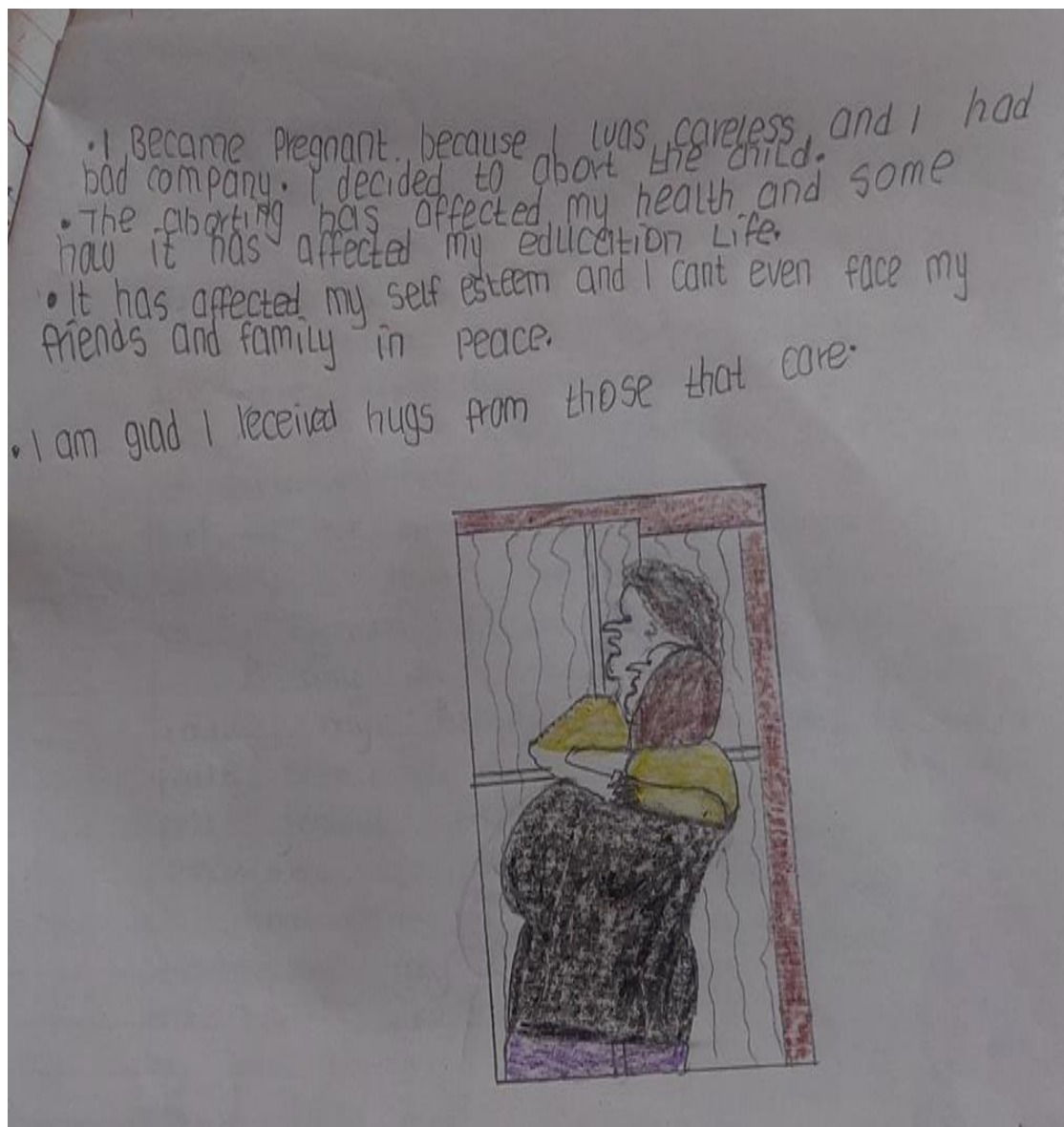


Figure 4.28: Larin's drawing.

Liz and Larin share similar experiences of living with drunk mothers.

4.2.1.2.11 Liz

Liz's drawing of a cracked cellphone depicts life like a crack. She captioned that girls attempted to abort pregnancies in vain because they lacked finances for the same. She said a mistake can be erased and worked on, just as a cracked phone can be repaired.

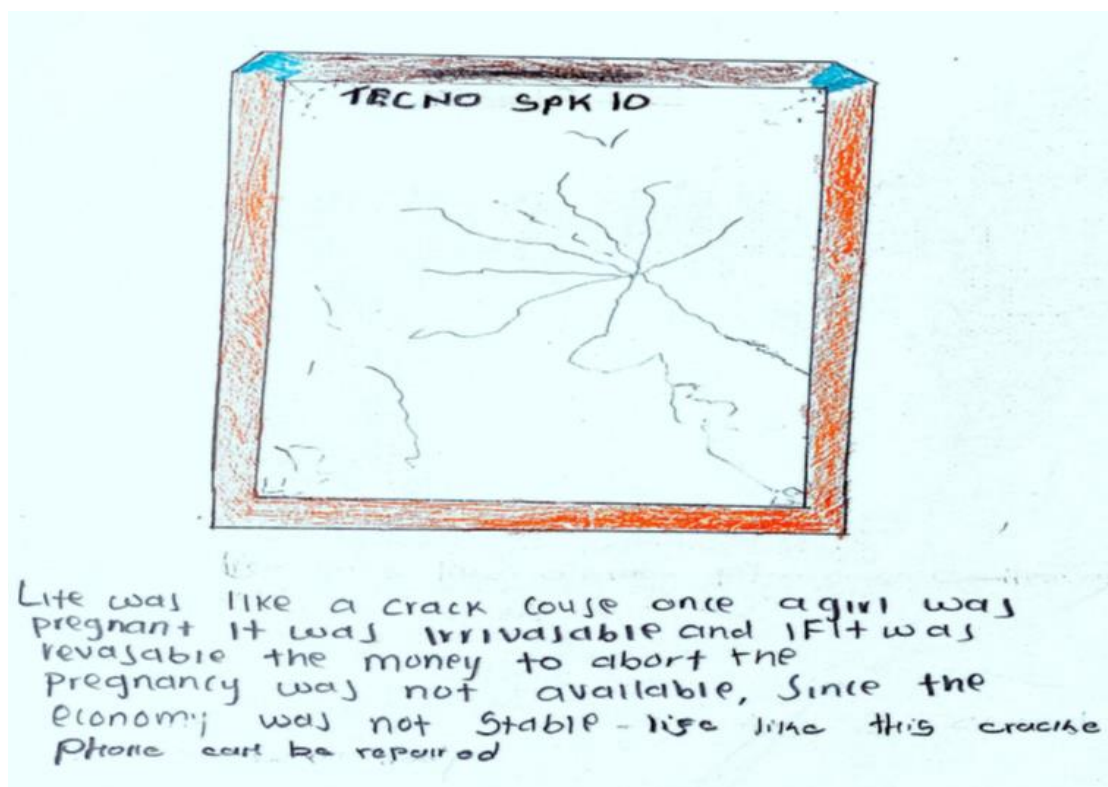


Figure 4.29: Liz's drawing.

The data generated through memory accounts, drawings and unstructured individual interviews answered the first research question of this study: *How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?*

From the participants' experiences as described by the unstructured individual interviews, memory accounts as well as drawings and the captions, three themes were generated through thematic analysis. These include participants' experiences on sexual related risks (theme 1), the experiences on family related risks (theme 2) and the experiences on criminal related risks (theme 3) (See table 4.2)

Table 4.2: Summary of the findings addressing the first research question

Theme		Categories	
1.	Sexual related risks	i.	Contracting STIs and HIV and AIDS
		ii.	Teenage pregnancies and abortions
		iii.	Addiction to pornographic videos
2.	Family related risks	i.	Domestic violence
		ii.	Alcoholism and drug abuse
3.	Criminal related risks	i.	FGM, forced early marriages and sexual and gender-based violence
		ii.	Suicide

4.2.1.3 Theme 1: Sexual related risks

These refers to the sexual acts and behaviors that affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and led to unintended results. It emerged from participants views that the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown came along with sexual related risk issues that affected the young people. The young were affected in several ways as they faced risks including: (i) contracting STIs, HIV and AIDS, (ii) teenage pregnancies and abortion, and (iii) addiction to pornographic videos (see table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Theme 1 and its categories

Theme 1	Categories
Sexual related risks	i. Contracting STIs and HIV and AIDS
	ii. Teenage pregnancies and abortions
	iii. Addiction to pornographic videos

4.2.1.3.1 Contracting STIs, HIV and AIDS

Whenever young people engage in sexual activities, they inevitably encounter potential risks associated with sexual indulgence. HIV and AIDS, as well as STIS are contracted/transmitted through sexual intercourse. Research has it that Kenya has the joint third-largest HIV epidemic in the world (alongside Tanzania) with 1.6 million people living with HIV in 2019 (UNAIDS, 2020). This means that the young, middle aged and the old people in Kenya risk contracting HIV and AIDS and related STIs when they indulge in unprotected sexual intercourse. According to UNAIDS (2017), Kenya

has had success stories in the recent past in the fight to zero rate HIV and AIDS. However, the COVID-19 pandemic came with setbacks over the same. The participants views seem to blend with these facts as evidenced from the following responses: Ben in his drawing captions that:

During the COVID-19 holiday because of my environment which was always party, I once engage in sex with an infected woman suffering from HIV and AIDS. But luck is on my side because I am still alive ...I know I am HIV positive; I spend a lot of money for my medicine.*

Wiseman's caption of his drawing of money in coin and note forms wrote that he felt that he was very important as he was admired by many women and fell victim:

I use coin and notes to mean that during the holiday, I was something important. I was admired by many ladies and girls making me engage in sexual relationship making fell sick due to STI and HIV and AIDS.

Of a similar experience is Justin, whereby she explains her experience of her drawing saying:

Men were looking at me with lustful eye and I fell in their traps. I contracted STIs.

Gaddafi's memory account captures the devastating risks affecting learners because of having multiple sexual partners. He wrote:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the risks of getting STIs were high because you could even have 20 girlfriends and they will love you and give you any time.

Traf in her account wrote that sexual activities brought about several risky issues on the young people:

Sexual abuse was one of the most arising factors which led to ...and transmission of sexually transmitted infections.*

In an interview with a participant, John, a PA member in one of the participating schools, he was of a similar experience as he said:

Cases of STIs and HIV and AIDS were on the rise as we heard and saw these cases in the neighbourhood.

From the responses of the participants given, they affirm that the learners were affected in different ways by the socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Stanford (2011) mentions that people who are ‘at risk’ are seen in terms of vulnerability, and those who are ‘a risk’ are considered in terms of their dangerousness. Basing on Stanford’s research, some of the young people were at risk of being infected because they fell in the traps of those that were a risk to them leading them to contracting STIs and HIV and AIDS as a result.

4.2.1.3.2 Teenage pregnancies and abortion

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic remained a pain to society because it complicated the efforts of reducing teenage pregnancies. It caused an immeasurable disruption to every aspect of lives. Sexual behaviour was on the rise since the teenagers had little to nothing to do, and it seemed to be riskier where parents didn’t really care what their children did while at home. According to UNFPA (2020), teenage pregnancies occurred because of limited capacity to negotiate for safe sex and consent, lack of protection against sexual violence, and the lack of access to contraceptive information and services to prevent unplanned pregnancy during the pandemic lockdown. In some situations, the girls resorted to unsafe abortions, which happened as personal or adult decisions imposed on them. In most cases, consequences of an unwanted pregnancy may be devastating for many young people, which may lead them to seek abortion in unsafe circumstances. The participants views suggest that most of the unplanned pregnancies and abortions occurred because of risks the young people were exposed to during the pandemic lockdown, as given in their responses.

Traf in his account wrote that sexual abuse led to unplanned pregnancies which further led to abortion:

Sexual abuse was one of the most arising factors which led to... which further lead to abortion...*

Glen found herself pregnant for a man that had pretended to rescue her family from poverty, since they had slept hungry in days during the lockdown. The man later offered her money to abort but she preferred to use that money to buy food for her family. This explains how she ended up as a young mother having been pushed by poverty. She wrote:

We had to sleep angry for one week till someone came and help us with some food for some three days. During that time, I met with a boy who just pretended to rescue my family from that problem and he told me that we can be *friendship partners as months move on, I got pregnant and the guy quiet the story of helping saying that he is not ready to have a kid he *lend me a thousand shilling for me to abort and I used the money to buy food for my family and carried on the pregnant...*

Arel shared a similar experience in her account as she wrote:

*Also, many of young girls were impregnated and the ones who gave them did not accept the pregnancy**

Jane felt that teenage pregnancies led some girls to commit suicide because of the shame of being in such a situation. She wrote:

**There were cases of pregnancy among young girls... some of the girls committed suicide because they fell shame in the community.*

In her drawing of a boy and a girl in a relationship, she reiterates on the dire consequences of teenage pregnancies:

*I choose *these picture to represent relationship between boy and a girl. During corona pandemic their* was an increase in pregnancy rate. Many pupils of different ages were impregnated by different men from different places. This made the girls not to continue with their studies immediately.*

Jane's views are affirmed by the Kenya Ministry of Health (2021) records which indicate that over 328,000 girls got pregnant in the first year of the pandemic. As schools reopened, a percentage of girls did not re-enroll and sit national examinations because of unintended pregnancies.

ANPPCAN (2021) posits that Kenya was experiencing economic instabilities at the time of the pandemic lockdown. The pandemic increased and worsened the vulnerability of young people to sexual exploitation. Of the same opinion are some participants felt that many girls were trapped into getting pregnant. Some of them kept the pregnancies because they did not have the money to finance abortion while others engaged in unsafe abortions that were cheaply availed to them. This is illustrated in Liz's drawing and an Interview with Periz, a teacher participant:

Researcher: *In your own opinion, how did the risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

Periz: *The participants were exposed to risks of poverty. The young people from poor backgrounds in our communities found themselves going against the odds to get food for their families. Some got impregnated and since many of them could not keep the pregnancy; opted to engage in cheap abortions that were risky to their health and lives in general.*

Liz drew a cracked phone to indicate a crack in life after being impregnated. She captions that:

*Life was like a crack *cause once a girl was pregnant, it was irreversible (keeping the pregnancy) and if it was reversible (abortion) the money to abort the pregnancy was not available, since the economy was not stable.*

Larin shares in her drawing that one risk associated with unsafe abortion is the aftermath of experiencing health issues and thereafter developing a low self-esteem because of the guilt:

I became pregnant because I was careless, and I had bad company. I decided to abort the child. The aborting has affected my health and somehow it has affected my education life. It has affected my self-esteem and I can't even face my friends and family in peace.*

From the participant data as well as the literature sources, there was an upsurge in pregnancy rates experienced as a risk issue that was brought about by factors ranging from poverty, inadequacy of contraceptive supply, idleness, parents, and guardian

negligence. This led the young people to risk unsafe abortion, which brought about issues of shame, health related complications and low self-esteem of those affected.

4.2.1.3.3 Addiction to pornographic videos

Pornography and its effects are a very provocative issue in both public and academic discourses. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, pornography consumption was seen as constructive coping behaviour to overcome pandemic-brought dullness and fear of the unknown (Grubbs, 2020; Lehmiller et al., 2020). In Kenya, as a response to school closures, the Ministry of Education established an emergency response strategy which charted the ministry's plan to endure provision of quality learning with an unbiased and inclusive online approach at home (MoE, 2020). The learners from well to do homes benefitted from the Ministry's plan but that was not the case based on Traf's memory account. Learners diverted from using the phones for academic work to watching pornographic videos which was a drive to sexual immorality and corrosion of moral values. Traf accounts that:

Due to introduction of e-learning. Most of the students used the phones in the wrong way like watching pornographic videos which lead to immoral behaviour and corrosion of moral values.*

Zack also feels that pornography affected their moral values as he shares in his account:

Our moral values were affected because you could find young people having boyfriend or girlfriend meeting and staying at the boys place for more than 2 nights having sex watching pornography together

Wiseman shared the same sentiments with Traf and Zack as he wrote:

...parents were buying data or paying wi-fi for children making children to be free to do everything they want hence this led to high immorality.

Ela, a PA in the boys' school mentions the negative effects of pornography access using the learning gadgets as she said:

Researcher: *Within these experiences, what were the risks that learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

Ela: *In our school, we encouraged our fellow parents to enroll the boys in the online classes that had been started by the school. Little did we know that most of our children used these academic platforms to share porn videos, others used their mobile phones to watch pornography, while others engaged in sexting and sending sexual videos to their alleged girlfriends. It was such a bad experience for us as parents!*

From the participants data, the young people were using their electronic gadgets for the wrong reasons during the lockdown. This affected their moral values as they practiced what they watched. As mentioned earlier, Grubbs (2020) and Lehmiller et al. (2020) suggest that part of the reasons people watch pornography to keep off idleness. This is suggested by Zack's account that some young people would meet and spend up to two nights together while at that time indulging in sexual activities or rather watching pornography. MOE (2020) and UNESCO (2020b) also posits that school closures intensified with constrained movements exacerbated cases of exposure to pornographic materials among the young people.

4.2.1.4 Theme 2: Family related risks

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a severe risk to the well-being of young people due to challenges associated with social interruption such as financial insecurity, caregiving burden, and confinement-related pressure. During the pandemic, many young people were forced to beg for food or take risky jobs to provide for their families leaving them unprotected and exposed to violence, abuse, and exploitation. It emerged from the participants that the learners were affected by family related risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in ways including: (i) domestic violence and (ii) alcoholism and drug abuse (see table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Theme 2 and its Categories

Theme	Categories
Family related risks	i. Domestic violence ii. Alcoholism and drug abuse

4.2.1.4.1 Domestic violence

Domestic violence encompasses acts of aggression that occur within the confines of a household, characteristically involving the violent abuse of a spouse, child, or a member of the family. Domestic violence heightens during times of crisis, including epidemics (Sety et al., 2014). From the data generated, families were facing heightened risks of domestic violence as family members spent most of the time together in isolation. Olingo (2020) posits that, businesses and schools' closures brought about many and diverse challenges such as physical and psychological risks, widespread job and income losses, family confinement, isolation, and economic vulnerability. Correspondingly, Massiot et al., (2022) argues that the pandemic lockdowns and school closures, aggravated household financial difficulties, increased stress among parents and decreased convenience to external social support. Thus, domestic violence towards children was aggravated. Family members redirected their fears and stress to their loved ones therefore creating tension within the household. This is described in Wiseman's account:

Some of the families where everybody wants to give order/rules
...hence lead to conflict.*

The youth were entrusted in the hands of some hostile parents that caused them more harm than safe. According to Muzungu (2020), the closure of schools and places of worship, which act as safe havens for many young people meant limited access to reach trusted adult figures who often can detect early signs of abuse. This is given in Zack's accounts in that some children could not reach out for help and ended up being beaten to death by their own parents:

Parents used to beat their children when they did wrong. Parents beat one of the children until he became paralyzed and died.

A similar experience was shared by Judy, a teacher in one of the participating schools that:

Parents were hostile to their children and most of our learners when asked, preferred being in school than staying at home. Some reported that they consistently got beaten without valid reasons back at home.

Gaddafi recounts going into drugs after he found out that their father was cheating on their mother. It caused a family tension as he told his siblings and insulted the lady in question. This clearly indicates the risks that can spike because of a tension within the family:

I mistakenly peeped in my father's phone chatting with a lady...it was so stressing that I told my siblings. I insulted her... I decided to go into drugs.

COVID-19 pandemic showed the negative outcomes of the lockdown and its accompanied restrictions that manifested as social stressors on family members, which possibly affected the children's mental health (Wade et al., 2020). Rich wrote that he consistently fought with his brother and would always be reminded by the stepfather that he was his illegitimate child. Such family rejection was a risk issue to Rich as this could easily account for a mental stressor to him. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown may have worsened existing while triggering tension within the home. Rich accounts that:

I used to fight with my brother everyday...my father used to say that I am not his child.

Parental violence has a risky impact on the children, derived from negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and resentment on the ensuing violent behavior. When parents conflict right before the children, there are possibilities of increased oppositional behavior from the children as they tend to disrespect their parents. Piquero

et al., (2020) argues that increased risk of violence between the parents during COVID-19 lockdown made it difficult for them to meet the children's needs as Jane accounts:

Another case is that there was disagreements bwtn* the members of the family. For example, the parents fighting when the children are around which will make the children disobey their parents.*

In view of the above, it is important that knowledge of the risk factors is vital for averting or reducing violence. It is crucial identifying the most appropriate forms of support and intervention to address these risks in future.

4.2.1.4.2 Alcoholism and drug abuse

Alcoholism refers to an addiction to the consumption of alcohol and irrational actions resulting from alcohol reliance whereas drug abuse is the habitual taking of addictive and illegal drugs. COVID-19 pandemic suggested increased levels of alcohol and drug use in Kenya (Jaguga, & Kiburi, 2020). It exposed complete vulnerability to the ordinary functioning of society. As a result of the accumulating stress, many young people found it difficult to cope with rising pressure and reverted to alcohol, drug and substance abuse.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns people with depression and anxiety signs reported the highest increase in alcohol consumption (Weis et al., 2021; Sallie et al., 2020; Pollard et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020). According to National Control of Alcohol and Drugs Authority (NACADA) (2020), when young people are not engaged and their movement is condensed, they are vulnerable to experiment on drugs or alcohol. The participants responses indicate the risky adventures of consumption of alcohol and drugs as given in their responses:

In his drawing Traf recounts how he was lured into alcoholism and drug abuse by his friends, and he was beaten up by his parents which gave him suicidal thoughts:

Draws a picture of a student who engaged in drug abuse (bhang provided by his friends at home) and alcoholism during the pandemic lockdown. The parents beat him up for the mistakes and he resorted to committing suicide.

Other participants shared similar experiences as Traf in that they were most indulging in alcoholism and drug abuse because of peer influence in the neighbourhood and being idle at home. This is because boredom is one of the challenges most people face when in a lockdown and some may be overanxiously obliged to resort to such behavioral activities as alcohol and substance abuse (Kim et al., 2021). This is illustrated from the following responses:

Traf accounts that:

Being idle at home leads to use of drug abuse which was a crucial thing. Also, as some of the students engaged in drug abuse, no one was there to guide them follow the right path.*

Jane in her account wrote:

I personally fall in alcohol addiction during the pandemic because of my friend introducing it to me and I cannot work without it*

Zack wrote that:

My neighbour went to a party at night and they were caught with bhang and taken to prison and paid a fine of twenty thousand shillings each and they were under 18 years of age.

Arel wrote:

During that pandemic lockdown, many of my colique neighbours were involved in drug abuse usage e.g., miraa, bhang and also Kuber*

Alexas wrote:

I almost got into alcoholism due to influence from my peers when I was forced to mercilessly take 'busaa'

Rean wrote:

Due to peer pressure my friends all got carried away into alcoholism. I as well ever tried the drink...

The relationship between stress and engaging in health-destructive behaviours exhibits a reinforcing tendency. Drawn from a different perspective, some young people

became victims of a variation in physiological stress and poor decision-making abilities from their parents which increased the risk of stress-induced alcohol consumption (Clay & Parker, 2020). Some of their parents would project stress on them after consuming alcohol while some young people would resort to alcohol because of stress induced by their parents. This was heightened by the mounting sense of hopelessness and helplessness that prompted increased use of drugs, with the likelihood of pushing users to become abusers (Chen et al., 2022). This is shared by some participants in their responses as follows:

Wiseman wrote:

Some get into field of drunken this was due to what parents drink* past 6p.m. which make children follow what their parents were doing.*

Zack in his account:

My father could come home drunk and could yell at mother to give him food and he did not buy anything and he could end up beating my mother and sometimes he could yell at me

Liz wrote:

During the COVID-19 pandemic I was so stressful because my mother was always drunk* throughout...she could just come at home and start to abuse me.*

Gaddafi wrote that he was pushed into using drugs when he found out that his father had an extra marital affair:

From that day I insulted her I've never cared about their relationship until now. I decided to go into drugs

The unpreparedness associated with COVID-19 that saw a change in lifestyle paved way for the mentioned stressful experiences as given in literature and participants views. COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns throughout the world had the potential to lead to alcohol and drug abuse on vulnerable individuals (Clay & Parker, 2020).

4.2.1.5 Theme 3: Criminal related risks

Crime can be understood in relations to risk exposure. Crime possibly occurs when likely offenders converge in space and time with suitable crime aims in the absence of proficient protectors against crime. It emerged from the participants that the learners were affected by crime related risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in ways including: (i) FGM, forced early marriages and Sexual and gender-based violence and (ii) suicide (see table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Theme 3 and its Categories

Theme	Categories
Criminal related risks	i. FGM, forced early marriages and sexual and gender-based violence ii. Suicide

4.2.1.5.1 FGM, forced early marriages and Sexual and gender-based violence

In Kenya, any violation to human rights is considered a criminal offence and warrants arrest. Female genital mutilation (FGM), which involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons (WHO, 2016), forced early marriages and sexual and gender-based violence are offences according to law. The implementation of FGM law and its enforcement remain a challenge (National Policy for the Eradication of FGM, 2019). COVID-19 lockdown led to increases in harmful cultural practices (Esho et al., 2022). This sharply contrasted to the progress made in reducing the prevalence of these practices in Kenya (Musa et al., 2021).

COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the rise in FGM, child forced marriage (CFM) and gender-based violence in Kenya. The pandemic undesirably affected execution of interventions to mitigate the same (Riley et al., 2021). These violations have far-reaching negative effects on the health of girls and women (Esho et al., 2017). This is supported by Periz, a teacher participant that said:

I noticed that one of my learners was always withdrawn after schools reopened. I talked to her to find out her problem and she said she had been forcefully taken through FGM. The pandemic lockdown saw her spend time in their remote home. FGM is still a common practice there. She confessed still having chronic pains, itching and vaginal discharge, that has made her withdrawn from her academics.

Ela shared a similar experience, having heard it from one of the parents she interacts with:

A parent confessed to us in one of our interactive sessions in my daughter's school that many girls from FGM practicing communities were undergoing severe health complication as the pandemic lockdown exposed them to the cut. Female teachers were asked to be very vigilant and rescue such victims from further psychological damages.

The aforementioned experiences demonstrate that schools provide comprehensive protection measures that include vigilance to coercions of FGM and forced marriage (UNFPA, 2020). Therefore, without the safety net provided by schools because of the lockdown, girls were exposed to an increase in risk factors. Moreover, main concern for girls is that being out of school for a lengthy period place them at risk of early marriage (Riley et al., 2021). This is evidenced in participants responses herein:

Justin in her drawing:

I even went to an extent of sneaking into an FGM practice that was illegally being conducted in our village

Gaddafy wrote:

Girls were mutilated and forced to marry at a young age.

Traf wrote:

Sexual abuse was one of the most arising factors which lead to early marriages ...The girls underwent through FGM which it was a harmful to the girls life

Unlike, Traf, Gaddafy and Justin's accounts on FGM and forced marriages, Joyce's account and Judy's interview response illustrate the devastating risks associated with rape. Joyce wrote that the girl committed suicide after she was forced to sleep with men:

My cousin told my mother...she told my mom that my aunt has been coming with full grown men and tell her to sleep with them so my aunt can get money to pay the rent and to buy food...*

In Judy's interview response, girls who have faced sexual abuse hardly cope with the rest of the learners. They are always withdrawn and suffer esteem and mental health issues:

Researcher: *Within these experiences, what were the risks learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

Judy: *Some of our female learners were being sexually molested by people known to them. Some learners reported having been forced by their mothers to sleep with men for material gain...these acts lowered their self-esteem and affected their mental health.*

As illustrated from Judy and Joyce's responses, adolescent girls' absence from school, tied with the lack of alternate safe spaces, was associated with increased vulnerability to sexual violence from family members and others, including guardians, neighbours, and other community members (Barchielli et al., 2021). While the actions taken to curb COVID-19 unquestionably curbed the spread of the disease, they seemed to be compromising the safety and well-being of citizens during lockdown (Chagema, 2023; Rockowitz et al., 2021; Flowe et al., 2020; Mutiso et al., 2020; Memiah et al., 2020).

4.2.1.5.2 Suicide

Suicide is the termination of emotionally vulnerable people's life. A few prior stages ought to pass before a suicide completion, which includes suicidal ideation or thought, suicide plan, suicide attempt, (Mamun et al, 2020: Klonsky, 2016). Youth suicide is a significant global public health problem (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Suicidal cases were on the rise during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Depression, anxiety, isolation, and decreased social support associated with COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns likely contributed to increased suicide risk in youth (Hill et al., 2021; Hawes et al., 2020).

The participants responses highlight the suicidal risks that the young people faced in their socio-ecological setup. Some participants wrote that some of their peers committed suicide in relation to what they were going through in their homesteads. Some girls opted to take their lives because they could not live with the shame of pregnancy, abortion, rape, and domestic violence. since schools which serve as safe havens for learners were closed, and in as much as some learners interacted with their teachers online, teachers becoming aware of any behavioral fluctuations was challenging. Thus, learners were left without much social support (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020; Erbacher, 2020). Here in are participants experiences as written in their accounts:

Joyce wrote:

She told my mom that my aunt has been coming with grown up men and tell her to sleep with them...after a few days later we had that my cousin killed herself by starbing* herself in the chest...*

Jane wrote:

Some of the girls committed suicide because they fell shame in the community

Liz recalled that:

She could throw me out of the house until their was a moment I was going to commit suicide...*

The pandemic forced people out of their comfort zones and impacted their emotional and mental health (Barkur et al., 2020; Tandon, 2020). while adults may have been better equipped to handle the disruptions, young people were greatly impacted (Marsden et al., 2020). In an interview with John, a PA participant, he commented that most of the learners in his community came from very humble backgrounds and found it difficult adjusting to life without free food in school and teacher shelter. The deprivation of the school comfort zone led some of them to taking their own lives:

Researcher: *In your own opinion, how did the risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

John: *The risks of staying home for a long time, facing challenges of even getting the basic needs like food and sanitary wear for the girls pushed some young people to mental health issues. Some went to an extent of committing suicide! Many of our young people felt lost in the community and this was basically heightened by the uncertainties of the pandemic.*

The isolation from friends, teachers and peers caused by the lockdown resulted in young people being extremely sensitive thus leading to mental stress (Li et al., 2020). To avert such eventualities in future, the young people should learn to take the bull by the horns. They should be encouraged to face difficulties head on and be more resilient to them.

4.2.2 Learners Perception of Socio-Ecological Risks Experienced During COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown

The second research question sought to explore how learners perceived socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The research question was stated as follows: *How do learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?* Data related to this question was mainly generated through cellphilms and focus group discussion. Twenty participants from the three participating schools took part in cellphilming to generate data that answered this research question. The participants worked in three groups, one per the participating groups in the three schools.

4.2.2.1 Presentation of samples of Cellphilms

Cellphilm presented herein were used to generate data to answer the second research question of the study:

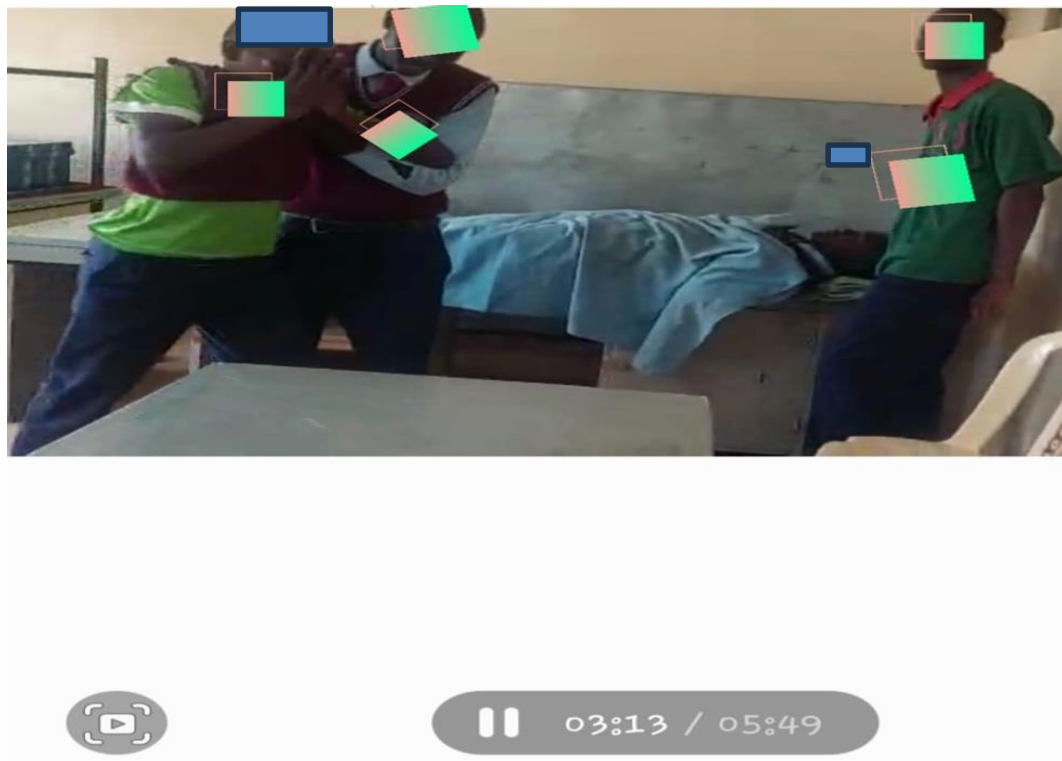


Figure 4.30: A cellphilm presentation of the devastating effects of COVID-19 pandemic that exposed young people to various risks

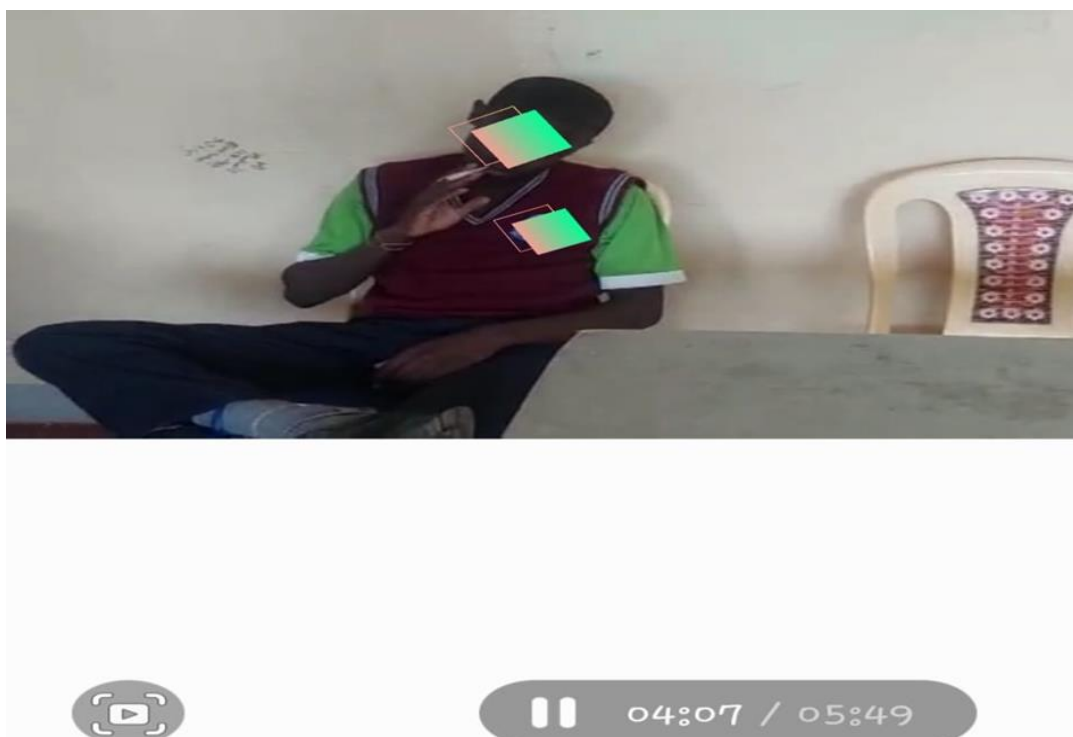


Figure 4.31: A cellphilm presentation of a young person smoking bhang

The participants perceived the pandemic risks in three ways; first as psychologically torturing by causing fear and emotional instability/distress (theme 1). Secondly, as life destructive for it led to school drop-out, caused family conflicts and lose of hope after contracting diseases (theme 2). Finally, as lowering their integrity as they caused shame and guilt and led to victimization of affected young people (theme 3). These findings are summarized in table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Summary of the findings addressing the second research question

Theme	Categories
1. Psychologically torturing	i. Fear ii. Emotional instability/distress
Life destructive	i. Dropping out of school ii. Family conflicts iii. Losing hope after contracting diseases and getting pregnant
Lowering integrity	i. Shame and guilt ii. Victimization

4.2.2.2 Theme 1: Psychologically torturing

This refers to the infliction of physical or mental suffering on a person. The risks that learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown inflicted so much pain on them both physically and mentally. The data generated from the participants indicate that the learners have varied perceptions of the socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. These are: (i) Fear, and (ii) Emotional instability (see table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Theme 1 and its categories

Theme 1	Categories
Psychologically torturing	Fear Emotional instability/distress

4.2.2.2.1 Fear

Fear is a result of psychological distress resulting from actions. It violates someone's moral and ethical conduct. Researchers have found that most risk issues affecting the young people occur while they are away from school (Litz, 2009). While governments focused on containment of the pandemic, they failed to put into consideration the risks that the young people were possibly going through because of the lockdown. Participants perceived that the risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic created a sense of fear in them. The risk in this category includes sexual violence and suicide.

The victims of sexual violence were mostly deceived, enticed or forced by the offenders into the sexual abuse. Such victims developed fear of staying around people that could possibly exert the same physical harm on them. This means that such victims need support network and strategize to cope with the trauma associated with sexual violence to avoid a reoccurrence (Papalia et al., 2021; Addae, 2021). Some participants complained of long-lasting psychological harm because of sexual violence. In the focus group discussion, a participant mentioned that:

My cousin developed fear after being consistently molested by strange men. She decided to commit suicide. That was a very low moment for us.

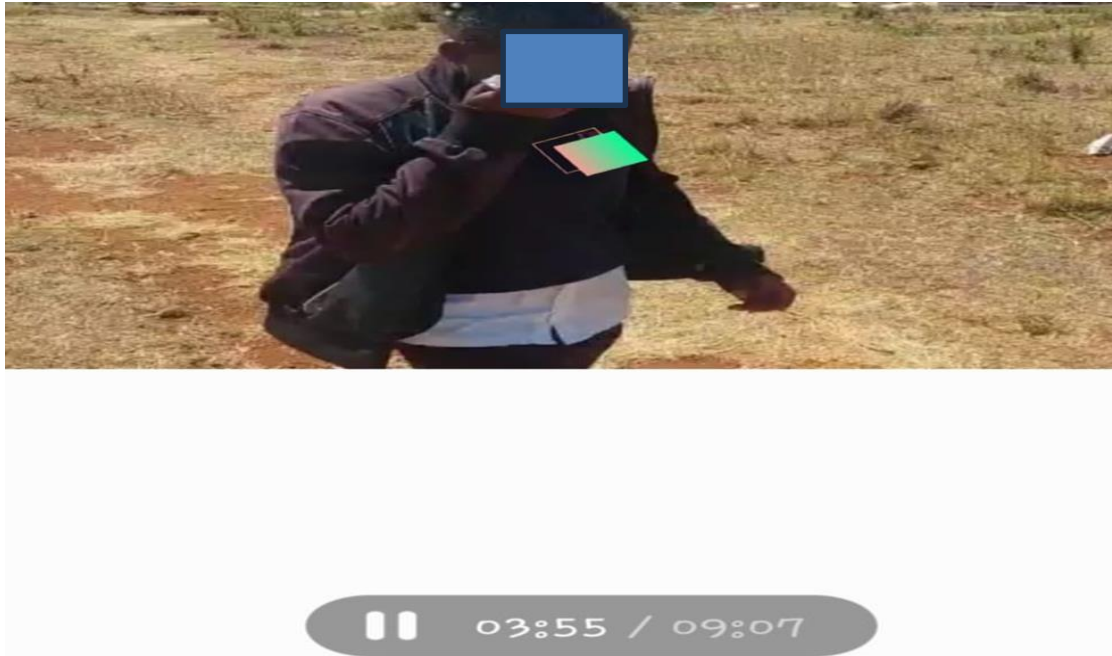


Figure 4.32: Cellphilm presentation of a girl after being sexually molested by three men.

The picture presented, is part of the cellphilm created by the participants, the girl in the picture is frowning and fearful after being attacked and raped by three men at ago. She shuns away from facing her fears and hides the truth from her parents who later own discover it as she became pregnant.



Figure 4.33: A cellphilm presentation of a victim of sexual molestation finally facing her mother

Young people who became victims of family fights developed fear associated with their family environment. They perceived fear as having led them loose trust in their family. Participants felt that their homes were no longer safe havens for them and preferred school over home (Peterman et al., 2020).

In conclusion, since learners regard schools as safe havens, the school counselling units should always strive to offer learners that went through such fears during the pandemic lockdown to fit with the rest of the learners in their institutions.

4.2.2.2.2 Emotional instability/distress

Emotional instability refers to a form of behavior characterized by prevailing, erratic, and sometimes rapid changes in emotions, thoughts, moods, and feelings of a person.

It was hard for the learners to cope with the school closures and loss of learning loss. Most learners faced social seclusion and solitude during the pandemic and some of them with more vulnerability experienced further trauma and disruption. These disruptions stretched from loss of members of the family, loss of parents and guardians' jobs loss, heightened poverty levels leading to food and accommodation insecurity and turning caregivers for their siblings (Winston, 2022).



Figure 4.34: A cellphilm of learners coping with abrupt school closures and exposure to risks

The cellphlms presented are presentation shared by teams of the participants sharing that the pandemic lockdown period was emotionally difficult for them and their families. They had suffered domestic and sexual abuse, and they carried these traumatic experiences back to schools as they reopened. The young people's social lives were greatly impacted by the pandemic since they lost their experience of connecting with peers and adults in the academic setup. This led to increased loneliness and social isolation therefore causing their emotional instabilities (Holmes et al., 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Learners hailing from economically straining families are more likely to face emotional and mental health problems, this could negatively affect their effectiveness and quality of life (Bundervoet et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2020). In the focus group discussion, a participant mentioned that her parents were unable to feed her with her young child and she went through a lot looking for casual jobs to get money for food. She admitted going through emotional torture because of the heavy responsibility at home.

Similarly, in a cellphilm shared by one of the teams, Thored shares his experience of going through an emotional trauma because of losing his father. His father was a doctor at a hospital in town and his mother is a housewife. In June 2020, he lost his father due to COVID-19 related complications. This caused stress on him as well as their family who were worried about how they were going to survive without money. This stress led Thored into drug and substance abuse to relieve himself from the tension. The stress affected him a lot that he had to be taken to a rehabilitation center for containment as a rescue strategy.

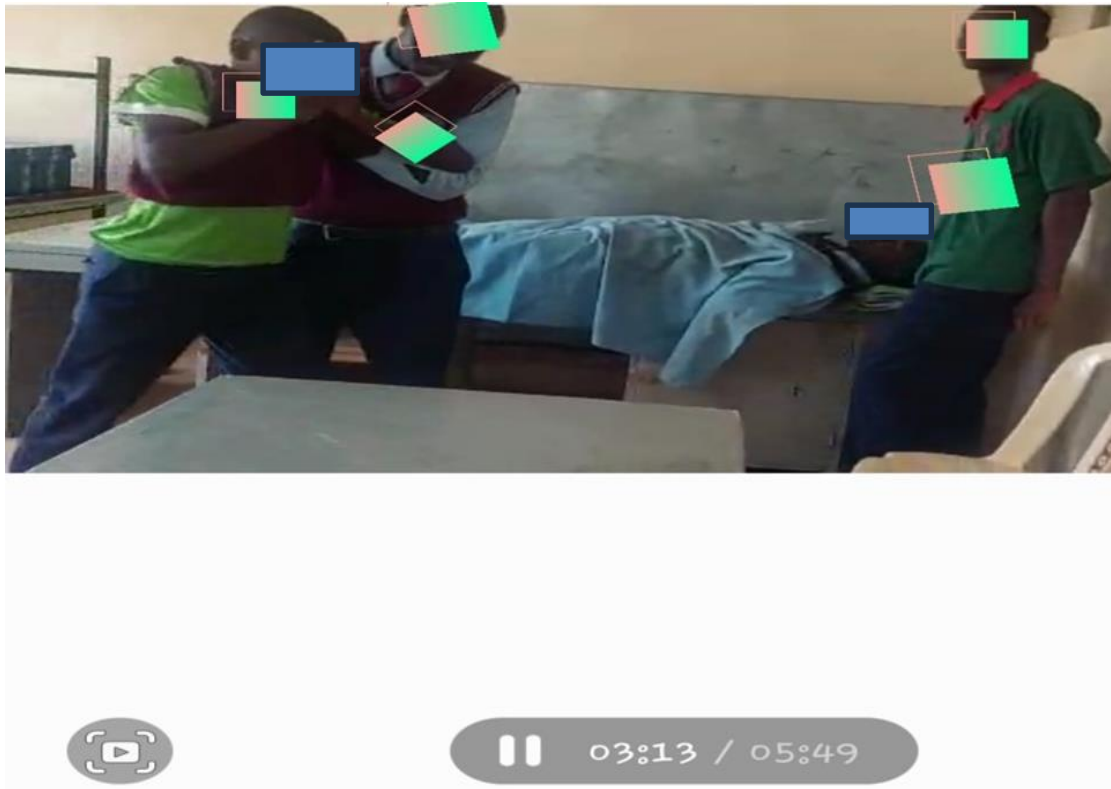


Figure 4.35: A cellphilm of a distressed child (Thored) who lost their family breadwinner

Another traumatic experience shared by the participants involved one of them (Lez) going through an emotional phase after his father lost his job during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Being the eldest son, he had to be a caregiver and provide for his family that was already worried on how they would get food and pay rent. He resorted to stealing to money to buy food. His father later own discovered and was stopped from doing so. Later own when schools opened, and his father was still jobless, he did not want to engage with his classmates, he disengaged for a couple of months and fell off in class. He was later taken through counselling sessions. This simply implies that the lack of basic needs are indeed a harmful source of anger, anxiety, and frustration (Brooks et al., 2020).

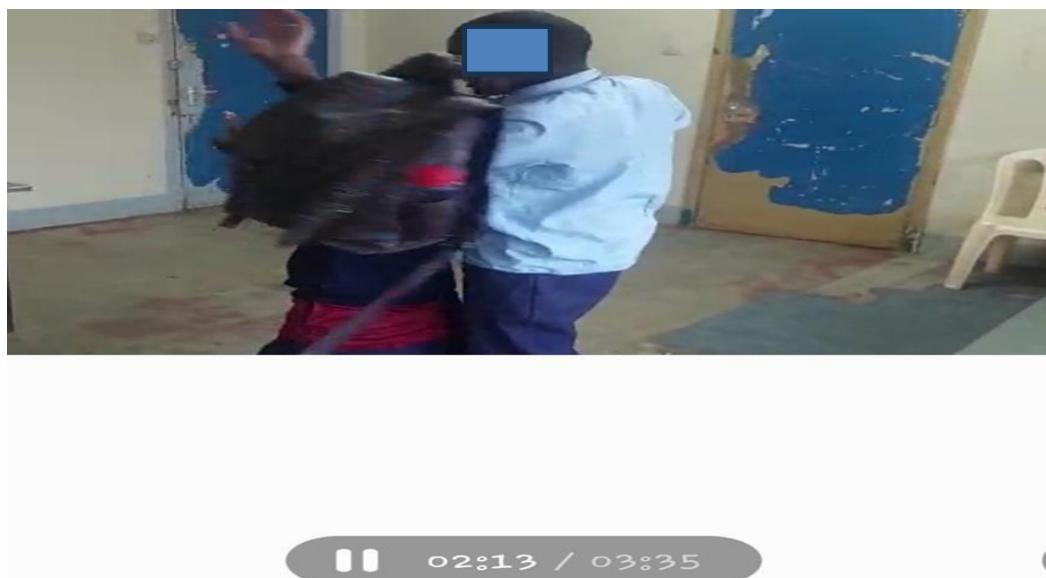


Figure 4.36: A cellphilm of a young person (Lez) stealing to get money for their family subsistence

Indeed, COVID-19 related risks and hopelessness led the young people to emotional instabilities during and after the pandemic lockdown. Despite the downsides, the pandemic gave the young people an opportunity to cross check their lives and make decisions that improve their lives now and in the future.

4.2.2.3 Theme 2: Life destructive

COVID-19 pandemic is one of the biggest life destructive pandemics that the world has ever faced. It destroyed individuals in all aspects of their lives. COVID-19 had a significant effect on the academic lives of the young people. This is because people all over the world were forced to adjust to a life other than the norm, staying home safely and avoiding further spread of the disease. From the participants responses, they perceived the pandemic lockdown as life destructive in that it led to: (i) dropping out of school, (ii) family conflicts and (iii) loosing hope because of contracting diseases and becoming pregnant (see table 4.8).

Table 4.8: Theme 2 and its categories

Theme 2	Categories
Life destructive	i. Dropping out of school ii. Family conflicts iii. Losing hope after contracting diseases and getting pregnant

4.2.2.3.1 Dropping out of school

Education is an essential human right and basically empowers human beings to be free from all kinds of seclusion and domination. It contributes to the fullest development of human beings and a deprivation of education destroys the future wellbeing of an individual. The more educated individuals are, the more it contributes to the nation's developmental options (Tenbusch, 2016; Basher, 2010). A learner's drop out of school is characterized by many parameters ranging from individual, family and social one. For instance, sexual and reproductive health harms (i.e., pregnancy), poverty and gender inequality (Zuleika et al., 2021; Duke, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, many academic institutions shifted from face-to-face to virtual teaching. Most learners were affected worldwide especially those that could not manage to adapt to remote learning because of the mentioned varied challenges (Moscoviz et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2020).



Figure 4.37: A cellfilm presentation of learners idling and engaging in life destructive activities (smoking)



Figure 4.38: A cellfilm of three young people after sexually molesting a girl.

This literature is supported by data from this study in that the cellphilm presented, demonstrate that young people were left out in online learning as their schools did not have such learning arrangements. This then led them to engage in peer activities that were life destructive (i.e., sexual activities leading to pregnancies and abortion that had long term health effects as well as drug addiction). Consequently, some of their peers dropped out of school after the pandemic lockdown. Having schools shut down, most learners from low socio-economic status experienced increased school dropout rates globally after the lockdown was lifted. In rural parts of Kenya, researchers observed a triplicated risk of school dropout amongst secondary school learners more especially the girls from 3.2% in pre-pandemic years to 9.4% during the pandemic period (Zulaika et al., 2022). COVID-19 pandemic lockdown threatened the unhampered school attendance by many learners globally, broadening the educational and social discrepancy among them. Thus, rendering the disadvantaged learners more at risk of deserting school prematurely (Zuleika et al., 2022; Miller, 2020). This study highlighted the harmful and possibly long-term effects COVID-19 pandemic on the learners with dropout rates varying intensely across settings, concentrated more among learners from low-income families. The findings in this study are in line with other studies that have shown heightened life destructive repercussions as caused by COVID-19 related containments.

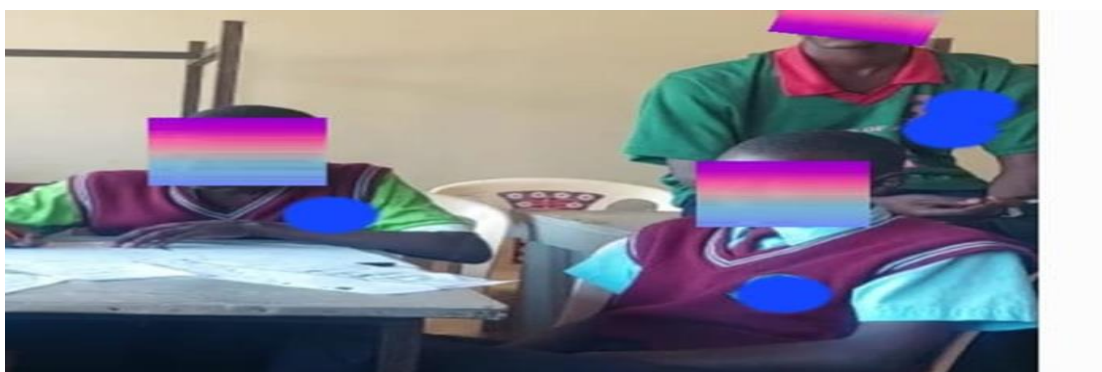


Figure 4.39: A cellphilm of three boys brainstorming

In the attached cellphilm, the three boys were sharing ideas on how to make money for their social needs. The long stay away from school gave them opportunities to engage in manual work which had negative effects as they confessed that some of their friends quit school after the lockdown because they had subsequently turned breadwinners in their families. One of them had dropped along the way but had been convinced to return by his guardian. The participants views align with some studies that show that once engaged in economic activities, the young people had to maintain those engagements even after schools reopened to aid sustain their families (Burzynska et al., 2020; Baron et al., 2020; Zuleika et al., 2021).

Zuleika et al. (2022) mention that some factors that lead to school dropout are pregnancy cases as experienced by some participants as given in the cellphilms and focus group discussions. Two girl participants were forced to be away from school after resumption because of pregnancy. They were later taken back to school by well-wishers and parents that opted to take care of their babies for them to get a chance of going back to school. It is worth noting that not most of their peers were lucky to be part of the return to school team and are struggling to make ends meet at home.



Figure 4.40: A cellphilm presentation of a young nursing mother who had to drop out of school after becoming a young mother

In conclusion, COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and related school closures had substantial life destructive effects on schooling. Therefore, appropriate measures that support in buffering the consequences of such emergencies on vulnerable young people are warranted.

4.2.2.3.2 Family conflicts

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown degenerated the living conditions of young people, placing them at an increased risk of diverse forms of abuse. Reports indicate that there were increased cases of family conflicts during this period (Usher et al., 2020). This was heightened by pandemic-related tension and income loss. Because of the diminishing household incomes, being idle, feeling less safe at home and persistent quarrels by household members, the young people were pushed to engage in life destructive activities. This included peer influenced activities such as sexual indulgence which exposed them to risks of STIs and HIV and AIDS, drug and substance abuse, abortions among other risks (Muzungu, 2020; Baron et al., 2020). Family related stress can be a drive to mental health problems for young people across the lifespan. This is associated with a lack of a positive and supportive home and learning environments.

The literature given is similar to participants cellphilm production as given:

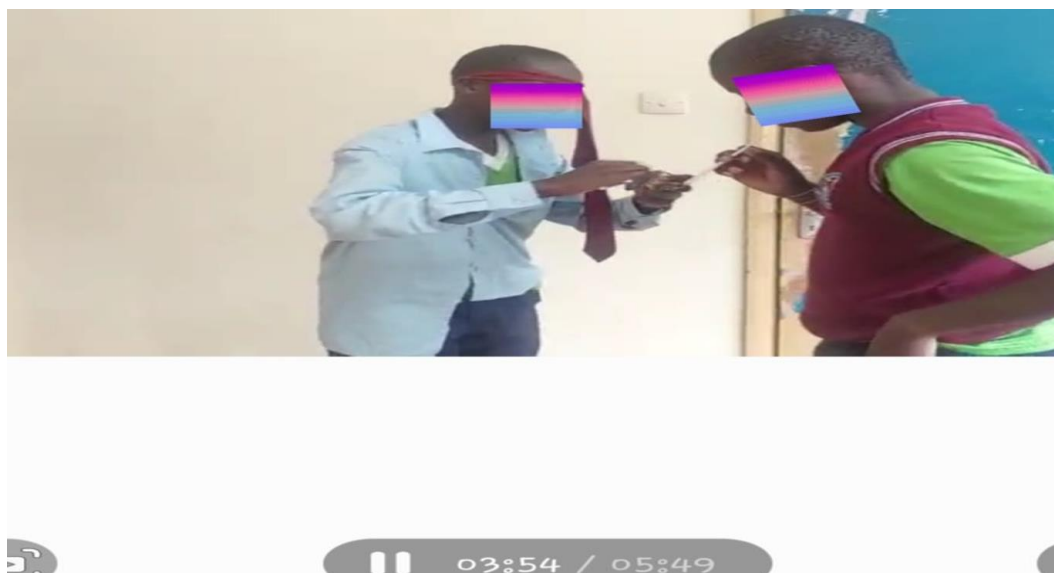


Figure 4.41: A cellphilm of young people who have resorted to drug abuse because of family related conflicts

Because of the containment directive by the government, there was a lot of much stress in the homes and the young people filmed, would meet up to pass time, they influenced each other into drug and substance abuse. This did not go well with them as they became addicts. On one occasion, they raped a girl that was walking alone in the forested area they would meet up. All these are life destructive as they risked contacting sexually transmitted diseases and health related complications as a result of drug addiction.

In the focus group discussion, a participant said:

I come from a large family. Because of family conflicts, I decided to look for a job so that I could buy food, because that was the cause of our problems. I was cheated by a man that pretended he could give me money if I slept with him. I got pregnant and he gave me money for abortion and disappeared. I used the money to buy food for my family. I am currently raising my child as I go to school.



Figure 4.42: A cellphilm of a girl in a family conflict for getting pregnant after a mass rape

From these data, it is suggested that pandemic challenges may introduce volatility and chaos into the household (Daks et al., 2020). As parents struggle meeting their demands, they may permit their children greater independence or dependency on children to sustain the family. Thus, exposing them to risky behaviours outside their homes (Sanzana et al., 2023). These family struggles can be a push factor to teenage pregnancy and early marriage, which persist to be significant difficulties for Kenya's adolescent girls, limiting their ability to complete school and exploit their potential (MoH, 2021; WHO, 2020).

Domestic conflicts, poverty, hunger and food insecurity are life destructive as they push people within a household to indulge in risky activities (Divala et al., 2020; Senghore et al., 2020). These critical challenges among households aggravate cases of exposure to increased rape, drug and substance abuse, exposure to pornographic materials, drug and substance abuse and suicidal ideation (MOE, 2020; UNESCO, 2020b).

During the pandemic lockdown, there were also cases of conflicts among the children within the home. The sudden changes and divergent responsibilities contributed to their emotional distress during the pandemic lockdown (Daks et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021). This paved way into engaging in greater household chaos that were life destructive to the well-being of the young people (Marsh et al., 2020).

It is recommended that parents, guardians and teachers generate constructive and helpful home and learning settings that may help lower levels of adopting distress in young people especially during pandemic lockdowns.

4.2.2.3.3 Losing hope after contracting diseases and getting pregnant

Hope is proactive eagerness attached with risk and progressive waiting (Bruininks, 2016; Roitman, 2014). Schools have always been considered crucial in supporting the health and wellbeing of learners as they provide whole round opportunities that can aid in protecting against negative outcomes (Humphrey et al., 2013). COVID-19 pandemic lockdown exposed learners to various risks in their socio-ecological settings that could have been partly preventable had they been in school. There were increased cases of STIs including HIV and AIDS, unplanned pregnancies, sexual violence, untreated physical injuries and suicide (UN Women & Snyder, 2020; Shipeolu et al., 2020). Failure to support young people that became victims of these issues risked losing hope in life (Shipeolu et al., 2020) since such risks possibly led to early end of education or mental health problems amongst the young people therefore reducing their chances of securing rewarding employment as adults.

In Kenya, media reports stated spiked adolescent pregnancies due to COVID-19 associated restraint measures, this raised concerns about schooling outcomes to the vulnerable youth (Nyothach, 2021; Mersie, 2020). Girls who were pregnant had a high chance of marrying, despite their young age whereas some dropped out of school.

Withdrawal from school is directly linked to loss of hope for a brighter future by the victims heightened by depression levels, social stigma, emotional support, isolation and lack of proper access to good healthcare (Thayer et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2020).

The participants shared the following views suggesting how devastated they were as a result of the pandemic lockdown. In the focus group discussion, a participant said:

... hopefully my baby will get a good education. My academic life has been affected because of the baby; I feel like giving up in life but I hope everything will work out.

Another participant said:

I could not believe I was HIV positive; it was like my life had come to an end...I am currently trying to pick up and accept and move on as I take drugs.

In a cellphilm, a participant is seen contemplating quitting school as a result of depression.

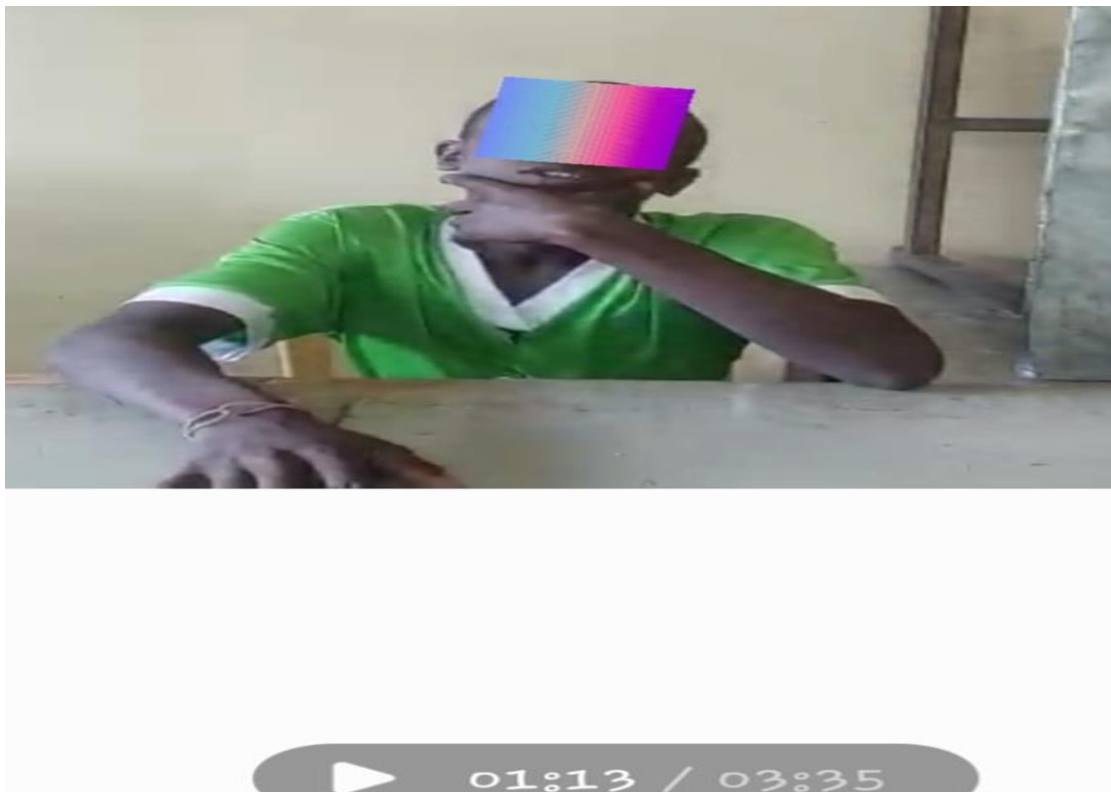


Figure 4.43: A cellphilm of a depressed boy contemplating suicide

In another cellphilm, the participants demonstrate a pictured destructive effect of risks whereby a female participant contemplates committing suicide because got raped and contacted STIs.

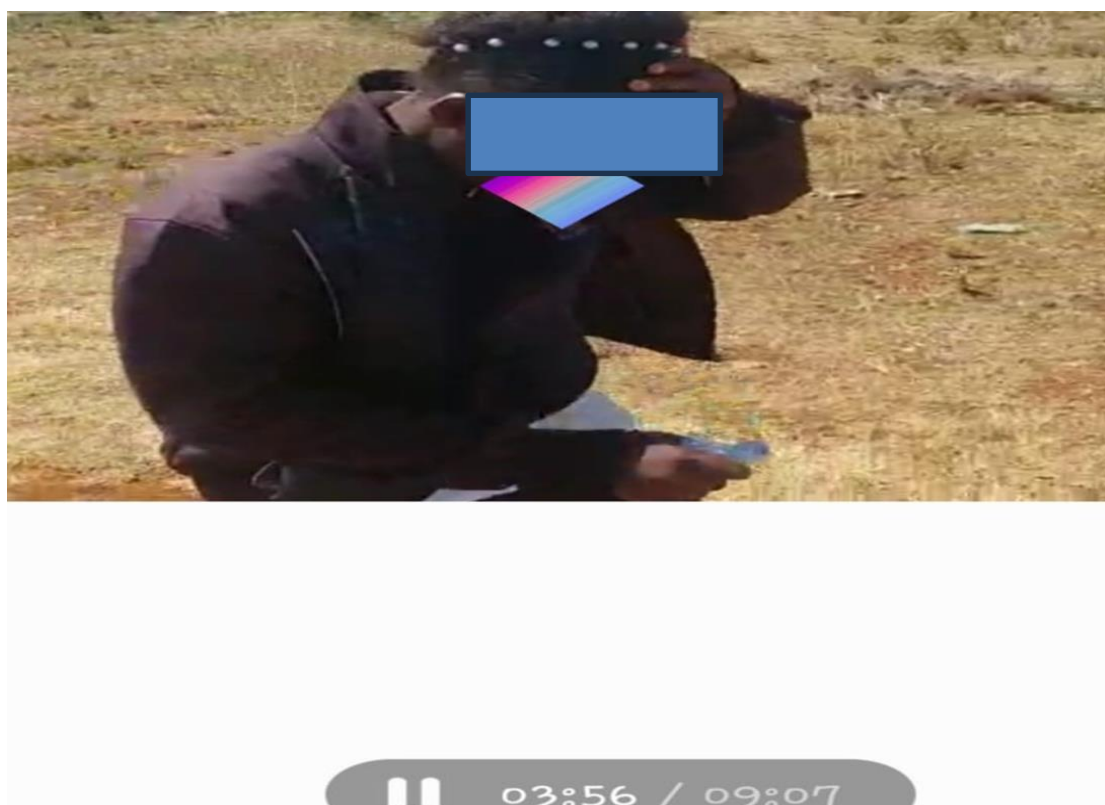


Figure 4.44: A presentation of a girl with suicidal thoughts

In conclusion, young people need a proper support from guardians, parents and teachers whenever they are going through stressful periods, a failure to which they may engage in life destructive activities that will see them not having fulfilling lives as adults.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Lowering integrity

Integrity refers to the quality of honesty and upholding strong moral values. Shameful deeds can allow one's principles, standards and morals to be lowered. In the study, participants perceived the risks they encountered in their socio-ecological settings as a lowering their integrity because of: (i) shame and guilt they experienced

afterwards and (ii) It led to victimization. This is discussed in detail in these categories herein (see table 4.9).

Table 4.9: Theme 3 and its categories

Theme 3	Categories
Lowering integrity	i. Shame and guilt
	ii. Victimization

4.2.3.1 Shame and guilt

When young people face risky situations in their socio-ecological environments, they tend to be engulfed with feelings of shame and guilt as a result. Young people who have experienced social harms, such as early pregnancies, female genital mutilation, sexual and gender-based violence, early marriage, risky and unsafe abortions, domestic violence and a lack of emotional support withdraw from associating with the rest and might opt to leave their societies altogether (Nyothach, 2021).

The feelings of shame and guilt significantly contribute to girls dropping out of school due to teenage pregnancy (Ruzibiza, 2021; Laski, 2015). In some countries like Burundi, pregnancy makes the end of education for teenage girls whereas in Kenya, there is usually a return to school policy that has not been clearly outlined therefore letting affected girls less confident to face their peers (Ruzibiza, 2021; Ndizeye, 2016). Pregnant youth dealing with feelings of shame, guilt, anger, disowning may end up depressed and having low self-esteem. Such victims shy off from seeking help from the people around them which lead to further seclusion from society (Potard, 2020).

It is worth noting that shameful behaviours such as sexual indulgence, crime and substance abuse among the young people are a drive to depression, isolation and low

self-esteem as a result of guilt and shame; which may have long term consequences linked to a wide range of emotional responses for those affected (Potard, 2020; Else-Quest, 2014; Aruda et al., 2010). These feelings of shame and guilt could lead to signs of depression and suicidal ideation as a way of disorienting the shame and guilt.

Data from the field indicate that participants experienced cases of shame and guilt because of the risky experiences they faced in their socio-ecological settings as given:

In a focus group discussion, a participant said:

I do not have support from anyone. My peers are laughing at me for becoming pregnant and getting a baby. Girls in my estate talk badly about me. I feel very bad.

Another participant shared that:

I have lived with the shame of contracting HIV and AIDS. Girls who know about my situation do not come near me. I am lonely and sometimes feel like killing myself.

A similar experience is shared by yet another participant in a cellphilm:

After being raped and childbirth, my mother took care of the child and I went back to school, but it was not easy for me in class. I have always tried to concentrate in vain. I am ashamed of what occurred to me, I end up crying.



Figure 4.45: Presentation of a girl crying whenever she thinks of the risks she faced

In conclusion, young people should be guided to explore their roles as self-agents in relation to conceivable risks and protective qualities that seek constructive well-being among the young people.

4.2.3.2 Victimization

Victimization is an act of unjust treatment. Studies have investigated risk factors for adolescent victimization which result from family conflicts, sexual violence, poor parental guides, and monitoring among other issues (Assink et al., 2019; Galabo & Gempes, 2017). Recent studies established that the number of youth victimization cases increased during COVID-19 pandemic promoted by the lockdown measures in countries around the world. This has triggered mental health challenges among the affected young people (Sanzana et al., 2023; Bradbury-Jones, 2020; Andreou, 2020). Some young people who have faced sexual violence in the communities possess symptoms of depression and face victimization. Other studies have investigated that

youth face social seclusion, humiliation and discrimination as a result of teenage pregnancies (Galabo & Gempe; 2017; Cherry & Dillon, 2014). Such victims become subjects of gossip and neighbourhood talk and make them feel out of place in the company of their peers, classmates and friends who take them as a letdown (Cherry & Dillon, 2014).

One participant commented that:

I was judged by neighbours who mocked and gossiped about me. Some referred to me as a prostitute not knowing what I was going through.

In other situations, parents of the girl may discourage them from going back to school because they are trying to protect their reputation and limit the victim's exposure to victimization from community and peers (Right to Education Initiative & Hakijamii, 2020). This was shared by a participant who said:

My father did not want to take me back to school after my rape incident and getting the baby. I had been rejected by my friends and my father felt that it was not the right time for me to go back to school. My mother talked to him as she was willing to take care of the baby so that I could come back to school.

This suggests the importance of creating awareness about the preventive strategies for creating safe spaces that reduce disparities among the young people should there be other pandemics in the future. Some studies suggested that alcohol and substance abuse played a crucial role in heightening victimization risks among the youth. This happen when the peers disassociate with those who have turned addicts of alcoholism and substance abuse because of fears of being influenced (Kisaakye et al., 2023). This is shared in the data of one of the groups. In a cellphilm, participants filmed a boy that was into deep thought as a result of taking drugs and being left out by the friends. The friends had been warned by their parents from associating with him.



Figure 4.46: A cellphilm presentation of a boy who is being victimized by peers and society

In conclusion, findings from this study have shed more light on the unmet necessities of vulnerable young people who navigate risky exploits on their own while lacking support from peers, family and friends. It is suggested that policies concerning the same issues be looked into so as to avert future problems.

4.2.4 Learners Coping Strategies in the Face of Socio-Ecological Risks Faced During the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown

The third research question sought to explore learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The research question was stated as follows: *What are learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?* Data related to this question was mainly generated through cellphilms, unstructured individual interviews and focus group discussion. Twenty learner participants from the three participating schools took part in cellphilm to generate data that answered this research question. As well, three teachers and three PA participants attached to the three participating schools took part in the study. As mentioned earlier in the analysis of the second research question, the researcher interviewed the PA representatives and teachers on different dates within the data generation time. The interviews were done individually on a one-to-one basis with the 6 participants in this study. This was done so as to

generate data that supported the data generated from cellphilms and focus group discussion in answering the third research question. The learner participants produced cellphilms by working in three groups, one per the participating groups in the three schools. The participants suggested learners coping strategies in two ways as given herein: Firstly, young people/learner capabilities during a crisis by being involved in recreational activities and community peer projects (theme 1). Secondly, young people's emancipation/empowerment through young people voice/taking part in decision making and having hope in the future by accepting what happens to them during crises and moving on with life (theme 2). These findings are summarized in table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Summary of the findings addressing the third research question

Theme	Categories
1. Young people/learner capabilities during a crisis	i. Recreational activities ii. Community peer projects
2. Young people's emancipation/ empowerment	i. Young people voice/taking part in decision making ii. Hope: Acceptance and moving on

4.2.4.1 Theme 1: Young people/ learner capabilities during a crisis

The young people in the present generation face unprecedented and unique challenges that are hard to navigate and some lead to devastating health challenges. The hasty routine disruptions because of the COVID-19 pandemic presented stressful situations for the young people and their families alike. They underwent psychological burden because of the containment measures that saw them locked within safe spaces in their homes and communities (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Rubin & Wessely, 2020). The participants views suggest capabilities that can be adhered to in future should a

crisis arise again. This is given as follows: (i) capabilities through recreational activities, and, (ii) capabilities through community peer projects (see table 4.11).

Table 4.11: Theme 1 and its categories

Theme 1	Categories
Young people/learner capabilities during a crisis	i. Recreational activities ii. Community peer projects

4.2.4.1.1 Recreational activities

Young people engagement in leisure can be developmental as leisure activities keep them busy and active thus becoming less idle to engage in risky issues within the homestead and the community. In as much as leisure activities are activated for, unstructured leisure can negatively affect young people's developmental pathway. Young people are encouraged to engage in youth programmes that inspire them. They become less at risk when they discover new hobbies, passions and talents. These activities range from cooking, music and art, sports and nature as well as academic programmes (Pavarini, et al., 2020) which can provide a better sense of control and value in their lives. When young people engage in recreational activities, they develop transferable Life Skills usable at home and school. Dunton et al., (2020), argue that recreational activities serve as intervention approaches that can leverage to influence and occupy socially vulnerable young people. As a result, youth are able to be engaged during lockdowns thus mitigating risks for sedentary habits and other social and mental risks (Hsieh et al., 2021).

The participants views are in support of given literature in that, in different cellphilm presentations, learners acted playing football in teams, competing in football competitions, playing lawn tennis and basketball that could keep them busy during pandemics lockdowns thus evading risks (Dunton et al., 2020).



Figure 4.47: A cellphilm presentation of boys playing football.



Figure 4.48: A cellphilm presentation of a learner playing basketball

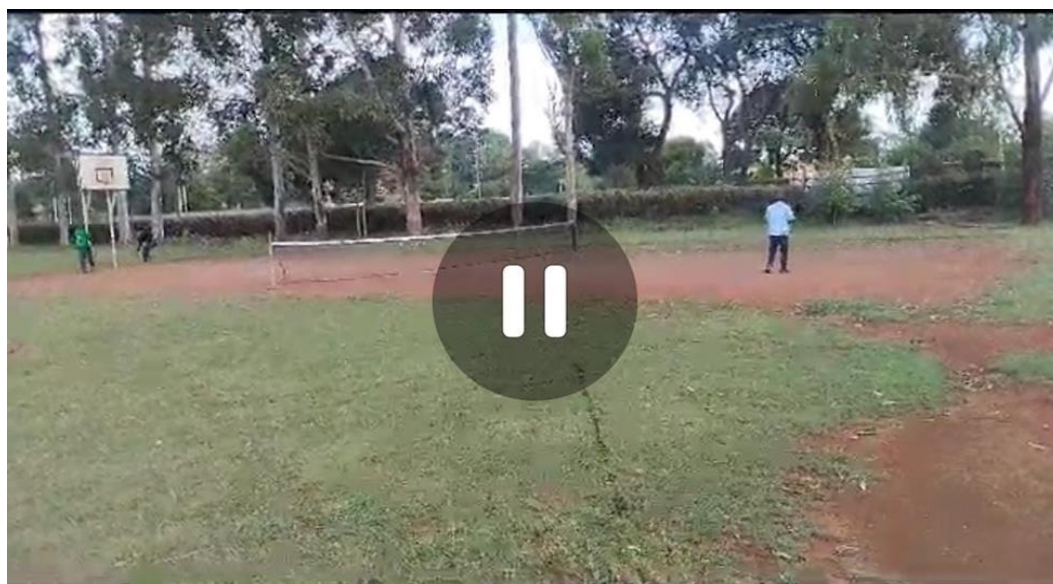


Figure 4.49: A cellfilm presentation of a learner playing lawn tennis

Another group of participants shared their clip engaged in writing poetry materials and sharing amongst themselves. They said that by sharing out their emotive selves in pieces of art, the young people can use that as emancipatory way of helping each other boost creativity during free times and avoid risks (Pavarini, et al., 2020).

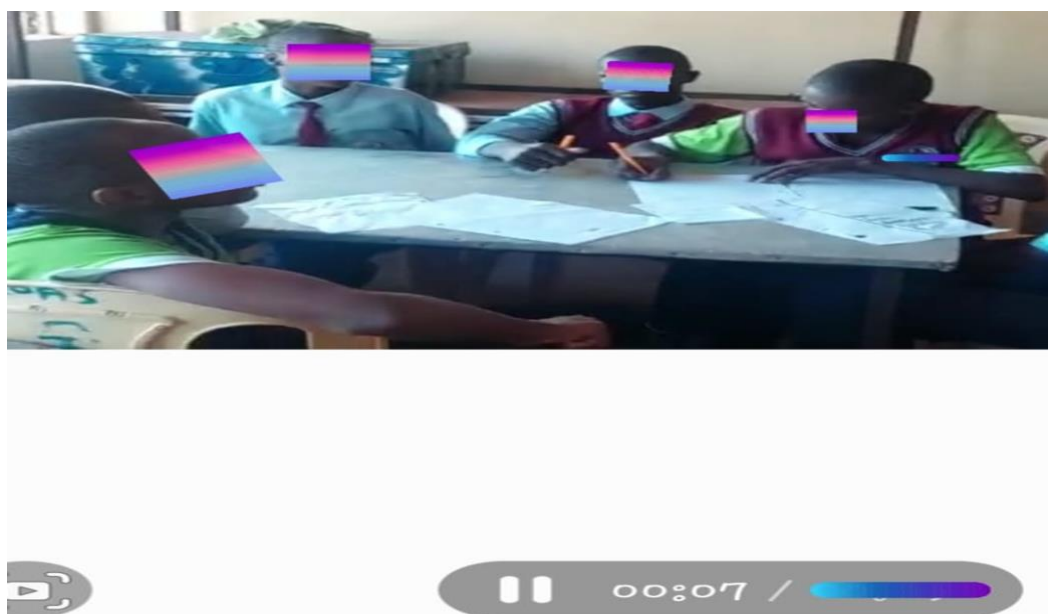


Figure 4.50: A cellfilm of learners writing poetry as a recreational activity

In the focus group discussion, a participant said that:

I wish I got things to keep me busy during the lockdown, my life would be totally different now.

From the data given above, it indicated that the learners were idling in the communities. The data also suggested that the young people entangled themselves in risky activities within those communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Holmes et al., 2020). This is expressed by one of the participants' comments, who imagined their lives would have been different had they had something to keep them busy during the lockdown period.

In an interview with John, a PA representative in one of the participating schools, he mentioned that learners were dealing with risks by engaging in recreational activities like playing football in community field whereby that helped to keep them busy and lessen risks:

Researcher: *In your own opinion, how were learners dealing with risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

John: *Some young people engaged in recreational activities, playing football, performing dances among other play activities in the community grounds...*

From the above generated data, it means that a look into appropriate ways of keeping young people busy in future pandemics is necessary so as to avoid/ reduce risks they face. It is important to build young people's resilience by supporting their capabilities that enable them achieve agency in times of pandemics and lockdowns.

4.2.4.1.2 Community peer projects

Young people's agency is critical in capability in that there are important opportunities that they could engage in that will support their mental and physical wellbeing at the times of crisis (Singh, 2017). They can be agents of local and global

initiatives by organising fund drives, raising money and identifying those in need and helping them (Dawson & Golijani-Moghaddam, 2020). During the pandemic lockdown, a group of Kenyan youth initiated a project named 'Mutual Aid Kenya' that helped vulnerable people in the communities handle the COVID-19 outbreak (Pavarini, 2020). Engagement in such activities have a long-lasting positive impact on the young people and those affected (Ballard et al., 2019). By engagement in community projects, the young people are positioned in a state of critical capability thus exploiting their potential in peer led interventions in time of crisis (Singh, 2017). Iyengar (2023) also posits that another way of keeping the young people busy during a crisis is by having libraries in the community that help to reach young people who are not enrolled in school at the time and to indoctrinate good reading habits among them. Consistent with prior studies, the findings in this study reinforce the importance of community peer projects in addressing crises. Interview with one of the teacher participants and cellphilm presentations of learners are given herein:

Researcher: *In your own opinion, how were learners dealing with risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

Judy: *Few of them engaged in activities that kept them busy during the pandemic lockdown. Thereafter, young people have teamed up in cooperating to engage in income generating activities that keep them busy should there be other pandemic lockdowns. I have seen learners in teams make beaded bracelets, necklaces, design cards and sell them. By coming together and sharing such activities, they are kept busy and therefore lessen the pain of remembering risks they faced during the lockdown.*



Figure 4.51: A cellphilm of learners reading in a community library.



Figure 4.52: A presentation of young people busy playing games together.



Figure 4.53: A cellphilm of a girl talking a walk.

In the cellphilm presentations, participants felt that engaging in collaborative activities like puzzles, walks, cooking and eating together and playing games were capability approaches that would deter them from engaging in risky activities. Most of

them admitted that they lacked these activities during the pandemic lockdown thus exposing them to risks (Barnett, 2020).

Another collaborative peer project that was hardly mentioned in literature but came out clearly from participant data is the capability of reaching out to affected peers through peer-to-peer counselling sessions.

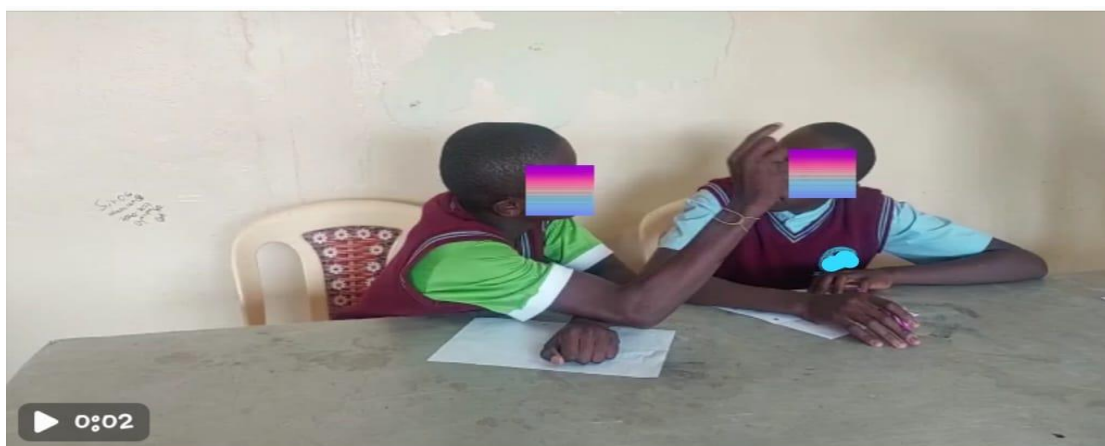


Figure 4.54: A cellphilm of learners engaging in a peer-to-peer counselling session.

The participants felt that it was easy to share their issues amongst themselves than approaching an adult about them. Through peer-to-peer counselling sessions, the young people would produce robust capacity to overcome difficulties through their collaborations (Ungar & Theron, 2020).

4.2.4.2 Theme 2: Young people's emancipation/empowerment

Young people have a right to be involved in issues affecting their lives. For a very long time, the voices of the young people have been ignored when it comes to policy making in terms of policy and practice. The present time youth need to be proactive in prioritizing and seeking an understanding to their needs. The participants in this study felt that they needed to be empowered through (i) Taking part in decision making/young people voice and (ii) having hope by acceptance and moving on (see table 4.12).

Table 4.12: Theme 2 and its categories

Theme 2	Categories
Young people's emancipation/empowerment	i. Young people voice/taking part in decision making ii. Hope: Acceptance and moving on

4.2.4.2.1 Young people voice/Taking part in decision making

Young people should always be prioritized in matters affecting their lives by being given a voice to air what affects them as well as coming up with solutions to their own problems. This can be done by creation of youth volunteering programmes and strategies for youth capacity building that will keep the young people mobilized to push for change in their own lives in the communities (Repper & Carter, 2011). By taking part in decision making, youth build up resilience so that in times of crises, they are able to emancipate themselves (OECD, 2020). The young people can take part in peer advice and educational programmes that support them in confinements so as to curb stigma and discrimination arising as a result of risks associated with pandemics (Taylor et al., 2017; Ozer, 2016). Young people need to voice their needs by learning to strategize and implement their needs-based assessments during pandemics and step up in leadership approaches by utilizing youth led actions (Ozer, 2016). There is a sense of self confidence, hope and feelings of inclusion in peer led interventions when a problem arises and this produces better outcomes and makes young people have confidence in their personal agency as that leads to positive developmental pathways to adulthood (Caldwell, 2018; Outley & Blyth, 2020; Repper & Carter, 2011).

The participants in this study opined that their voices are transformative as they give them chances to challenge universal inequalities between youth and the adults who impose things on them. Their voices raise critical realization to evaluate their lived experience through a comprehensive socio-ecological complete lens (Outley & Blyth, 2020; Cammarota & Fine, 2010).



Figure 4.55: A cellphilm of youth taking part in decision making on matters affecting them.

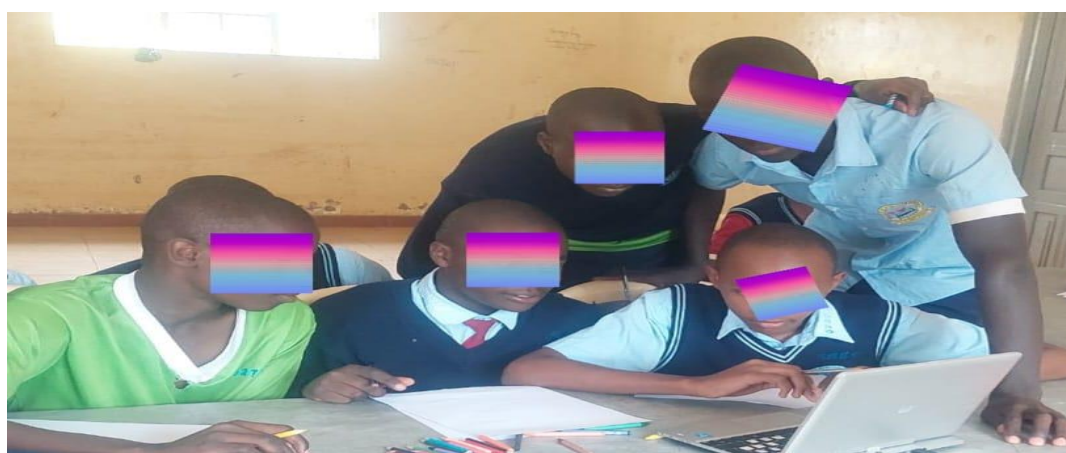


Figure 4.56: A cellphilm presentation of young people engaging in a capacity building programme.

During the pandemic period, some countries invented youth led organizations that assisted young people in voicing their issues thus mitigating the COVID-19 crisis in their countries.

In Denmark, there was a collaboration between the government and a youth organization that helped in mitigating the COVID-19 crisis via an initiative tagged “What can youth do under COVID-19” (Li, 2020), in Middle East and North Africa, youth engaged in dialogue sessions and skillful work to contain themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic, in Romania, youth had a collaboration with the government on empowering youth on how to cope with studying and staying at home (Thrasher, 2020). European Association for Local Democracy initiative in Morocco engaged in “Art & Confinement” and “What are the best uses of digital tools” topics to keep young people socially engaged (Paxton, 2020). Young people in Tunisia led an initiative that was meant to enable them acquire entrepreneurial skills from home during the pandemic lockdown.

Globally there was a youth led initiative that was organised by student-led organizations worldwide and called for a global response to the crisis in collaboration with young people aimed at providing justness, defending human rights and adopting a youth-sensitive approach by bringing the voice of young people into policy making in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis (Lerner et al., 2021; Snape, 2020). Although there was a group of Kenyan youth who initiated a project named ‘Mutual Aid Kenya’ that helped vulnerable people in the communities handle the COVID-19 outbreak, not much was done in Kenya to rescue young people from indulging in risky activities (Pavarini, 2020). It is therefore important that the current research aims to look into emancipatory ways in which youth can be well equipped to handle a crisis. The participants views

align with literature as they shared in their cellphilms and discussions on the need to be empowered as a way of youth preparedness in case of future pandemic outbreaks.

In conclusion, young people can act as decision makers while in collaboration with the adults to bridge concerns and achieve objectives aimed at building a fair and inclusive society geared towards resilience.

4.2.4.2.2 Hope: Acceptance and moving on

Acceptance is an empowerment skill as one is able to cope up with a problem by taking a stand and voicing out their fears with an intention of seeking solutions to their problems. This describes participants' hopes for their future life. Problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic did not only affect people's mental health but also their physical conditions (Hussong et al., 2021). It is important to find an intervention that encourages victims to refocus on the good things found in a situation (Wang et al., 2021).

The participants acceptance in this study was realized in different ways as a way of moving on with their lives after facing risks in their communities. Some participants who had been victims of drug and substance abuse accepted to be rehabilitated, those that contracted sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and AIDS accepted to take drugs and live positively while some that had been married off early and those that got pregnant returned to school (Kotoh et al., 2022; Iddy, 2021). The eventual goal of rehabilitation is reintegration of the victims back to the society. While going through rehabilitation, victims benefit from participation in co-curricular activities and other developmental skills that are therapeutical thus adjusting to life (Dual et al., 2020; Hussong et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2020; Hsieh et al., 2021; Dominguez-Alvarez et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Young people in Kenya faced heightened risks of unprotected sexual intercourse, leading to increased exposure to unintended pregnancy and HIV and AIDS during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wado et al., 2020). It is on this note that an individuals' acceptance of their HIV status and their sense of hope and belief for living with it, is emphasized. Victims' acceptance of their disease and devotion to medication is influenced by their opinions, principles, mental health, and societal support (Rzeszutek et al., 2016).

Many girls experienced preeminent risks as child marriage, early pregnancy, and violence which hindered their capability to return to school after long school closures because of the pandemic in Kenya (World Vision, 2020). Chiyota and Marishane (2020) disclose that voices of young mothers are hardly given a consideration during policy formulation therefore contributing to ineffectiveness. It is therefore important for the young people to bring forth their empowerment so as to express their concerns appropriately.

Participants in this study express positive feelings concerning their lives as they give credit to individual and peer support in coping and moving on with life (Kotoh et al., 2022; Iddy, 2021) as given in discussion herein:

A participant said:

I accepted my situation because I have seen others surviving with the virus. I had to go for counselling and accepted it. What helped me is counselling because counselling helps.

Another participant added that:

Although I went through a challenging time as a teen mother, I want to tell other young girls there is hope after pregnancy.

In cellphilm presentations, a learner who had become a drug addict is taken through rehabilitation whereas another one who became a young mother went back to school.



Figure 4.57: A cellphilm of a girl that finally sees hope in going back to school after getting a child.



Figure 4.58: A cellphilm presentation of a boy taken to a rehabilitation centre and later goes back to school.



Figure 4.59: A cellphilm of a boy who quits stealing, returns stolen goods and hopes for a better life by going back to school.

The participants positive approach to life, expectations and hopes for a good future demonstrate optimism to life leading to quality living (Kalra & Emmanuel, 2019). In conclusion, supporting young people empowerment that allows them to achieve agency in the COVID-19 crisis response contributes to the development of resilience and communal strengths to better response to crises in future.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented an analysis and discussion of the data generated with the participants in the study. The themes were generated from the analyses and responded to the three research questions in this study. The findings gave insight into the young people's risks as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, their perceptions of those risks and coping strategies in the face of the socio-ecological risks. In the next chapter, findings are summarized, a conclusion is drawn and recommendations are made.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the research findings discussed in chapter four, conclusions and the recommendations for policy and practice. It also presents the contribution to knowledge, in filling the gap by enhancing learner voice and developing supportive strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during crises and always. The purpose of this study was to explore socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and generate supportive strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times. The exploration took place in the context of Kenyan secondary schools; three schools (public and private) were selected for this study. The study was located in the field of teaching and learning in secondary schools, particularly in empowering learner voice in teaching. The findings were purposed towards drawing conclusions and recommendations on how the data responds to the main research question:

What were learners' experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?

Three secondary research questions were established while endeavouring to answer the main research question:

- i. *How did socio-ecological risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya?*
- ii. *How do learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

- iii. *What are learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

In pursuing these research questions, a phenomenological qualitative research approach, within critical paradigm was used. The supported expressive data of the participants, which paved way to comprehend the subjective world of their contemporary experiences of the phenomenon, were investigated. The research applied a participatory visual methodology by using memory accounts, drawings and cellphilms. It also made use of interviews and a focus group discussion. This methodology was used to generate data from 26 participants who were purposively selected from three Kenyan secondary schools.

De Vos et al. (2014) posit that, a description of the research findings gives innovative answers to ancient problems in the research field. As such, the generated data in this study, has contributed creatively to the existing knowledge with regard to the socio-ecological risks that the young people faced in their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and productively sought out to engage in developmental coping strategies should they face such risks in future. This study worked within Paulo Freire's emancipation theory in order to ensure that the findings made meaning in answering the research questions.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The findings are presented based on the research questions of this study:

5.2.1 How socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya

This question aimed to explore the participants experiences of socio-ecological risks that affected the young people during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. It specifically focused on what they remembered about their experiences. The findings are categorized under three themes namely: sexual related risks, family related risks and criminal related risks.

The participants' view was that COVID-19 pandemic lockdown came along with sexual related risks that directly affected the young people in the communities. The participants mentioned that they were not sufficiently equipped to face these risks that were heightened by the extended lockdown. The young people were affected in a number of ways as they faced risks including contracting STIs, HIV and AIDS as a result of risky sexual indulgence, these further resulted to teenage pregnancies and abortion, where as some young people could not contain themselves from watching pornographic videos that paved way for addiction.

The second theme on family related risks was also revealed using the findings of this study. It emerged that COVID-19 pandemic posed a severe risk to the well-being of young people due to challenges associated with social interruption such as financial insecurity, caregiving burden, and confinement-related pressure. Young people faced domestic violence that led some of them to resort to alcoholism. Some of them solicited refuge in their friends and because of the peer pressure, they eventually indulged in drug abuse.

The third theme that emerged from the generated data is the theme of criminal related risks. These risks are harmful to young people's lives and are considered illegal by the

Kenyan government. It emerged from the participants that learners faced risks ranging from Female Genital Mutilation, forced early marriages and Sexual and gender-based violence that led some of them to commit suicide.

5.2.2 How learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

This question aimed to explore the learners' perceptions of socio-ecological risks that affected them during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Data related to this question was mainly generated through cellphilms and focus group discussions. The findings are categorized under three themes namely: psychologically torturing, life destructive and lowering integrity.

Participants felt that the risks they faced during the pandemic lockdown are psychologically torturing as they went through mental and physical harm as a result. The data generated from the participants indicate that learners perceived socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as causing fear and emotional instability/distress.

The second theme emerging from the data indicate that learners perceived COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as life destructive. This is because it destroyed young people in all aspects of their lives. From the participants responses, they perceived the pandemic lockdown as life destructive in that it led to learners dropping out of school, it led to family conflicts and resulted to some of them loosing hope because of contracting diseases and becoming pregnant.

The third emergent theme indicate that learners perceived the pandemic lockdown to be lowering their integrity. The participants perceived the risks they encountered in

their socio-ecological settings as a lowering their integrity because of shame and guilt they experienced after facing those risks as well as experiencing victimization in the community and in schools.

5.2.3 Learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

This question aimed to explore learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Data related to this question was mainly generated through cellphilms, interviews and focus group discussions. The findings from the participant data are categorized under two themes namely: young people/learner capabilities during a crisis and young people's emancipation/empowerment.

The first theme about young people/learner capabilities during a crisis emerged as participants felt that the present generation young people need to tackle issues facing them on their own. The participants views suggest capabilities that can be adhered to in future should a crisis arise. They suggest that this can be experienced by engaging in capabilities through recreational activities and community peer projects. When young people engage in recreational activities, they develop transferable Life Skills usable at home and school. Their agency is critical in self-support of mental and physical wellbeing at the times of crises.

The second theme that emerged from the data is young people's emancipation/empowerment. Young people need to have a voice in policy and practice. The participants in this study felt that they needed to be empowered through taking part in decision making/young people voice and by having hope in the future through acceptance of what happened to them and moving on. The participants optimistic

approach to life, expectations and hopes for a good future demonstrated confidence in themselves to better their lives should there be other crises.

5.3 Study Conclusions

This study sought to explore socio-ecological risks faced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and generate guiding strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times. This study was significant as it contributes to the few that exist about learners' exploration of their capabilities on socio-ecological issues and how they can construct positive identities within their environment towards social change. The participants were involved in determining what affects them, tapping into their own experiences, while making them heard to match their lived experiences. Several conclusions were arrived at.

5.3.1 How socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya

From the first research question, the following conclusions were drawn:

During COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, young people were abused and became increasingly vulnerable to abuse and its consequences. This study has shown that while the government, through the Ministry of Health, was looking for ways of controlling further spread of the corona virus, young people's lives were clearly put at risk.

Based on the data generated it is evident that Life Skills programme within the HIV and AIDS education programme in Kenyan schools remains a major concern as it only focusses on changing individual behavior while ignoring the communities in which young people are located in.

5.3.2 How learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

From the second research question, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Young people were not well prepared to face the challenges associated with the pandemic lockdown. They perceived the risks as having caused them individual and societal harm.
- Young people faced unprecedented risks that were life threatening, thus putting them through torture and further lowering their integrity in the society.
- Young people were not well equipped with strengths-based approaches to intervene in their own problems.

5.3.3 Learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

From the third research question, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Cognizant of the risks that they faced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, young people felt that they should be addressed as potential authorities and knowledge producers about their social worlds' so that they can take charge of their lives during crises.
- It is important to note that, young people have the potential to be involved in the development of a more inclusive and emancipatory curriculum that generates the conditions for learners to feel safe, informed, empowered, and confident in their socio-ecological environments.
- Involving learners in a participatory study is an important exploration to find ways of contributing to prevention strategies and supportive guidelines that can decrease risky behaviours in times of crises.

5.4 Theoretical Contributions

This study was positioned in Freire's (1970) empowerment education theory which specializes in encouraging individuals to become vocal about their needs and those of the community. Freire's critical pedagogy offered valuable insights into exploring learners' socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Learners' achievement is about more than just academic performance as it relates to qualities, information and skills learners develop during their time in school. It also relates to these factors' relevance to the contemporary world. Thus, it entails a sense of social justice demonstrated by a need to close achievement gaps, expand access, and focus on developing critical and democratic citizens.

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, young people faced challenges in the community because of the abrupt school closures. As given in the participant data, some of the learners were enrolled in online learning to keep them busy whereas others especially those in remote and poor backgrounds could not manage to enroll. Wiseman in his memory account wrote that: *Some of the students from rural areas where electricity is not available or where there is no ability to use online classes affect students from gaining knowledge...* The same sentiments were reiterated in the focus group discussion. This clearly portrayed education as a service of the wealthy which according to Freire is against the achievement of genuine democracy since some learners were marginalized. Therefore, to necessitate fair action and redress in the teaching and learning process, Freire (2018) says:

Reflection and action in close interaction are the necessary conditions for dialogical action and if one of them is prevented the word becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world for denunciation is impossible without commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. (p. 87).

Freire (2016) posits that an education should emphasize on empowering marginalized learners in the communities. This argument was not realized during the pandemic lockdown therefore exposing some young people to varied risks in their socio-ecological setting. The participant data indicate that some learners faced devastating risks like unsafe sexual indulgence therefore contracting STIs and HIV and AIDS, unsafe abortions, increase in rape cases, domestic violence, early forced marriages and FGM among other risks. This suggests that learners lacked the empowerment to emancipate themselves from these risks therefore experiencing unprecedented outcomes that affected their social and academic lives.

The pandemic lockdown put young people in a state of solitude and disembodiment from their peers and teachers. Freire (2018) advocated for a liberating education. In exploring socio-ecological risks, learners should be encouraged to identify challenges, analyze root causes, and propose solutions relevant to their lived experiences. Judging from the learners' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, Freire could have argued that the learners were conditioned to live away from their safe spaces that did not allow democracy and they could not manage to develop voice and reason. Data indicate a gap in school-based knowledge of Life Skills education as the learners were unable to liberate themselves from the exploitations in the socio-ecological setting. Some participants cited cases of risks faced which unfortunately the victims did not have safe space to share what they were going through as given; *'sexual abuse was one of the arising factors which led to early marriages which further led to abortion and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. The girls underwent FGM which was harmful to the girls' lives.* Whether a learner becomes a slave or free depends on the kind of education system that they have been exposed to. Learners became slaves of social injustices and prejudice in the socio-ecological setting since they were not

liberated to have their own freedom. Meaningful knowledge for tackling risks in the social and cultural setups was needed.

Freire advocates for a more world mediated mutual approach to education that encourages the co-creation of knowledge. By fostering dialogue, learners come together to share their experiences, express their concerns, and collaborate on finding collective solutions to socio-ecological risks during the pandemic lockdown. While looking for solutions for problems faced during the pandemic lockdown, learners became part of the active process of generating knowledge useful in averting risks in events crises arise again. In the focus group discussions, participants' dialogue served as an instrument to free them from risky situations through unity, cooperation and proper organization of knowledge needed to face such risks (Freire, 2018). Participants came up with strategies that would enable them cope with risks. In groups, participants acted out in the cellphilms engaging in peer-to-peer talks that encouraged positive behaviour change, they as well produced cellphilms of engagement in community projects that would keep them busy instead of idling in the community. Together, they discussed the importance of their voices in active decision making in social and academic issues surrounding them. While creating and assessing their own learning, learners engage in the decision-making process, which in turn results in their own decision-making (Auerbach, 1995; McLaren, 1988; Shor, 1996). The COVID-19 pandemic crisis enabled learners assess their lives through the lens of the risks they faced in the pandemic lockdown. In the process, the participants perceived the pandemic as putting them through life threatening risks that encouraged them to engage in making decisions to guard their lives. A participant who was raped and consequently got a baby, decided to redeem her life by going back to school; *'As time went by, my mother told me to go back to school...I accepted ...'* another participant who was impregnated and left by her

boyfriend left her baby with the mother and decided to return to school ‘...*I became pregnant through rape. I was raped by three guys. I feared disclosing the information to my parents but they discovered, I went back to school after sometime*’. These participants were a source of enriching knowledge in the focus discussion as they influenced their peers to advocate for empowerment in decision making by raising their perception to analyze and contest oppressive social conditions (Freire, 2016).

Shih (2018) critically assesses Freire’s model and advocates for an autonomous and critical education practice where learners’ voices and views are analyzed. In the study, participants felt that data generated with them would contribute to a critical analysis of the learner voice and considering their views in creating a comprehensive curriculum that meets all the needs of the learners in the socio-ecological setting. Similarly, Ayoub et al. (2014), explored Freire’s ideologies of curriculum planning, focusses learners’ active involvement in educational planning. They believe that curriculum should be planned mutually and all the stakeholders of teaching and learning to achieve individual and social transformation. The participants yearned for an education that would emancipate them and orient their actions towards broader social struggles to achieve social emancipation.

It should be considerable of the education system to consider the information and experiences that learners bring to the engagement process of the curriculum development, and to draw on these lived experiences when dealing with societal problems (Wood, 2016). In line with Freirean critical pedagogy, young people’s silenced voices in the socio-ecological setting need to be tapped to determine why these voices have been suppressed (Sathorar, 2018). When this is realized, young people risk in the societies are prevented and controlled as they will provide sufficient knowledge

useful in dealing with issues affecting their lives. The study encouraged young people to make emancipatory decisive actions of challenging the oppressive social conditions they face in the societies. The real-life problems the learners face, are intended to be understood and acknowledged by them while reaching possible solutions to tackle those problems.

This study focused on modern-day young people in their social world and understanding them within that world. Therefore, an enquiry of their socio-ecological constructions needed to be investigated. The provision of a comprehensive exposition of the learners' welfare was presented through the socio-ecological influences on their livelihoods. Indeed, COVID-19 pandemic offered an opportunity on social and pedagogical possibilities of the basic purpose of education and how renewed vision in the education system might be harnessed to develop a more democratic and just society. By applying Freirean principles, learners are empowered to become active participants in understanding and transforming their socio-ecological realities.

5.5 Conceptual model- Coping Strategies Model

This part of the chapter presents a conceptual model, the coping strategies model, which was developed by the researcher, based on the analysis of the research findings. Having examined the empirical literature as well as the findings of this study, the researcher proposed a model for effective teaching of Life Skills education programme in Kenyan schools. The model will enable learners be self-equipped to cope with future crises. The findings of this study show that coping strategies include the following: (i) young people/learner capabilities during a crisis by being involved in recreational activities and community peer projects, and, (ii) young people's emancipation/empowerment through young people voice/taking part in decision

making and having hope in the future by accepting what happens to them during crises and moving on with life. This can be expressed in the following model:

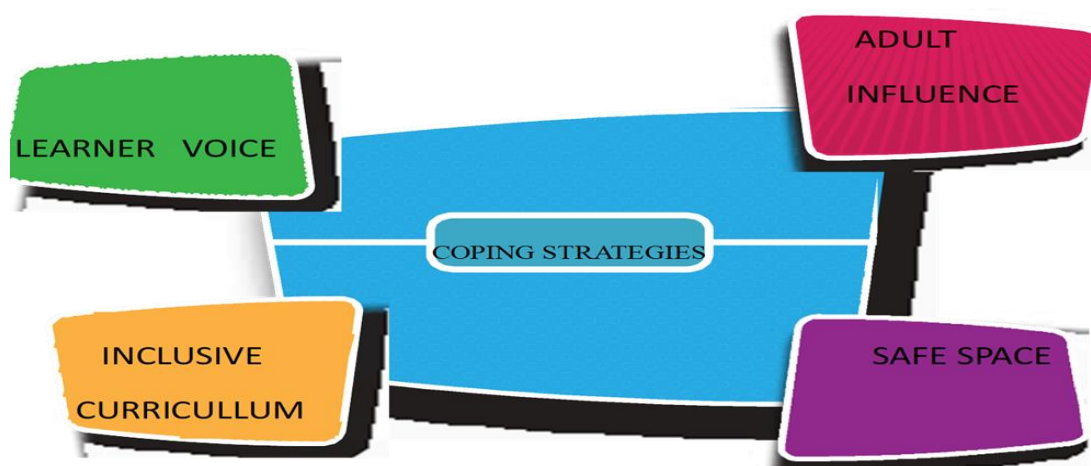


Figure 5.1: Coping strategies model adopted by researcher.

This model is that is concerned with learner voice and participation. Young people's rights become hard to safeguard when societies and governments do not entirely appreciate the threats that disasters characterize to their children's future (Tanner & Seballos, 2012). The researcher argued that for learners to be well prepared to face risks that occur in their socio-ecological setting, the coping strategies model is one approach that would assist in striking a balance between what learners know about their lives and what adults impose on them. This model provides a way of conceptualizing learners coping strategies amidst pandemics and lockdowns. The four tenets of the model which include learner voice, adult influence, safe space and an inclusive curriculum are discussed herein:

Learner voice: From the data generated, this strategy was realized by seeing the need to sensitize learners through emancipation and empowerment. This could be done by giving them a chance to voice their needs and allowing them take part in decision making. Incorporating learner voice in educational settings, especially during a

pandemic, is crucial for fostering emancipation. This enables the educational environment to be responsive, inclusive, and supportive. The model focusses on giving voice to learners' individual knowledge while giving them safe space to express their needs to match those of their socio-ecological settings. Learners need to take part in decision making by working together in small groups to discuss topics and solve problems collaboratively. They can also create online spaces where they can engage in discussions, share resources, and support each other in case of lockdowns. Strengthening learner voice during crises involves creating responsive, flexible, and inclusive educational environments. By actively listening to learners, incorporating their feedback, and adapting to their needs, teachers can empower learners, foster resilience, and ensure a supportive learning experience even in challenging times. More often than not young people are always denied the chance to voice their concerns even though it is obvious that the matter under consideration is affecting them. Opportunities to be heard should start in early childhood to lay the foundations for expression and active participation in decision-making. This might support young people's growth and development into healthy, resilient, and active citizens. Learners should therefore develop coping skills to navigate challenges and build resilience. Thus, learners' voice must involve their thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and views to form a clear narrative that can be presented to involved parties in order to ensure their meaningful participation in decision making. Learners' views which involve a more detailed look at why the learner may be voicing what they are should be considered, eloquently developed, and formed so as to be communicated as their voice.

Adult influence: From the data generated, this strategy was attained by learners citing capabilities during crises. These include adult led recreational activities and community peer projects. By leveraging adult-led recreational activities and

community peer projects, learners can develop resilience and a sense of empowerment during crises. These strategies provide organized support, foster societal networks, and enable learners to contribute positively to their communities. These capabilities are implemented effectively if learners get support from child protection units, teachers, parents and community leaders.

Adult influence is important in attaining the inclusive curriculum that offers learners opportunities to be part of policy making when their views are acted upon. The foundational framework for the model is the focus of application of both young people and adult knowledge in teaching and learning. The learners in this model become capable socially and academically since they are active participants in decision making, meaning they bring to fore their views to solve an existing problem. Therefore, learners should always be encouraged to seek support from family members, peers, teachers, and community networks. Arguably, social connections provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, which can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation during a lockdown. To have a meaningful solution to young people's problems, engaging them in decision making is generating an opportunity for involvement, a space that enables the young people to express their concerns.

It is the duty of the adult to create a safe space for the young person to air their views without judgment. Therefore, the researcher proposed that the views of diverse range of learners be included in decision making processes. These include views on learning problem-solving strategies, practicing stress management techniques such as relaxation exercises, and enhancing adaptive coping mechanisms to cope with uncertainty and adversity. The opportunity to voice in decision making should not only be left to the literate and articulate young people. It is important that learners are empowered to

advocate for their needs and rights in addressing challenges related to pandemic crises. They develop a sense of agency and voice in seeking support, accessing resources, and influencing positive change within their communities.

Safe space: From the data generated, this strategy is an important exploration to give learners hope in the future and foster resilience. Providing a safe space for learners to tackle pandemic crises is essential for their emotional well-being, academic success, and overall resilience. Young people are supposed to express their views freely depending on the ability to create a perspective concerning their lives independent of a mature or immature point of view. Therefore, the young people may need the help of an adult in directing and guiding them form a view. Young people have a choice to express their views in different ways be it in writing or oral (Lansdown, 2020). Adults are supposed to influence young people's views by taking what they say seriously rather than just listening without necessarily acting. Learners' views must be given weight by ensuring that they are informed on how their views are considered and what decisions are made from their views.

The period of teenage years, is characterized by the advancement of a sense of identity, acquisition of new responsibilities and exposure to emerging opportunities and risks, and in many cases engagement in more risk-taking behaviours. While lobbying for coping strategies, young people obtain more maturity, so their level of agency to take greater responsibility and to exercise their rights rise. Giving young people more influence in decision-making will still have them protected and their interests safeguarded. Some risk-taking has inherent value in both achieving change and helping explore and understand the assessment and control of risk. Learners prioritize holistic well-being by addressing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of health.

They engage in activities that promote self-care, maintain healthy lifestyles, nurture positive relationships, and foster a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Engaging young people in identification of potential risks and the measures needed to mitigate them, through their exercise of participation, will lead to more effective protection. Therefore, when safe spaces are created for learners during crises, they are able to address both physical and emotional safety by ensuring inclusive and flexible learning environments, and, providing robust support systems. By fostering open communication, engaging learners in supportive activities, and continuously monitoring their needs, educational institutions can help learners navigate crises effectively and build resilience for the future.

Inclusive curriculum: From the data generated, this strategy is important in strengthening and enabling efficiency in Life Skills education programme. Provisioning a Life Skills-inclusive curriculum is imperative for equipping learners with the competencies required to navigate pandemic crises effectively. This curriculum must be comprehensive, addressing a wide range of skills that promote resilience, adaptability, and overall well-being. An inclusive Life Skills curriculum needs to consider learners as having a right to be listened to and be involved in the decision-making process. It is therefore important that young people are given a right of audience by the curriculum implementors to voice their views as an emancipatory process of having them involved in always creating practical solutions to their problems. Meaningful participation in matters affecting young people is their right rather than a gift from the adults. Learning should emphasize hands-on, practical experiences that allow learners to apply skills in real-world situations. An inclusive curriculum needs to employ interactive teaching methods that use interactive methods such as participatory teaching methods including role-playing, simulations, and group projects to engage

learners. The researcher advocates for an inclusive curriculum which is critical in preparing learners to tackle the multifaceted challenges presented by pandemic crises. By embedding essential Life Skills into the educational framework, we empower learners to navigate these challenges with resilience, informed decision-making, and a proactive approach to personal and community well-being. Modifying this curriculum to include the learner voice needs requires a collaborative effort, continuous adaptation, and a commitment to fostering holistic development in learners.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown presented unprecedented challenges that required innovative coping strategies to support learners' academic, emotional, and social well-being. The coping strategies model developed by the researcher in this study, focuses on a holistic approach to support learners. By addressing emotional and mental health, providing academic flexibility and fostering social connectivity, the model aims to mitigate the adverse effects of the lockdowns and other crises, and, enhance learners' overall resilience and adaptability.

5.6 Recommendations

It is apparent that despite knowledge gained from this study; other observations could be further explored to add to the knowledge of coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced in times of pandemic lockdowns. In respect of the above summary and conclusions, this study makes the following recommendations:

- i. The Kenyan Ministry of Health, department of public health and the Ministry of Education's department of Basic education, need to strike a balance on safety measures to be taken during pandemic crises so that young people's lives are not compromised by rules that govern further spread of a disease outbreak. Stakeholders should prioritize equitable

access to technology and resources, enhance support for mental health and well-being, strengthen social support networks, build resilience and adaptation strategies, and foster interdisciplinary research collaborations to address the multifaceted challenges faced by learners in times of crises thereby creating more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable educational ecosystems.

- ii. The Ministry of Education's department of Basic education and KICDs department of curriculum implementation should strengthen Life Skills education programme within the HIV and AIDS education programme in Kenyan schools, to offer an inclusive curriculum that incorporates supportive coping strategies in the communities and schools that young people are located in.
- iii. Education policy makers departments in the Kenya Institute of Curriculum developers and Ministry of Education, should ensure that the Life Skills education curriculum is examinable in schools. This would ensure effective delivery of the programme to prepare young people to face rising challenges in their socio-ecological settings. Therefore, averting individual and societal harm.
- iv. County governments' Education departments in collaboration with child protection units should provide community resources centres that offer effective guidance and counselling sessions for young people. They should also be made functional to help young people that face life threatening risks in the society.
- v. Teachers and parents should take young people through school based and community workshops that equip them with strengths-based

knowledge approaches to intervene when faced with problems during crises.

- vi. Since young people are cognizant of the problems facing them, curriculum developers, parents and teachers should give them opportunities to voice their needs as they are potential authorities and knowledge producers concerning their social worlds. This might enable them to can take charge of their lives during crises and all other times.
- vii. Education policy makers should give young people a chance to be part of policy making and decision-making processes as they have the potential in the development of a more inclusive and emancipatory curriculum that generates the conditions for learners to feel safe, informed, empowered, and confident in their socio-ecological environments.
- viii. Teachers should always strive to make Life Skills school programmes more participatory to offer learners safe space to voice their needs, be heard and helped as this is an important exploration to find ways of contributing to prevention and supportive strategies that can decrease risky behaviours in times of crises and always.

5.7 Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher makes the following recommendations for further research:

- i. This study utilized a qualitative approach, with the use of drawings, memory accounts, cellphilms, unstructured individual interviews and focus group discussion as tools for data generation. The study could also be carried out using quantitative approach and tools.

- ii. The study was carried out in private and public secondary schools in Kenya. It would widen the understanding of socio-ecological risks and coping strategies if the same study is replicated in private and public primary schools in the country.
- iii. There is need for a comparative study in Kenya and developed nations; this could help to identify further areas that need to be strengthened for effective delivery of Life Skills education programme in Kenyan schools.

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APPENDICES

Part A: Letters of Permission

I: Letter from Moi University School of Education



MOI UNIVERSITY

Office of the Dean School of Education

Tel: (053) 43001-8

(053) 43555

Fax: (053) 43555

P.O. Box 3900

Eldoret, Kenya

REF: DPEM/5879/22

DATE: 8th November, 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: RESEARCH PERMIT IN RESPECT OF LILY
JEROTICH YEGO – DPECT/4145/20**

The above named is a 1st year PhD in Educational Research and Evaluation student at Moi University, School of Education, Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies.

It is required of her PhD studies to conduct a research project and produce a research report. Her research topic is entitled:

“Exploring Learners’ Experiences of Socio-Ecological Risks During the Covid 19 Pandemic Lockdown and Developing Supportive Guidelines: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.”

Any assistance given to enable her conduct research successfully will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

PROF. ANNE S. KISILU
DEAN, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



(ISO 9001 – 2015 Certified Institution)

II: Letter from NACOSTI

 REPUBLIC OF KENYA	 NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION
Ref No: 410278	Date of Issue: 01/February/2023
RESEARCH LICENSE	
	
This is to Certify that Ms., LILY JEROTICH YEGO of Moi University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Uasin-Gishu on the topic: Exploring learners' experiences of socio-ecological risks during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown and developing supportive guidelines: A case of selected secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya for the period ending : 01/February/2024.	
License No: NACOSTI/P/23/23423	
Applicant Identification Number	 Director General NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION
	Verification QR Code
	
NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.	
See overleaf for conditions	

III: Permit from Uasin Gishu County Director of Education


REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
State Department for Basic Education

Email: cdeuasingishucounty@gmail.com
: cdeuasingishucounty@yahoo.com
When replying please quote:

County Director of Education,
Uasin Gishu County,
P.O. Box 9843-30100,
ELDORET.

Ref: No. MOE/UGC/TRN/9/VOLL. V/48

8th March, 2023

Lily Jerotich Yego,
Moi University
P.O Box 3900
ELDORET

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION.

In reference to your Licence Ref no. **NACOSTI/P/23/23423** dated 1st February, 2023 from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), you are hereby granted the authority to carry out research on **"Exploring learners' experience of socio – ecological risks during the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown and developing supportive guidelines: A case of selected Secondary schools, Period Ending 1st February, 2024,"** Within Uasin Gishu County.

We take this opportunity to wish you well during this data collection.

FOR COUNTY DIRECTOR
UASIN GISHU COUNTY
MAR 2023


Samuel K. Kimaiyo
For: County Director of Education
UASIN GISHU.

P.O. Box 9843 - 30100, ELDORET
TEL: 053-2063342 / 0719127212



Part B: Letter of Invitation to School Principals

P.O. Box 3900- 30100

Eldoret- Kenya.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: LETTER OF INVITATION TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

I am a Doctoral student at Moi University. I am conducting research on **‘Exploring learners’ experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: A case of selected secondary schools in Kenya’**. Socio-ecological risk experiences refer to risk factors that occur at varied points of the social environment such as, in the neighbourhood, within the community; that influence young people’s lives. These include sexual abuse, substance abuse, early marriages, female genital mutilation and violence, including self-harm. I invite your school to consider taking part in this research. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of Moi University. This study will use drawings, memory accounts, cellphilms, unstructured individual interviews and focus group discussions to generate data. I will also seek permission to take photos and videos wherever and whenever necessary. Results will be disseminated to the school. Permission will be sought from the learners prior to their participation in the research. Only those who consent will participate.

I will administer the data gathering process and the approximate time to be used. All information collected will be treated in strictest confidence and neither the school nor individual learners will be identifiable in any reports that are written. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The role of the school is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty. The study has no intention of causing any harm to the participants. If a learner requires support as a result of their participation in the research, steps will be taken to accommodate this.

Once I have received your consent to approach learners to participate in the study, I will arrange a time with your school for data generation to take place and also obtain informed consent from participants.

Attached is the Consent Form.

Invitation to Participate

If you would like your school to participate in this research, please complete and return the attached form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Lily Yego (Researcher).

DPECT/4145/20

Part C: School Principal Consent Form

I give consent for you to approach learners to participate in the research study:
‘Exploring learners’ experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: A case of selected secondary schools in Kenya’

I have read the Project Information Letter explaining the purpose of the research project and understand that:

- i). The role of the school is voluntary.
- ii). I may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty.
- iii). Learners will be invited to participate and that permission will be sought from them.
- iv). Only learners who consent will participate in the project
- v). All information obtained will be treated in strictest confidence.
- vi). Learners’ names will not be used and individual learners will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- vii). The school will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- xiii). Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- ix). A report of the findings will be made available to the school.

I may seek further information on the project from Lily Yego on +254 [REDACTED].

Principal’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Part D: Letter of Invitation to Study Participants

P.O. Box 3900- 30100

Eldoret- Kenya.

Dear Participant,

RE: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

I am a postgraduate student of Moi University undertaking a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Communication and Technology. I intend to conduct a study entitled **“Exploring learners’ experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: A case of selected secondary schools in Kenya”**. Socio-ecological risk experiences refer to risk factors that occur at varied points of the social environment such as in the neighbourhood within the community; that influence young people’s lives. These include sexual abuse, substance abuse, early marriages, female genital mutilation and violence, including self-harm. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to consider taking part in this research. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee of Moi University. This study will use drawings, memory accounts, cellphilms, unstructured individual interviews and focus group discussions to generate data. I will also seek permission to take photos and videos wherever and whenever necessary. Your participation in the data generation process will be completely voluntary. As such your decision to decline, withdraw or skip any tasks given in the course of this study will not attract any consequence.

The information you give shall be treated with utmost confidentiality during and after the study. There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study and all the responses you give shall be used only for the purpose of this study. If you would like to participate in this study please complete and return the attached consent form. Thank you for reading this information.

Thank you in advance.

Lily Yego (Researcher).

DPECT/4145/20

Part E: Learners' Consent Form

I give consent to participate in the research study: **Exploring learners' experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: A case of selected secondary schools in Kenya**

I have read the Project Information Letter explaining the research project and understand that:

1. The role of the participant is voluntary
2. Only learners who consent will participate in the project
3. All information obtained will be treated in strictest confidence.
4. Learners' names will not be used and individual teachers will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
5. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
6. A report of the findings will be made available to the school.
7. I may seek further information on the project from Lily Yego on +254 [REDACTED].

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Part F: (I) Memory Accounts Prompt

Dear Students,

This is a study to find out your opinion on how socio-ecological experiences faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown affected you. Socio-ecological risk experiences refer to risk factors that occur at varied points of the social environment such as in the neighbourhood within the community; that influence young people's lives. These include sexual abuse, substance abuse, early marriages, female genital mutilation and violence, including self-harm. Memory accounts are written narrative that give a reader a sense of what the narrator is feeling. Whereas, a drawing is a picture made with a pencil, pen, or crayon rather than paint. This is NOT a test. Therefore, please bear in mind that there are no right or wrong memory work entries and, no good or bad drawings, just draw. Prepare to share your drawing with the rest of the participants and give an oral explanation of it in the focus group discussion. All memory accounts and drawings will add to the richness of the research.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Questions

1. Please recall any memories you have in relation to socio-ecological risky experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
2. Using the paper and pen given, write down any memories you have in relation to socio-ecological risky experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The exercise takes 30 minutes.

Thank you once again for your willingness to participate in the study!

I hope you had fun.

Part G: (II). Drawing prompt**Questions**

1. Using the paper, pencil and crayons given, draw a picture(s) illustrating how socio-ecological risks affected you during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
2. Below each of your drawing(s) explain in writing what the drawing is about, what it means to you and why you chose that particular drawing.

Once again, thank you for participating!

I hope you had fun.

Part H: Cellphilm Prompt

Dear Learners,

This is a study to find out your opinion on your coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Socio-ecological risk experiences refer to risk factors that occur at varied points of the social environment such as in the neighbourhood within the community; that influence young people's lives. These include sexual abuse, substance abuse, early marriages, female genital mutilation and violence, including self-harm. Cellphilm is cellphone video production where you use a cellphone to record a short film of about 5 minutes with the research participants. This is NOT a test and therefore, please bear in mind that there are no good or bad films and therefore no video editing will be needed. Once filming is concluded, the entire research team will return to the workshop venue and watch the films as a group. During the screening of the films, you will be invited to ask questions or comment on each story- a process that will be digitally recorded with your permission.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Steps in cellphilm

1. Produce a short film of about 5 minutes focusing on your perception of socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Producing the cellphilms will occur in the following phases:

Phase 1: Together with the other participants in the group, use the flipchart and pens given to brainstorm problems related to how you perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Phase 2: In the group, list all your priorities regarding how you perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on a flipchart. After that, vote using three sticky dots, for the top three issues you feel are most important to address based on the problems and their solutions, and about which you would want to produce a cellphilm. Once each member in the group has 'voted', discuss how best to create a group story.

Phase 3: In your group, create a storyboard template on which to plan and execute a story and facilitate this process. With the other members, you are encouraged

to have a maximum of six scenes for your films. Part of the analysis in this study will focus on the storyboards produced in this phase.

Phase 4: I will then hand you cellphones and you set off to produce the films. You will be allowed as much time as you need to make these films. First, with the group members, you will practice acting your roles before filming using the ‘No-Editing-Required’ (NER) technique (Mitchell, 2011).

Part I: Unstructured Individual Interview Schedule for Teachers and Parents' Association (PA) Representatives

Dear Teachers and Parents association representatives,

This is a study to find out your opinion on socio-ecological risks experienced by learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Socio-ecological risk experiences refer to risk factors that occur at varied points of the social environment such as in the neighbourhood within the community; that influence young people's lives. These include sexual abuse, substance abuse, early marriages, female genital mutilation and violence, including self-harm.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

The following questions will guide the interview:

1. Kindly tell me about your role in this school?
2. What is your opinion about COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
3. Tell me about the social background of learners you engage with?
4. What positive experiences did learners in your school experience during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
5. What negative experiences did learners in your school experience during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
6. Within these experiences, what were the risks that learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
7. In your opinion, how did the risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
8. In your opinion, how have the risks affected learners' lives after the COVID-19 lockdown?
9. In your own opinion, how are learners dealing with risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Thank you for participating!

Part J: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Learners

Good afternoon! My name is Lily Yego, a doctoral student in the school of education at Moi University. I will be facilitating the discussion this afternoon. With me, is my research assistant and she/he will be taking notes and helping me. Thank you so much for taking the time to be here today. We will be discussing your experiences of socio-ecological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. We are interested in finding out from you how socio-ecological risks affected you and how you perceive those risks. This information will not bear your name and will be treated as confidential. If at any point you do not want to continue participating in this discussion, you are free to leave the group and we will no longer be asking you any more questions. The information discussed today will help us to understand what can be done to develop supportive strategies to cope with socio-ecological risks during pandemic times.

We would like to record this discussion. Even though we will be taking notes, we are not able to write everything down and want to be able to go back and listen to any information we might have missed. All notes and the recording will be kept safely and securely. Is everyone okay with recording this conversation? (The researcher will confirm that all participants consent). We ask that you please take turns while speaking and do not interrupt anyone. We are interested in what all of you have to say, so please be respectful of each other's opinions. This discussion will last about an hour and half. I will request each one of you to introduce yourself. Before we begin, does anyone have any questions?

Guiding Objectives

Objective 1: To investigate how socio-ecological risks affected learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in selected secondary schools in Kenya.

1. Who do you live with?
2. Please tell us about the community in which you lived in during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
3. Please tell us about your positive experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
4. Please tell us about your negative experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

5. Using the drawing(s) you drew earlier own, explain how these experiences affected you during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Objective 2: To explore how learners perceive socio-ecological risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

1. Based on your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, what are the risky issues that you faced because of the lockdown?
2. Based on your experiences during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, what risky issues do you still face associated with the risky situations you faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Objective 3: To explore learners coping strategies in the face of socio-ecological risks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

1. From your experiences, what do you think can be done to solve the problems faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
2. Based on your risky experiences faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, what supportive strategies can help you cope with the risks, now and in future?

Thank you for participating!

Part K: Budget for the Study

DATA GENERATION BUDGET	
Item	Cost (Kes)
1.Typesetting draft proposal + project & binding	5000.00
2.Typesetting final proposal + project & binding	5000.00
3. Photocopying	5000.00
4.Editing	2000.00
Stationery	
5.Glue	2000.00
6.Foolsaps	2000.00
7.Pens, pencils, crayons & rubber	5000.00
8.Flash disk	3000.00
9. Video recorder	10000.00
10. Manila and duplicating paper for drawings and photovoice (63pieces @100 per piece	6300.00
11. 22 Exercise books for journals @50.00 per book	1100.00
Travelling cost	
12. To administer learners' drawings and interviews	5000.00
13. To administer learners' photovoice	5000.00
14. Fare @1000Ksh for 22participants for FGD	22000.00
Computer expenses	
15. Internet/Data bundles	10000.00
16. Follow-up activities cost	5000.00
17. Telephone cost	5000.00
18. LCD Projector @ 3500	3500.00
19.Venue Hire for one day: 8000.00 per day	8000.00
20.Meals: Tea break, Lunch &4 O'clock tea - To Conduct Focus Group Discussions (22 participants @2,000Ksh-venue and meals)	44000.00
21. Snacks while administering cellphilm, drawings and interviews	10000.00
22. Contingencies	5000.00
23. Research assistant	20000.00
24. Analysis' technical support	15000.00
	202,900.00
TOTAL	

Part L: Samples of Data Generated

I: Drawings



II: Cellphilm





III: Unstructured Individual Interviews

Qn. 1: Kindly tell me about your role in this school?

Ans: I am the Parents' representative for the Form 2 West class in the school.

Qn. 2: What's your opinion about COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Ans: It presented a sense of unpreparedness by people globally and that is why there was tension everywhere.

Qn. 3: Tell me about the social background of the learners you engage with?

Ans: The learners from our school come from the suburbs of Eldoret. Some live in the slum areas of this town. Many at times they are forced to find jobs when out of school so as to feed their families. Most of them come from struggling families.

Qn. 4: What positive experiences did learners in your school experience during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Ans: Since there were restrictions (curfews) everywhere, learners were able to bond with family as they spent a lot of time together. Those with strict parental roles were able to settle and study.

Qn. 5: What negative experiences did learners in your school experience during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Ans: Rape cases were randomly experienced, pregnancy cases were on the rise, some of our students were involved in theft cases and some got jailed. Some family disputes which arose to fights were also experienced.

Qn. 6: Within these experiences, what were the risks that learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Ans: They faced risks of early motherhood, risks of being left out to look for food and upkeep, risks of stealing to survive, cases of STI and HIV and AIDS were on the rise as we heard and saw these cases in the neighbourhood.

Qn. 7: In your opinion, how did the risks affect learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Ans: Some went through mental stress because of family disagreements, lack of basic food and were exposed to risks in order to look for food. Being idle young ones influenced themselves therefore indulging in risky sexual behaviours that led to abortion and other risks.

Qn. 8: In your own opinion, how have the risks affected learners' lives after the COVID-19 lockdown?

Ans: School dropout rates have been high, adaptation to peer influenced behaviour, early marriages and cases of molestation that have had dire consequences like psychological torture on those affected.

Qn. 9: In your own opinion, how are learners dealing with risks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Ans: Some resorted to guidance and counselling, some parents were advised to take care of children while the mothers returned to school. Some young people began community projects to keep them busy and earn some money for their daily needs.

IV. Focus group discussion

Researcher: What can you say about the communities that you live in as well as the communities that you lived in during the covid-19 pandemic lockdown?

P.1: The Community that I lived in is not safe as you can be robbed, you can be mugged ...

P2: The community is not safe. I live with my grandfather in the event he dies I have no one else to turn to.

P3: The community is not safe because there were so many cases of rape, robbing, drunkenness and experiences of bad things during the pandemic lockdown

P4: The community that comes from is not safe as people drink alcohol and smoke bhang...

Researcher: Please tell us about your positive experiencing covid-19 pandemic lockdown?

P.1: I had a lot of time to focus on my academics

P2: I got enough time to bond with my family to get to know each other and participate in community activities.

P3: I got time to spend with my family and my entire friends....

P4: I got enough time to spend with my mother cooking and doing the household activities.

P5: I got time for my family members and their characters.

P6: I got time to help my family with housework.

Researcher: What are the negative experiences that you faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

P1: I lacked counseling from teachers who I was close to and that made me not focus so much.

P2: I lost my mother which is so painful. I did not manage to see my teachers for guidance and I even wanted to commit suicide...

P3: During that time, I did not have time to visit friends, I did not study anymore, i lost out

P4: I joined a bad company and contracted STIs and even got pregnant.

P5: I had bad company, I engaged in sexual activities and I am now HIV positive...sadly the person I was with is no longer with us and luckily, I am still alive, I take drugs...

Researcher: Using your experiences in the drawings and memory accounts, explain how COVID-19 pandemic affected you?

P1: I wasted a lot of my time in parties, things that do not favour me at all. I got infected with HIV which has actually affected me... I urge the rest to take care because as for me my life will never be the same again.

P2: My life got upside down but luckily with time we have recovered.

P3: I joined bad company that drugged me into using drugs after everyone left me and I was all alone and therefore, I joined this company.

P4: After my mother passed on, I joined bad companies, I even got infected with syphilis as I indulged in sexual activities.

P5: I didn't find someone to counsel me then, but I am under counselling now. I got a child and am now expecting a second child.

P6: I regret I lost my brother because of my carelessness. I introduced my brother to drugs and one time he was driving with me and we got an accident and he died

P7: My life was like a crack...later own life got better. Society has exposed us to many risks that we wish we don't face again.

P8: I was very tired of the things that people went through; I passed through sodomy...

V: Memory Accounts

- Memory accounts Name: Arel
- 1. Please recall any memories you have in relation to Sociocultural risky experiences during the Covid 19, pandemic lockdown.
 - ✓ During that pandemic lockdown, many of my colleague neighbours were involved in drug abuse usage e.g. miraa, Bhang and also (Kuber)
 - ✓ Also many of young girls were impregnated and the ones who gave them did not accept the pregnancy.
 - ✓ During that lockdown it affects some of the Christians or not actively participating in the church subjecting many people to be Pagans.
 - ✓ There was also shortage of food where the towns can be closed at around 6-00pm where the parents can struggle to get that little food.
 - ✓ There was loss of lives especially the neighbours around, causing also a lockdown to the neighbouring houses either to talk or with a greeting.
 - ✓ Introduction of mask also savours the mature people and for the children it didn't hence causing a huge number of loss of children.
 - ✓ During that pandemic most of the students become school dropouts hence being bode bode ridos.
 - ✓ It also affect those students due to a because of introduction of online classes, for those whose parents didn't have smartphones and also lack of electricity.

Part M: Map of Kenya Showing Uasin Gishu County

Part N: Plagiarism Report



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THESIS WRITING COURSE

PLAGIARISM AWARENESS CERTIFICATE

This certificate is awarded to

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In recognition for passing the University's plagiarism

Awareness test for Thesis entitled: **EXPLORING LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL RISKS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN: A CASE OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS, IN KENYA** with similarity index of 13% and striving to maintain academic integrity.

Word count: 51624

Awarded by

Prof. Anne Syomwene Kisilu

CERM-ESA Project Leader Date: 25/06/2024