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COLLEGE CONVERSION INTO QUARANTINE CENTRE: PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON SAFETY AT KENYA MEDICAL TRAINING COLLEGE, MOMBASA

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COLLEGE CONVERSION INTO QUARANTINE CENTRE: PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON SAFETY AT KENYA MEDICAL TRAINING COLLEGE, MOMBASA

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to determine perception of parents on safety of their children upon resumption of face-to-face studies at Kenya Medical Training College, Mombasa after its temporary conversion into COVID-19 quarantine centre.

Methodology: The study was a descriptive cross-sectional design done at KMTTC-Mombasa. 85 (10%) parents were sampled by convenience method from total population of 850. Multi stage sampling was used to select 85 participants. Data was collected through structured phone administered interview. Response rate was 85.8% (73). Descriptive analyses were carried out using SPSS 26. Presentation of the results was done by use of graphs, pie charts and tables.

Findings: 65.8% (48) of parents were aware of KMTTC Mombasa having being converted into COVID-19 quarantine centre. Most parents 91.8% (67) felt safe for their children to go back to college. Availability of clear information about safety measures was cited by 69% (46) of the parents as the reason they felt the students would be safe. Only 6 parents (8.2%) felt unsafe for their children. They explained that COVID-19 spreads quickly in congested places like schools and that the college was 'highly infectious' as a quarantine centre. There was a significant relationship between parents perception of safety of the college and their proposition of dates of reopening the college ($p=0.01$). Parents generally considered the college facilities conducive for use (Mean=61.33%).

Unique contribution to theory, practice and Policy: The views of parents as key stakeholders when learning institutions are converted into quarantine centers during a pandemic have not been explored in literature. Parents who perceived the college as safe would allow their children to go back to college and resume face-to-face learning as soon as possible. However, parents who perceived the college as unsafe would stop their children from going back to college. For smooth learning, it is important for college management to ensure that necessary safety measures are put in place and communicated to parents before reopening of college.

Keywords: *Conducive, COVID-19, Kenya Medical Training College, Mombasa, Perception, Quarantine centre, Safety, Parents*

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is one of the greatest challenges facing education sector globally in more than fifty years. Shortly after the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11th March, 2020 by World Health Organization as reported by Cucinotta and Vanelli (2020), several governments across the world put in place measures and response strategies to mitigate the spread of the highly infectious virus. This was because the virus that causes COVID-19 could infect people of all ages, and therefore leaders were expected to do everything feasible to keep students, teachers, staff, and communities safe (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Among the strategies employed, was temporary closure of education institutions from pre-primary to tertiary level across the globe. Consequently, this led to substantial change in the manner in which institutions of higher learning operated. For example, teaching and learning changed from predominantly face-to-face approach to online or virtual learning. In Kenya, several public learning institutions were converted into quarantine and isolation centers, including some campuses of Kenya Medical Training College.

As people adjust to the new normal, some countries have established guidelines for reopening colleges. Cheng, Wang, Shen and Chang (2020) advised that safe reopening was possible with a combination of containment and mitigation strategies. Engagement of the different groups of customers by the college leaders is crucial for the success of this endeavor. The groups of customers include students who are its primary customers receiving educational services, to parents who pay school fees and faculty members who train students to gain knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform their jobs. Therefore, no one was supposed to be left behind. COVID-19 has created an unstable and unpredictable operating environment for colleges and universities. Thus the ability of these institutions to survive and thrive through a monumental challenge of this caliber depends on how they engage key stakeholders.

Parents are important stakeholders in higher education system (Wood and Su, 2019). Their involvement forms an integral part of a 'return to normalcy' for colleges partly because they greatly influence the decision making process of their children. Reassuring students and their parents of the safety of learning institution is a vital element of institutional response to COVID-19 (Solórzano, 2020). Merriman (2020) explained that understanding expectations of parents during such a crisis is important to its successful management. This is because parents are deeply involved in their children's higher education. In a study conducted by Gentili *et al.* (2020) on impacts of communication measures implemented during school Tuberculosis outbreak, 66% of parents perceived a moderate to high level of risk before any intervention, but only 43.4% perceived high risk after the intervention to combat its spread was carried out. However, their study did not address the safety of various school facilities as well as when parents were willing to have their children go back to school.

Safety was an important criterion for decision-making with regards to higher education for both students and their parents. Parents just like their children (the students) have high levels of anxiety about safety of institutions that have been used as quarantine centers given the fear of facilities and stigma of individuals exposed to the virus (Logie and Turan, 2020). Therefore, it is

crucial for higher education institutions to involve parents in their processes and respond to parents' concerns in order to keep them satisfied.

Problem statement

Maintaining safety of students upon resumption of studies in institutions that had been converted to quarantine centres for COVID-19 is a concern for leaders and parents. This is paramount in order to avert spread of infection among students, staff and the community upon reopening. If parents are not assured of safety of college facilities, they might not let their children go back to college. This in turn could negatively affect operations of learning institutions in terms of attaining their mission. Finding out the perception of parents on safety of college infrastructure would provide vital information in such challenging times and supports collaborative leadership required in making key decisions (Harris, 2020). Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine perceptions of parents' on safety of their children upon resumption at Kenya Medical Training College, Mombasa after its temporary conversion into COVID-19 quarantine centre.

METHODOLOGY

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional design done at KMTC-Mombasa. Researchers worked on assumption that each student had at least one parent, therefore from total population of 850 students, 85 parents were sampled by convenience method thereby representing 10% of the total population (0.1x850). Multi stage sampling was used to select 85 participants (parents) proportionally to the six courses that students were enrolled in. Data was collected through structured phone administered interview. Response rate was 85.8% (n=73). Simple descriptive analyses were carried out using SPSS 26. Presentation of the results was done by use of graphs, pie charts and tables.

RESULTS

Participants' demographics

Table 1: Participants distribution by Age and Gender

Demographics	Category	Frequency(n=73)	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	30-39	4	5.5
	40-49	25	34.2
	50-59	30	41.1
	60 and above	14	19.2
Gender	Male	40	54.8
	Female	33	45.2

Table 1 shows 41.1% (30) of parents were within the age bracket of 50-59 years, a state that resonates with Winerip (2013) who stated that the average age of parents with college students is 50 to 60 years. The mean age for each gender varied. Female parents recorded a mean age of 45 years while male parents recorded a mean age of 48 years.

Gender in the study was defined as biological characteristic of being either female or male. 54.8% (40) of the respondents were male while 45.2% (33) were female. This is a reflection of social expectation where fathers tend to be more involved in their children education mostly in high school and higher education. Ali (2017) noted that majority of parents were getting involved in their children education and becoming advocates of their children academic welfare. In addition, she uniquely highlighted that parents who were active in their children academic lives consisted of Generation X, that is, the cohort of parents born between 1961 -1981 (39 to 59 years) which was a true blend of the parents in KMTC Mombasa.

Perception of Parents towards Safety of College after its use as Quarantine Centre

Perception referred to how parents regarded the safety of the institution after it was converted into a COVID-19 quarantine center during the pandemic response strategy. This was necessary because parents' involvement in their children welfare was important for planning and actualization of safety measures for resumption of college activities.

Table 2: Parents' awareness on college being used as a COVID-19 quarantine Center

Awareness	Frequency (n=73)	Percentage (%)
Yes	48	65.8
No	25	34.2
Total	73	100.0

Awareness referred to respondent's recognition of KMTC Mombasa campus being COVID-19 quarantine center. Despite information of KMTC having being converted into COVID-19 quarantine centre existing in the public domain and mainstream media only 65.8% (48) of parents displayed awareness of the same. 34.2% (25) of the respondents were not aware of KMTC Mombasa being a COVID-19 quarantine centre. This could be because the college leadership had not informed the parents officially about the conversion. Ali (2017) acknowledged great improvement in parental involvement in their children's higher education however he noted that there was still limited access to students' information by parents. Moreover, most parents depended on the children to relay all the necessary information to them pertaining to their school work (grades, activities etc). According to Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), parents also relied on communication from the school to understand the progress of their students. Schools were expected to send home fliers and notes about important activities and events, In addition, updated websites, regular notices, memos, emails, phone calls and other vital means in communicating to parents were also necessary. Nevertheless, it was emphasized that the school should try to translate the information into easily understandable format so as to reach a wide range of parents and guardians for example, the unlearned category.

Table 3: Safety of students when they resume college

Safety	Frequency (n=73)	Percentage (%)
Yes	67	91.8
No	6	8.2
Total	73	100.0

Safety in the study meant being protected from the risk of getting COVID-19 upon resumption to college. Parents’ perception on safety of their children upon resumption of college was crucial as it influenced their decision to release them from home to college. The participants were asked if they consider their sons and daughters safe from COVID-19 once they go back to school by indicating YES for Safe and NO for Not Safe. The findings indicated that 91.8% of parents felt safe for their children to go back to college while 8.2% felt unsafe for their children. Parents who felt unsafe for their children to resume college stated that COVID-19 spread was high in congested areas for example schools. However, by virtue of the college having been a quarantine centre warranted it to be “highly infectious”. They felt the students were at high risk of being infected. They therefore suggested that students should adopt online learning till the spread had been contained. The following were some of their responses;

“There is no assurance of our child's safety due to the increase of COVID-19 patients and no cure has been found.”

“Virus is infectious more at crowded areas so students to continue with on-line learning till proper measures are done.”

Parents who felt safe for their students to go back to college stated the reasons displayed in figure 1.

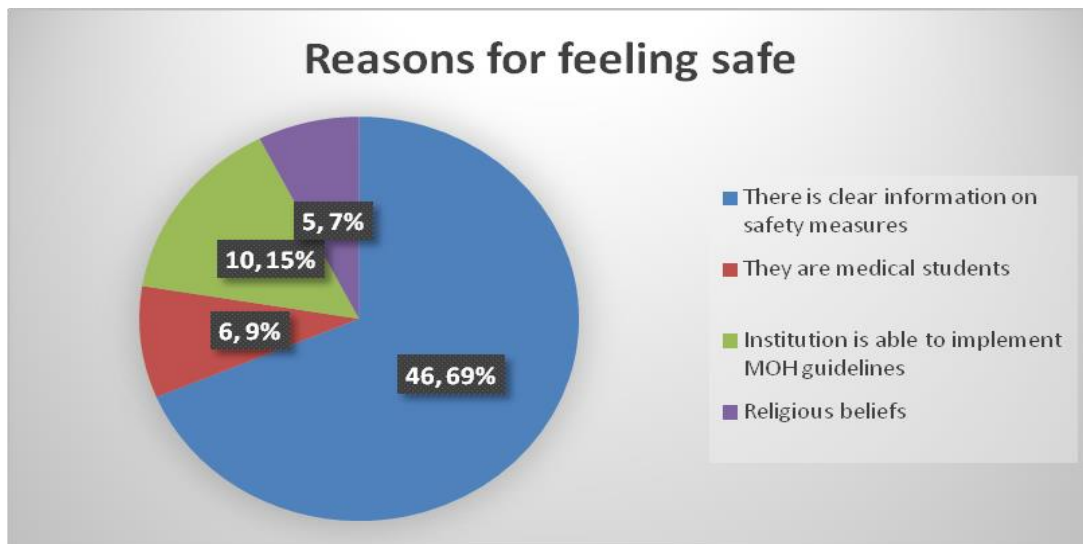


Figure 1: A Pie chart showing parent’s reasons why they felt safe about the students getting back to KMTC- Mombasa after its conversion into a COVID-19 quarantine centre

In figure 1, availability of clear information on protective measures from COVID-19 was the main reason parents felt their children would be safe while in college. There was also a feeling that KMTC had the capacity to implement MOH guidelines before and after students report back. Moreover, by virtue of their children studying in a medical college parents felt that they were experts in health matters hence clearly understood how to be responsible in avoiding spread of COVID-19 infection. Other parents believed in divine intervention as a means of protecting their children while in college (7%). Soliman, Koran and Gomaa (2018) stated that it was responsibility of any educational establishment to ensure safe and healthy learning environment free from any form of threat like; fire, accidents, disaster, gangs, terrorism, infectious disease outbreaks, and the discharge of toxic substances. Parents in this study believed that the institution was able to uphold this responsibility. In addition, parents' knowledge on safety measures by the schools reduced their negative perception towards school safety while parents who were more familiar with workings of the school were more likely to feel that their children were safe.

Table 4: Safe to resume college * when to return to college Cross tabulation

Safe to resume college	when to return to college				Total
	Immediately	September	January 2021	Others	
Yes	49	8	2	8	67
No	0	0	2	4	6
Total	49	8	4	12	73

There was a significant relationship between parents perception of safety of the college and their proposition of dates of reopening the college ($p=0.01$). Parents who perceived the college as safe preferred immediate resumption of face-to-face learning while parents who perceived the college as unsafe preferred later resumption (up to 6 months later). Cheung *et al.* (2015) noted that parents who were aware of disease severity were more likely to consent to preventive measures as compared to parents who didn't understand. The study was done during influenza pandemic and was looking at parents' perception on safety of Influenza vaccine to school children. This similar scenario applies to KMTC parents whose perception on safety of the college influences their likelihood to consent to reopening of college activities.

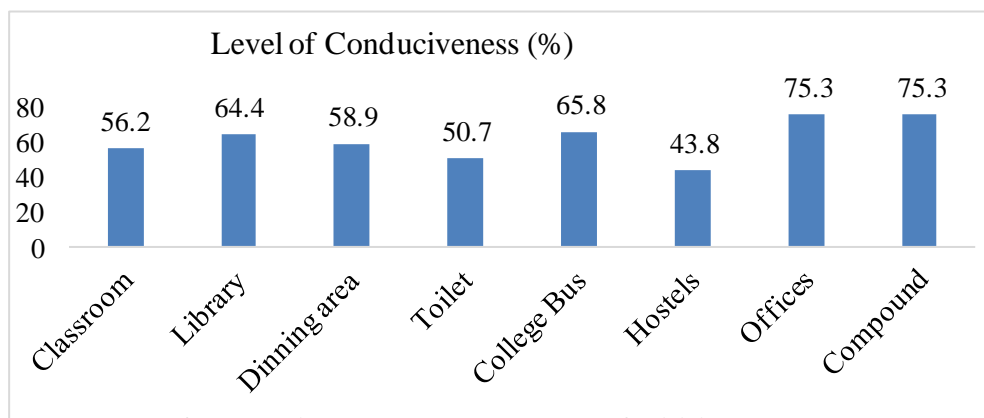


Figure 2: Level of conduciveness towards college facilities

In this study conduciveness meant state of being safe for use of college facilities after resumption of college activities. Many parents considered the college facilities conducive for use (Mean=61.33%). Compound and offices were ranked the most safe to use (75.3%) while hostels were ranked the least safe (43.8%). The average mean of conduciveness affirms that the parents' perception of safety of college facilities for use was good and hence ready to resume college activities. These results were also in agreement with the parents feelings, since 91.8% considered the college safe and would not mind if the college was reopened immediately (67.1%, n=49).

DISCUSSION

The outbreak of COVID-19 was reported in Kenya in March 2020. Rising number of cases led to conversion of college facilities into quarantine centers. It was speculated by the Kenyan Ministry of Education that schools were to reopen in January 2021 (Bonaya, 2020). Perception of parents towards safety of college facilities after being used as quarantine centers has great influence on when their children are to go back to college. This is because, parents are most likely to influence their children's behavior and how they would perceive safety upon resumption to college.

A study conducted by Gentili *et al.* (2020) on impacts of communication measures implemented during school Tuberculosis outbreak, found that majority of parents reported that they had knowledge of tuberculosis before the school outbreak. However, a few parents (13.8%) were aware of the occurrence of cases in their province of residence. A similar result was discovered among teachers where few (30.2%) were aware of TB cases in that area. These findings contradicted the finding of this study, where majority of parents (65.8%) were aware of KMTC Mombasa being a quarantine center during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be because conversion of public learning institutions into quarantine centers in Kenya was communicated to the general public through the media by the Government. Other than the parents of the students, the populace was also informed in the same manner. Parents who did not have access to the media channels may have missed out on this information.

In this study parents were asked if they consider their children safe from COVID-19 once they go back to college. Majority of parents (91.8%) felt that it was safe for their children to go back to college. They gave several reasons that were categorized into four themes as follows; clarity of information on safety measures, institution's ability to implement MOH guidelines, medical students and religious beliefs. In Malaysia, a study was conducted by Rabe *et al.* (2017) that focused on the safe distance allowed by parents and guardians to their children when travelling from their homes to public places such as schools. The study findings revealed that the main factor that influenced parents and guardians was children age. This meant that perception of parents towards safety of their children was influenced by their age. A possible explanation as to why 91.8% of parents from KMTC Mombasa felt that it was safe for their children to resume college could be because they were considered adults therefore of age to take care of themselves.

There was a relationship between parents' perception of safety and the proposed date of college resumption after COVID-19 pandemic. This was evident by results that demonstrated a significant relationship between parents perception of safety of the college and their proposition

of college reopening dates ($p=0.01$). Parents who perceived the college as safe preferred immediate re-opening of college while parents who perceived the college as unsafe preferred later opening date. These findings were congruent with a study by Chua *et al.* (2020), which found that 67% of respondents would send their children to public school for in-person classes during the 2020-2021 school years. The main reason given was respondents trusted their schools to keep their children safe.

According to Soliman, Koran and Gomaa (2018), there are several factors that contribute to school safety. Some of these factors have been listed as personal characteristics, contextual characteristics, processes within the schools and relationships. All these factors have implications on parents, student and teacher perception regarding school safety. Majority of parents (91.8%) who felt that it was safe for their children to go back to college gave several reasons. For example they believed that the institution would implement COVID-19 mitigation measures namely fumigation, maintenance of social distance and installation of hand washing and sanitization facilities.

In a study by Chua *et al.* (2020), a few respondents (12%) reported that they were likely not to send their children to school for in-person classes due to health related concerns. Those findings were in agreement with this study where few parents (8.2%) felt unsafe for their children to resume college. The main reason given was that COVID-19 spread was high in congested areas like schools. In addition they regarded the quarantine centre as “highly infectious,” thus increasing the risk of the students contracting COVID-19. Parents would like to have an assurance that the health of their children is safe guarded. This may be very critical especially for parents with children who have underlying illnesses.

Parents considered the college facilities conducive for use (Mean=61.33%). In comparing conduciveness of several college facilities, college compound and offices were ranked the most safe to use (75.3%) while hostels were ranked the least safe (43.8%). This could be because quarantined persons were hosted in the hostels and were not allowed to move within the compound or visit college offices. Among contact traced individuals who were quarantined in the college hostels some turned positive. These individuals had been into contact with the hostels’ surfaces therefore posed a risk of contamination. A study by Rabi *et al.* (2020) stated that corona viruses can survive, and remain infectious, from 2 hours up to 9 days on inanimate surfaces such as metal, glass, or plastic, with increased survival in colder and dryer environments. This is a possible reason why hostels were considered least safe by parents. Therefore parents may have preferred the students to report back to college at a later date when the hostels were no longer considered infectious.

CONCLUSION

Majority of parents felt the institution was safe after its temporary conversion into a quarantine center and were ready for their children to get back to college immediately.

RECOMMENDATION

1. KMTC management should to ensure that necessary safety measures that are recommended by WHO are put in place before reopening of colleges.
2. KMTC management should use various modes of communication to parents to inform them of the measures put in place to ensure safety of their children once they get back to college.

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