



World Food
Programme

SAVING
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Rebuilding human capital amidst the pandemic

The impacts of COVID-19 on school-aged
children and youth in Ghana

October 2022

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Highlights

- › In Ghana, 1,354 youth aged 15–24 years and 610 parents of schoolchildren were randomly surveyed online between May and July 2021. Parents reported on behalf of 843 young boys and girls aged 6–14 years.
- › This study found that COVID-19 had negatively impacted **access to education** and quality of learning for children in Ghana. In the 2021 school year, school attendance for schoolchildren was 8 percentage points lower than pre-pandemic levels. Young girls and children aged 6–9 years old were more affected than young boys and older children. Almost 80 percent of parents also stated that the quality of learning for their children had markedly deteriorated during the pandemic.
- › While the COVID-19 pandemic affected **school enrolment** in youth somewhat less severely than for schoolchildren, it provided additional challenges to accessing education. Many youth reported they could not pay school costs. Additionally, out of those in school at the time of the survey, 60 percent reported that less interaction with teachers, loss of focus and insufficient academic support led to a decrease in the quality of learning and education.
- › Both parents and working youth reported having their **income** decreased either through job losses or a reduction of working hours. Young women and 14–19 year-olds, and groups that were already less likely to have a job before COVID were particularly affected by job losses (57 percent and 51 percent respectively).
- › Unemployment and income instability appears to have strongly affected the **food security** of Ghanaian households with children. While almost 80 percent of children consumed at least two meals per day, 62 percent of parents of schoolchildren still reported that they worried about not having enough to eat. It is also alarming that 43 percent of respondents reported that their children had to adopt severe food-based coping strategies in the month prior to the survey. Comparable findings were found in youth, with almost one in four reporting they had gone at least a day without eating.
- › When asked about **access to medical services** for their children, almost half of parents surveyed reported experiencing challenges, most commonly lack of money, which coincides with the income losses encountered by households due to COVID-19.
- › The main **challenge** identified by parents of schoolchildren and youth in the younger age group (14–19 years) was access to education, while the 20–24 year-olds reported lack of working opportunities as the main difficulty they faced during the pandemic.
- › When asked about **safety concerns** in their community, one in two parents reported perceiving tensions (45 percent), with 44 percent reporting that tensions severely affected their children and 29 percent reporting that tensions affected their children to some degree. Similarly, over a third of youth reported not feeling safe in their own environment, with a slightly higher percentage of 15–19 year-olds and rural youth reporting feeling unsafe than other groups.
- › According to Ghanaian youth included in the survey, better job opportunities and more equitable access to education are key to ensuring that they can be successful in their lives and make a **positive impact** in their communities as agents of social change.

Background

Ghana is a lower-middle-income country with a population of 29.6 million.¹ Despite its generally rapid economic growth and recent reductions in extreme poverty, Ghana's development gains are still unevenly distributed, with major inequality in poverty, nutrition and human development indicators.²

The 2016/17 Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) suggests that about 23 percent of the population live below the poverty line, and 8.2 percent live in extreme poverty. Ghana is faced with the triple burden of malnutrition (underweight, overweight and vitamin and mineral deficiencies). The Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study on Ghana reveals that the country loses 6.4 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) annually due to child undernutrition. Only 13 percent of children meet the minimum acceptable diet. The 2019 food security and nutrition assessment of people living with HIV indicated that about 21 percent of the households sampled were food insecure.³ Ghana ranks 138 out of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. In the past 20 years (1990-2020), Ghana HDI value increased from 0.465 to 0.611 thanks to an increase of 7.3 years in life expectancy at birth and 2.4 years of mean years of schooling – a very encouraging trend for human capital. However, these improvements are unequally distributed across the population. Gender inequalities are also very prominent, and

the country is ranked 107 out of 153 countries in the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index.⁴

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, Ghana introduced measures to limit the spread of the virus and mitigate its impacts. Like many countries across the world, Ghana declared nationwide closure of schools, which had far-reaching economic and societal consequences, including interrupted learning and disruptions for households. School closures adversely affect children, disrupting their learning and access to education, creating challenges for their parents, and depriving them of access to school health and nutrition services, such as school-feeding. From July 2020, the schools in Ghana started re-opening using a phased approach. By March 2021, all schools fully reopened. Overall, between 2020 and 2021 schools were partially or fully closed for 53 weeks and affected 9.7 million students in Ghana.^{5,6}

In addition, the lockdown and measures to restrict movement significantly impacted economic activities, leading to a contraction of the economy, loss of household income and higher prices for basic goods.⁷

Ghana's strong economic performance of the last two decades has not translated into job creation or improvements in working conditions, especially for Ghana's growing younger population.⁸ In Ghana, 57 percent of the population is under 25, yet, even before the pandemic, the country struggled with high youth unemployment and underemployment rates, estimated at 12 percent and 50 percent each. COVID-19 worked as an

1 World Bank. 2021. "[Ghana - Overview.](#)"

2 WFP. 2021. "[Ghana - Annual Country Report 2020.](#)"

3 WFP. 2021. [Ghana - Annual Country Report 2020.](#)

4 World Economic Forum. 2021. "[Global Gender Gap Report 2020](#)"

5 UNICEF DATA. 2021. "[COVID-19 and School Closures: One Year of Education Disruption.](#)"

6 Might Kojo Abreh and Wisdom K. Agbevanu. 2021. "[What Happened to Dropout Rates after COVID-19 School Closures in Ghana?](#)" Center For Global Development.

7 Might Kojo Abreh and Wisdom K. Agbevanu. 2021. "[What Happened to Dropout Rates after COVID-19 School Closures in Ghana?](#)" Center For Global Development.

8 Ernest Aryeetey, Priscilla Twumasi Baffour, and Festus Ebo. 2021. "[Addressing Youth Unemployment in Ghana by Supporting the Agro-Processing and Tourism Sectors.](#)" Brookings.

amplifier for youth unemployment with youth assumed to have been particularly hit by COVID-related economic measures.⁹

Ghana is one in seven countries part of a global study conducted by WFP's Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) Division and the School-based programmes (SBP) Service which aimed to better understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on schoolchildren aged 6–14 years and youth aged 15–24 years to help increase their resilience, build back their education and livelihoods, and avoid long-term impacts on human capital. Human capital is defined by the World Bank as “the knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society”.¹⁰ Other countries covered included Cambodia, Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya and Zimbabwe. These countries were selected to represent each of WFP's regions as well as all three school-based programme contexts.¹¹ An additional selection criterion was the relatively good internet coverage in each of these countries, which improved representation of the target groups covered.¹² A global report and seven separate case studies were produced in the context of this initiative. This case study provides an overview of context-specific findings of the survey among parents of schoolchildren and youth specifically for Ghana.

9 Christabel Dadzie, Mawuko Fumey, and Suleiman Namara. 2020. “[Youth Employment Programs in Ghana: Options for Effective Policy Making and Implementation](#)”. The World Bank.

10 World Bank. 2022. [The Human Capital Project: Frequently Asked Questions](#)

11 School-based programme contexts include Context 1: Providing operational support (Haiti); Context 2: Transitioning to national programmes (Cambodia and Kenya); Context 3: Consolidating and strengthening national programmes (Colombia, Ghana and Zimbabwe).

12 A minimum threshold of 30% of internet users within the total population. Data on internet users for 2020 was retrieved from: <https://datareportal.com/>.

Methodology and sample description

This study used innovative web surveys to collect information from random and anonymous respondents in near-real time. In practical terms, these surveys appear when internet users click on a broken link or make a mistake in their URL – instead of receiving a broken link notification, they receive a survey form.¹³ The analysis builds upon data from parents of schoolchildren aged 6–14 years and youth aged 15–24 years who were identified using specific filter questions and channelled to the appropriate survey form. Indeed, two custom but thematically similar surveys were designed for these two groups. The survey in Ghana was administered in English to meet the linguistic requirement of the country.

The overall target sample size for the country was 960 completed surveys with the following disaggregation (Table 1) to ensure representativity of school-aged children and youth from different age groups. Moreover, the sample was distributed proportionally to population size by admin 1 level.

Data collection was conducted in Ghana from 13 May to 28 June 2021. Overall, **1,964 surveys** were completed, more than doubling the national target. All disaggregated targets were also met. A total of **1,354 youth and 610 parents of schoolchildren** completed the survey. The parent survey included a child roster where respondents were invited to provide information for each of their children (up to five children). Parents reported on behalf of **843 children** aged 6–14 years, which allowed for sex-and- age disaggregated analysis on questions related to this group.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through the surveys. Questions mainly

covered access to and quality of education, livelihoods and income sources, food security situation and livelihood coping, access to healthcare (children), main challenges faced, safety concerns as well as aspirations for the future (youth). As the web survey technology presents a certain bias because it mainly reaches literate populations connected to the internet, a three-variable weighting system was introduced during the analysis phase to ensure that both sexes and people with different educational backgrounds and geographical areas were represented according to the prevailing national statistics. Moreover, when and where possible, data was triangulated with secondary sources to complement key findings.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Surveys across all seven countries targeted parents who had children aged 6–14 years as well as youth aged 15–24 years. Overall, in Ghana the unweighted samples for both youth and parents contained over twice more male respondents than female ones. This is likely due to a greater presence of men on the internet than women. Figure 1 illustrates the sex of respondents before and after weighting.

With regards to the age of the respondents, parents of schoolchildren were found to be mainly in the 24–44 years age bracket. For youth, the ages were aligned with the 50/50 targets that were set out for the two age groups (240 for 15–19 years and 240 for 20–24 years). Indeed, the overall sample after weighting is relatively well distributed by group of interest with 47 percent youth aged 15–19 years and 53 percent aged 20–24 years.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF SAMPLE AND DISTRIBUTION PER COUNTRY¹⁴

480 x Parents of school-aged children (6–14 years)	240 x school-aged children (6–9 years)
	240 x school-aged children (10–14 years)
480 x youth (15–24 years)	240 x youth (15–19 years)
	240 x youth (20–24 years)

¹³ WFP contracted RIWI Corporation to implement web-based surveys using its patented Random Domain Intercept Technology (RDIT™). Detailed information regarding RDIT can be found on the service provider's website: <https://riwi.com/>.

¹⁴ The overall sample of 480 completed surveys per target group is based on a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of 5 percent.

In terms of education, the sample for both parents and youth shows an underrepresentation of less-educated respondents, which is to be expected with the use of the web surveys. However, the weighting system helped correct this bias by recalibrating the sample based on education statistics for Ghana.

This provides a greater voice in the sample to those who have lower education levels, which is often a proxy of lower socioeconomic status, and thereby highlights the specific challenges and needs these groups are facing.

FIGURE 1: SEX OF RESPONDENTS UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED

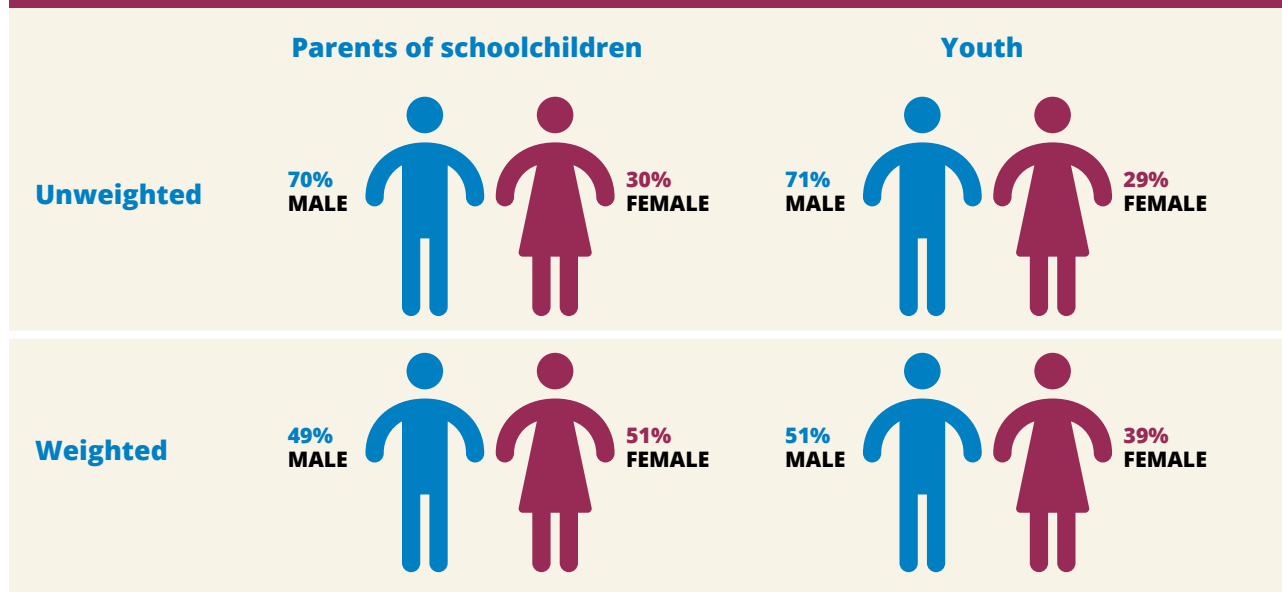


FIGURE 2: AGE OF RESPONDENTS (AFTER WEIGHTING)

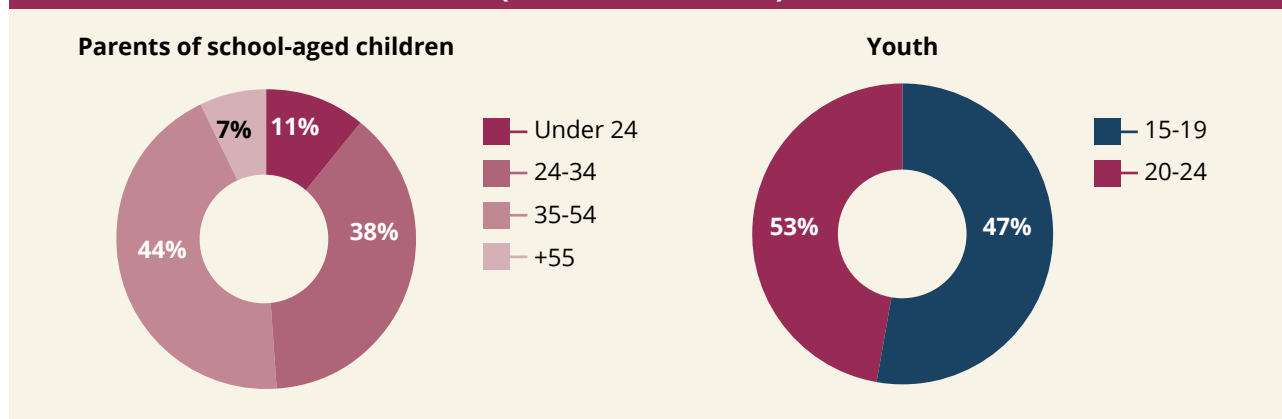
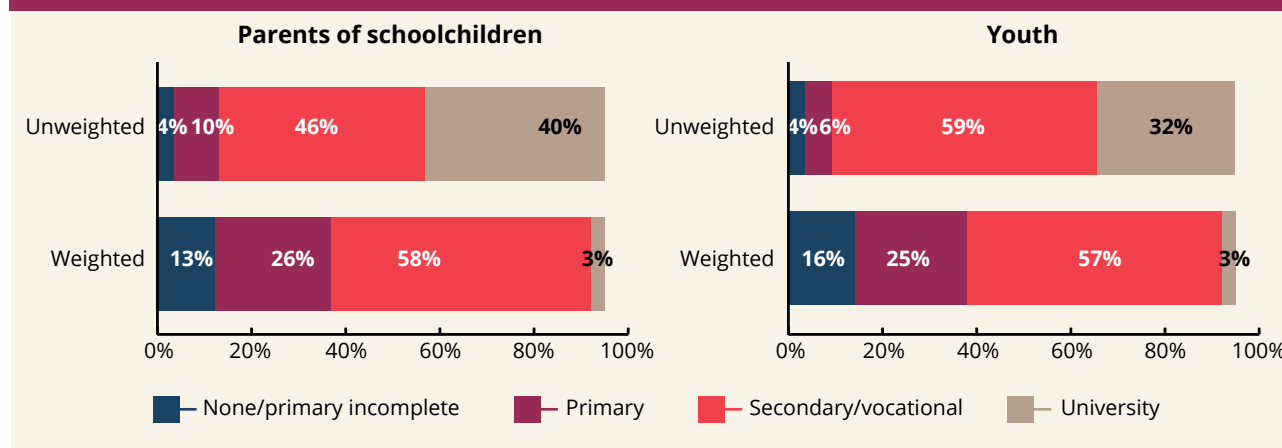


FIGURE 3: EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED



Access to and quality of education

Education is central to develop a country's human capital.

UNESCO estimated that the school enrolment rate for Ghana in 2019 was 86 percent for primary schools, normally attended by children aged 4–11 years, and 57 percent for secondary schools.¹⁵ Ghana's compulsory education lasts 11 years, from age 4 (pre-primary) to age 14 (secondary).

A key focus of this study is to what extent COVID-19 affected children's and youth's ability to attend school (either physically or from home), and if they could not, the main reasons impeding them from doing so. It also aims to further understand the perception of impacts on the quality of education, which is another important aspect to consider together with the quantity of education children and youth are receiving.

SCHOOLCHILDREN

Overall, 91 percent of school children were reported to be in school before COVID-19 started, with a slightly smaller percentage of young boys enrolled (89 percent) than girls (92 percent). A higher percentage of children aged 10–14 years (11 percent) were out of school before the pandemic than children aged 6–9 years (8 percent).

As shown in Figure 5, school attendance fell to 83 percent during the 2021 school year, which

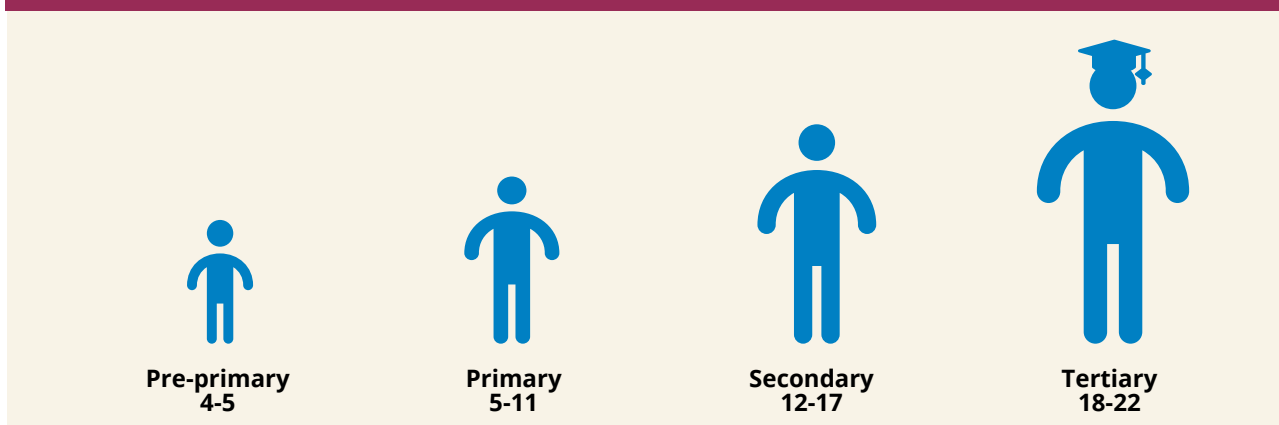
means that around 8 percent of children surveyed dropped out of school during the pandemic. This affected young girls aged 6–14 (9 percent) and children aged 6–9 years (11 percent) more considerably than young boys (6 percent) and older children (4 percent).

The main reason reported by surveyed parents for not sending children to school, both before and during the pandemic, was their inability to pay for school costs (39 percent). While the public education system in Ghana is free to all, support for families in need to cover additional costs such as textbooks and uniforms is lacking, which might explain the finding. In addition, research found that even when education is free, it can have hidden costs such as school supplies, transportation and earnings lost when the child is in school, which can make education prohibitively expensive.¹⁶

For the 2021 school year, reasons linked to the pandemic were also important in the decision of not enrolling children to school (see Figure 6).

Out of those attending school during the 2021 school year, most children attended classes in-person, including 57 percent reporting attending in-person classes every day, and 20 percent going only some days. This is consistent with the gradual reopening of schools in Ghana during 2021. At the same time, the new learning modalities and

FIGURE 4: OFFICIAL SCHOOL AGES BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION



¹⁵ UNESCO Institute of Statistics. 2021. "Data for the Sustainable Development Goals - Ghana."

¹⁶ World Bank. 2019. *World Development Report 2019: The Changing Nature of Work*. World Development Report

economic struggles impacted the quality of learning for children. Indeed, almost 80 percent of parents stated that COVID-19 negatively impacted the quality of their children’s education. Parents listed the many challenges faced by their children in related to education quality, including needing their child(ren) to work to earn an income (21 percent), distraction and loss of focus (17 percent), less interaction with teachers and peers (16 percent) and need for academic support (14 percent).

“It would help my children to have free and compulsory quality education, school feeding and free internet to learn online” stated one father.



FIGURE 5: SCHOOL ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN BEFORE COVID AND DURING THE 2021 SCHOOL YEAR

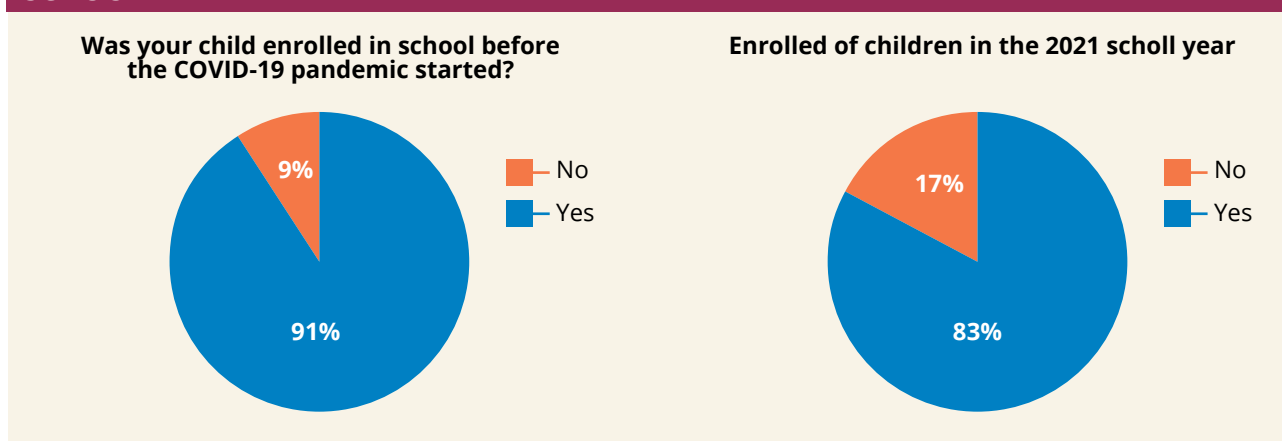
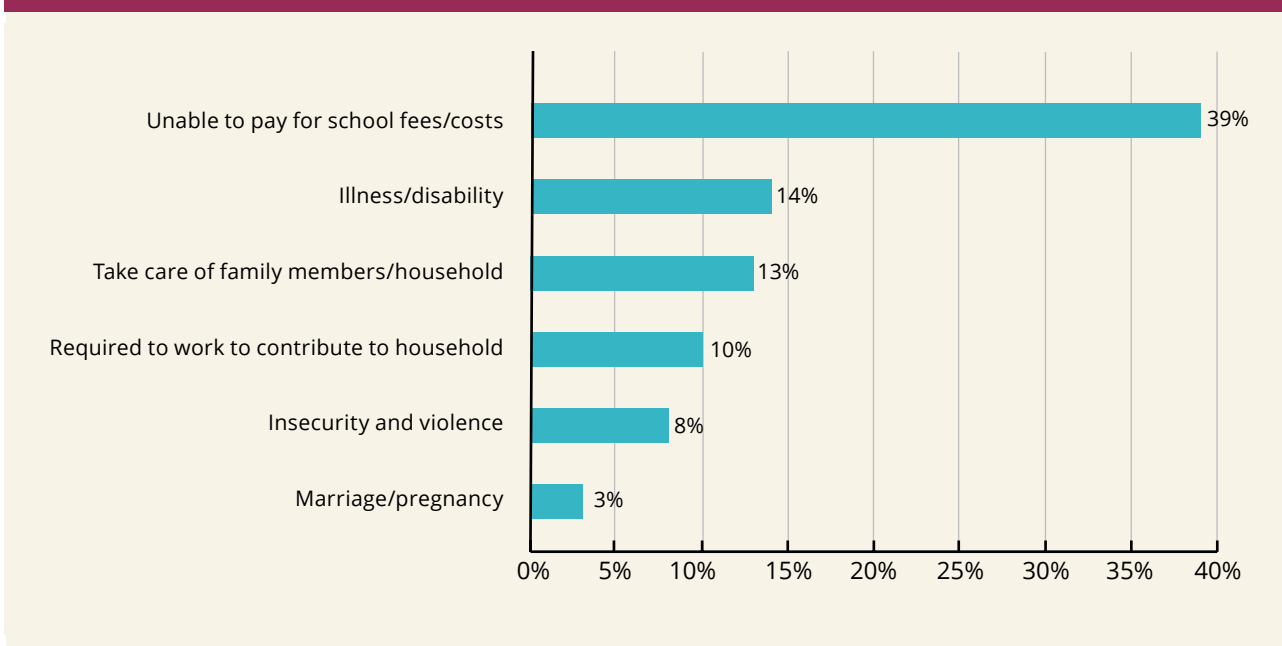


FIGURE 6: MAIN REASONS FOR NOT ENROLLING CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS DURING 2021



YOUTH

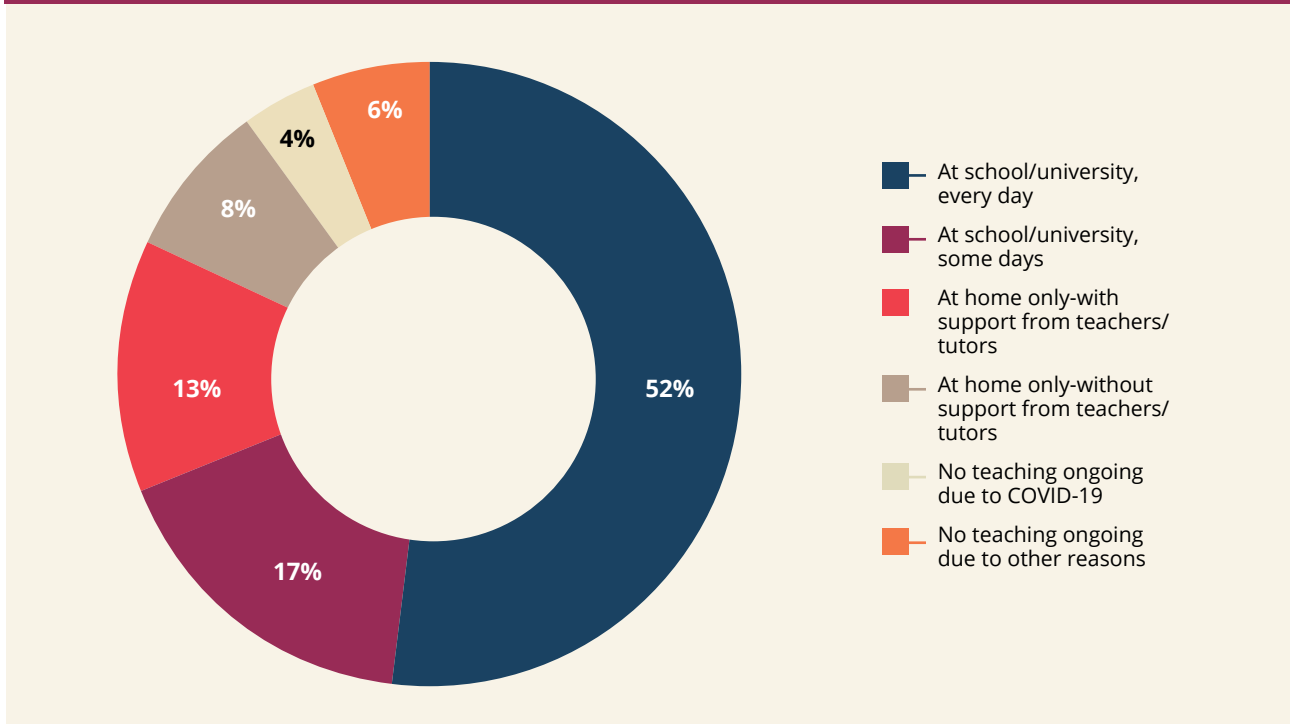
Around 64 percent of youth aged 15–19 years old and 51 percent of 20–24 year-olds reported they were enrolled in an educational institution (school or university) before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, 11 percent of youth dropped out of school, with the rate slightly higher for young women (14 percent) and 20–24-year-olds (13 percent), and rural youth (15 percent). Out of those not enrolled in schools, one in four reported the main reason for not going to school was the inability to pay for school fees and costs.

Despite COVID, most youth (68 percent) reported attending school at least partially in-person, while 21 percent of young men and women studied remotely from home, with teacher support (13 percent) or by themselves (8 percent). Only 4 percent of youth could not study due to COVID-related reasons.

Despite this, 60 percent of youth reported a decline in quality of education due to less opportunity to interact with teachers and peers (20 percent), distraction and loss of focus (18 percent) and lack of academic support (15 percent).



FIGURE 7: MAIN PLACES WHERE YOUTH WHO ARE ENROLLED IN SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY IN 2021 LEARN AND/OR STUDY



Livelihood activities and income

The impact of COVID-19 was acutely felt by respondents, as it disrupted businesses, employment opportunities and earnings. It is estimated that 75–80 percent of the population in Ghana is employed in the informal sector.¹⁷ Lockdowns and other containment measures have disproportionately affected self-employed workers in the informal economy, which may have long-lasting implications on poverty and livelihoods.¹⁸ This study also found that both households with school-aged children and young people were negatively affected, with greater difficulties in accessing basic services and meeting essential needs.

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

The majority of parents participating in this survey reported obtaining their income from owning a business (22 percent), casual labour (14 percent), or farming, petty trade and salaried work (11 percent each). The categories of workers relying on unstable source of income, such as casual labour and petty trade, were among the hardest hit from lockdowns and other COVID-related measures, especially in urban areas. It is therefore not surprising that one in two parents reported a decrease in their income since the beginning of the pandemic, with urban households affected to a greater extent than households living in rural areas.

FIGURE 8: WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD'S MAIN INCOME SOURCE?

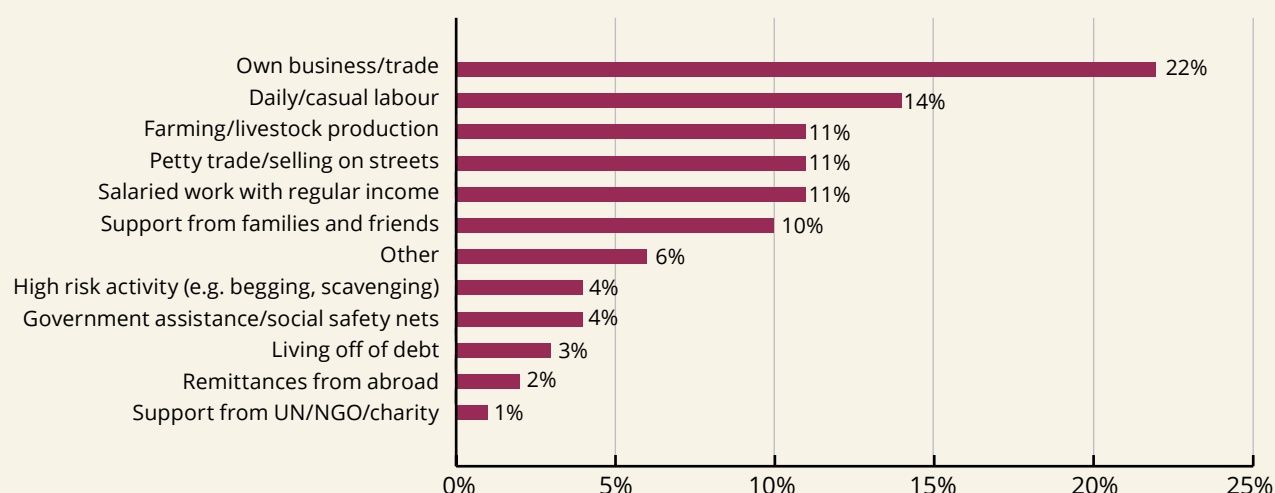
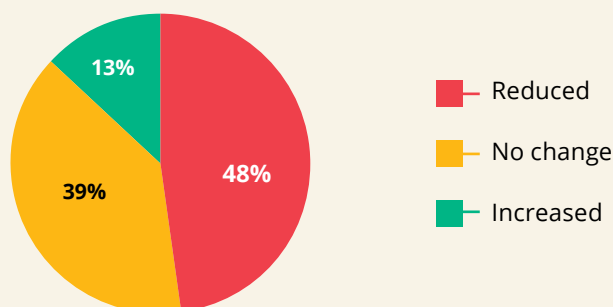


FIGURE 9: HAS YOUR HOUSEHOLD'S INCOME LEVEL UNDERGONE ANY CHANGES SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?



17 TILO. 2020. "The Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy in Africa."

18 Simone Schotte et al. 2021. *The Labour Market Impact of COVID-19 Lockdowns: Evidence from Ghana*. WIDER Working Paper

YOUTH

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 28 percent of all youth and 37 percent of those aged 20–24 reported working. The main sectors of employment were trade, transport and storage, education and research, and restaurants and other food services.

COVID created additional challenges for youth’s ability to find a job and earn an income. Almost one in two youth surveyed reported having lost their job, with an additional 19 percent reporting their salary or working hours were reduced. Young women and 14–19 year-olds, groups that already were less likely to have a job before COVID, were particularly affected by job losses (57 percent and 51 percent respectively).

A 24 year-old man described the struggles of Ghanaian youth during the pandemic:

“Every day I wake up and send lots of job applications, hoping to be called back. That is, if I can afford the internet bill! I mostly find commission-based jobs that won’t assure me a decent income at the end of the month even though I’m willing to go above and beyond for my commissions”.

Job loss also affected youth mobility for work purposes. Thirty percent of youth who reported they lived away from home, but returned home during COVID, did so due to income loss.

Despite these challenges, there was a slight increase across all ages, genders and geography in the number of employed youths in 2021, suggesting that Ghanaian youth might have been able to quickly find new employment despite the challenges that the pandemic posed.

FIGURE 10: HAS YOUR ABILITY TO EARN AN INCOME CHANGED SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

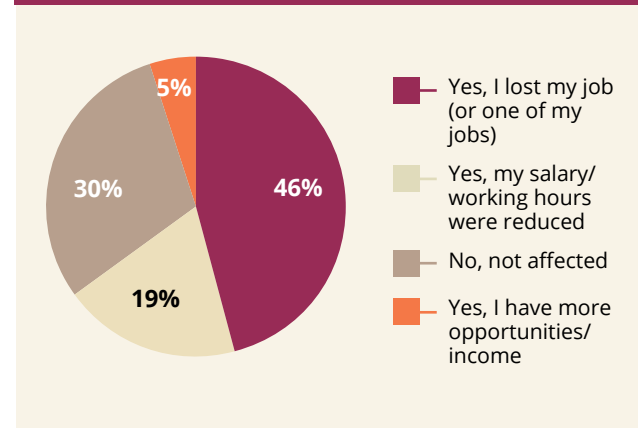


FIGURE 11: MAIN SECTORS WHERE YOUTH WERE WORKING BEFORE COVID-19 AND IN MAY/JUNE 2021

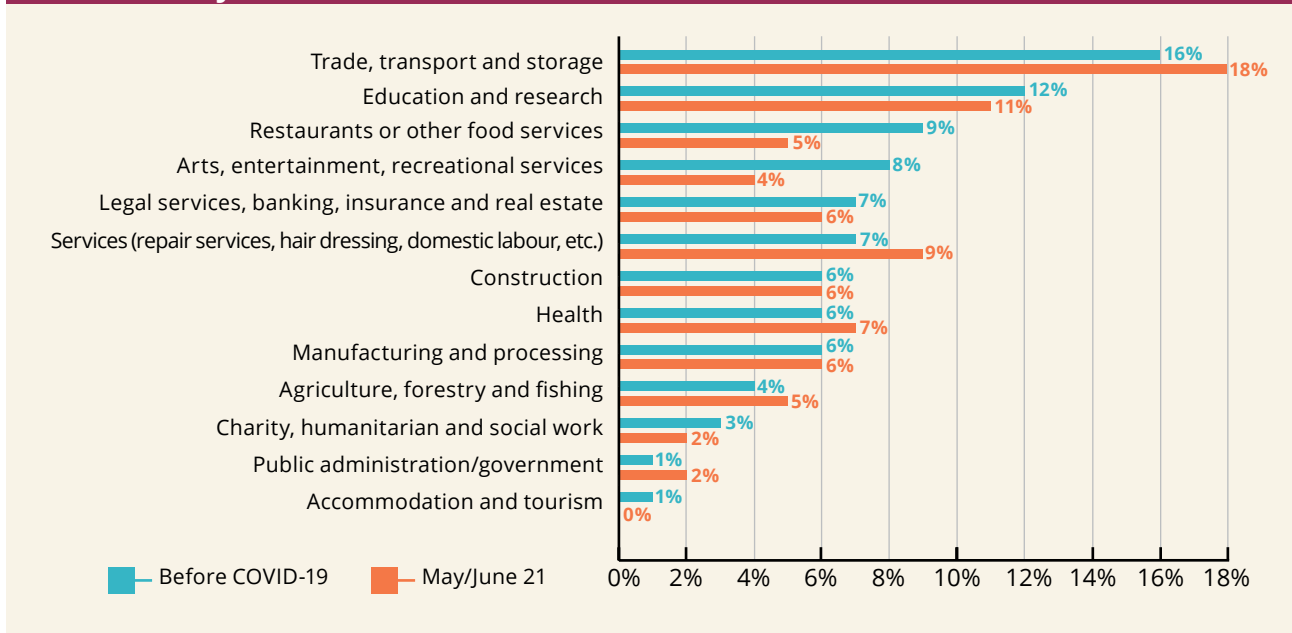




FIGURE 12: OVER THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING IN A PLACE AWAY FROM YOUR HOME FOR WORK PURPOSES?

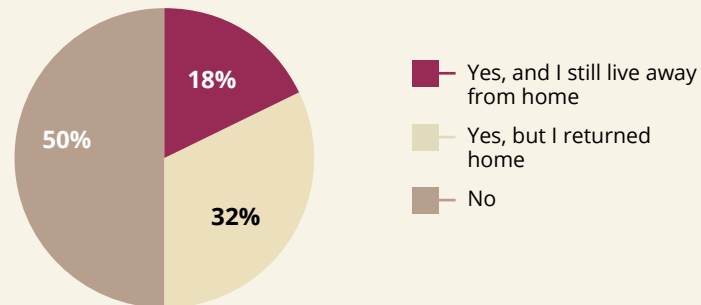
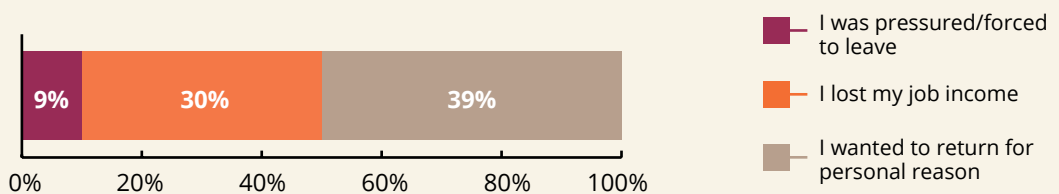


FIGURE 13: IF RETURNED HOME, WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON?



Food security situation and livelihood coping

Experiencing food insecurity at a young age can have devastating effects on the future health and development of children. It can also have long-term impacts on children’s educational attainment. Adolescents and adults who experienced developmental obstacles during early childhood will struggle more to acquire new school and job skills than those whose development was uninterrupted.¹⁹ Youth and parents were asked in the survey about their food security situation and that of their children, as well as the use of livelihood coping strategies, to further understand current levels of vulnerability among these groups.

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Over 62 percent of parents of school-aged children reported they worried about not having enough to eat – the most concerned were parents living in debt, relying on unstable sources of income, such as casual labour, support from family and friends or begging/scavenging. Out of those who worried

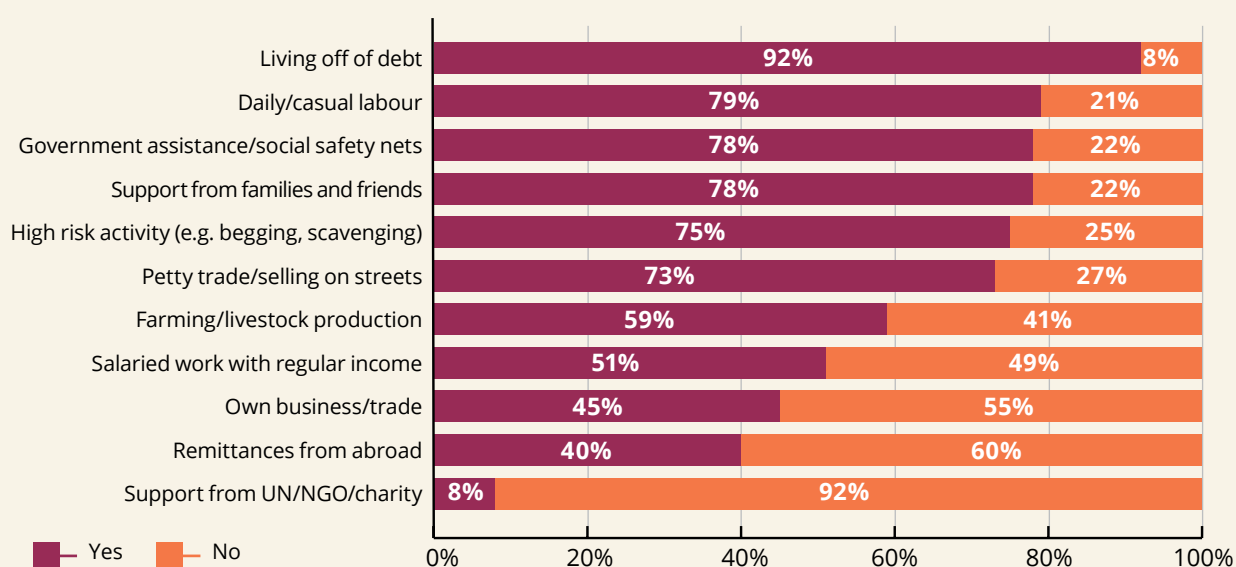
about their food security, 50 percent also saw their income decrease during the pandemic.

The food security situation of children also appears to have been compromised. Twenty-two percent of parents reported that their children ate fewer than two meals the day preceding the survey, a figure that grew to 40 percent in rural households.

Around 43 percent of respondents also reported that their children had to adopt severe food-based coping strategies in the past month, such as skipping meals or eating less than usual (31 percent) or eating less expensive food (22 percent). Sixteen percent went at least one whole day without eating, a figure that rises to 21 percent for children living in rural areas.

Over 80 percent of parents reported having to adopt at least one coping strategy to meet their most basic needs over the past month (see figure 14). A significant number of people living in rural areas (13 percent) reported not being able to employ any coping strategy.

FIGURE 14: IN THE PAST 30 DAYS, HAVE YOU FELT WORRIED ABOUT NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT?



19 Meredith Hickso et al., 2013. [“Feeding Our Human Capital: Food Insecurity and Tomorrow’s Workforce”](#) Children’s Health Watch.

FIGURE 15: HOW MANY MEALS (INCL. BREAKFAST) DID YOUR CHILD(REN) EAT YESTERDAY?

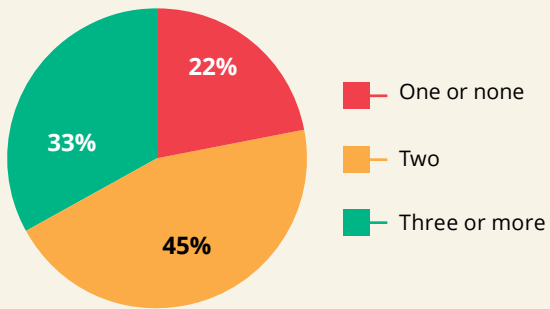
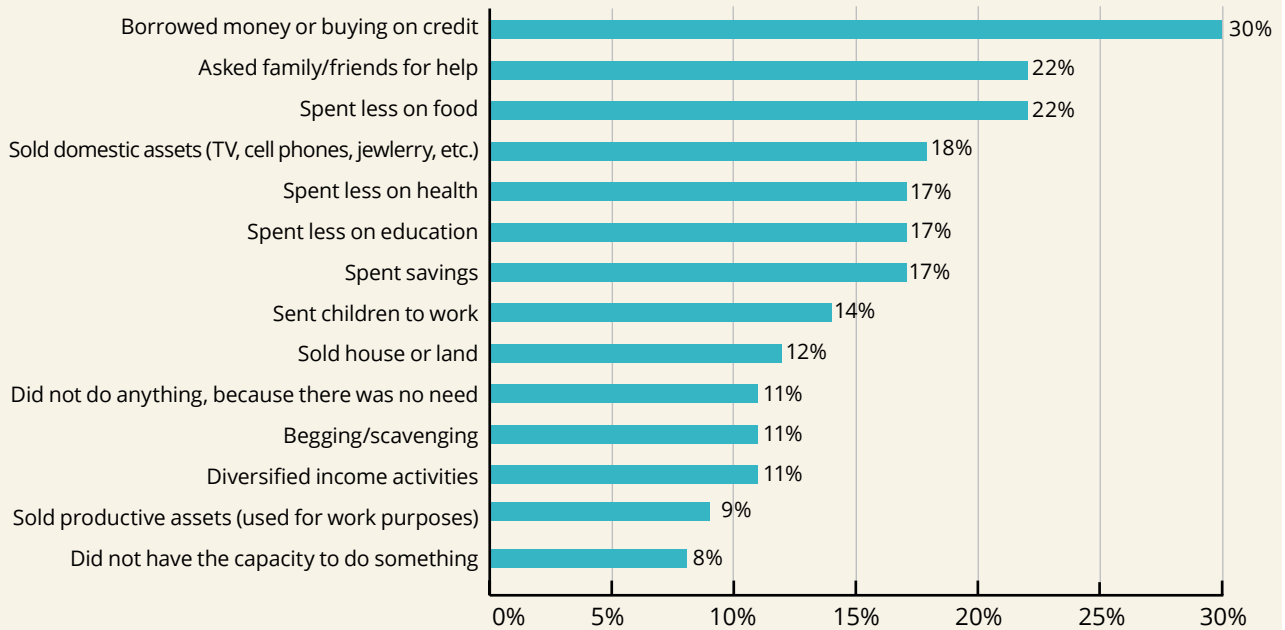


FIGURE 16: MAIN LIVELIHOOD COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY PARENT RESPONDENTS (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)



YOUTH

Around 80 percent of youth reported having eaten at least two meals in the day before taking the survey, with the remaining 20 percent eating one or no meals. More young men and youth aged 20–24 years of age reported compromising their food consumption than young women and youth aged 15–19 years of age.

67 percent of youth reported they had to resort to food-based coping strategies, with almost one in four going a whole day without eating. People in the younger age group (15-19) and those living in rural areas were slightly more likely to reporting not eating for a whole day. 43 percent were found also to have adopted less severe measures such as economizing on food or skipping meals.

One in two young people also reported concern about not having enough food for themselves, with slightly more youth living in rural areas (54 percent) reporting worrying about their food security. Loss of job and/or income also negatively influenced the perception of food security: young people who saw their income decrease were more likely to also be worried about not having enough to eat.

Over 70 percent of youth also reported using livelihood-based coping strategies. However, it was found that about one youth in 10 could not cope in any way, with young people living in rural areas more likely to not be able to do so (15 percent). Coping strategies were quite diverse and included borrowing money, spending savings, asking family for financial support, and spending less on food and health expenses.

FIGURE 17: HOW MANY MEALS (INCL. BREAKFAST) DID YOU EAT YESTERDAY?

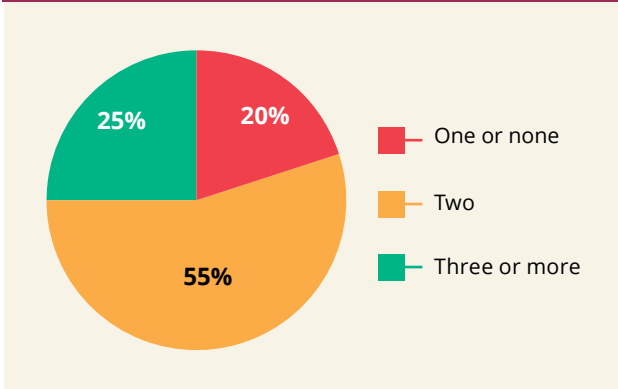
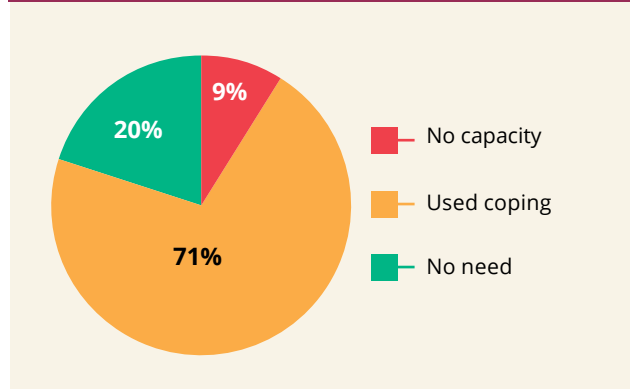


FIGURE 18: USED LIVELIHOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES OVER THE PAST MONTH



IN THE WORDS OF THE RESPONDENTS – YOUTH

Young women and men were asked an open-ended question about how they are currently coping with the difficulties they face.

This account from a 23-year-old young man describes the interlinkages between income loss and food insecurity:

“I spent all my savings to make ends meet. I skip breakfast and eat just once a day. There is also a high unemployment rate in the country [...]”.



A 24-year-old young woman illustrated challenges related to access to higher education:

“One of the main difficulties I’m facing is paying my university tuition. I applied for a student loan, but it doesn’t completely cover tuition and accommodation. When she can, my mother helps me financially. When I have vacation, I work in retail to cover my expenses.”

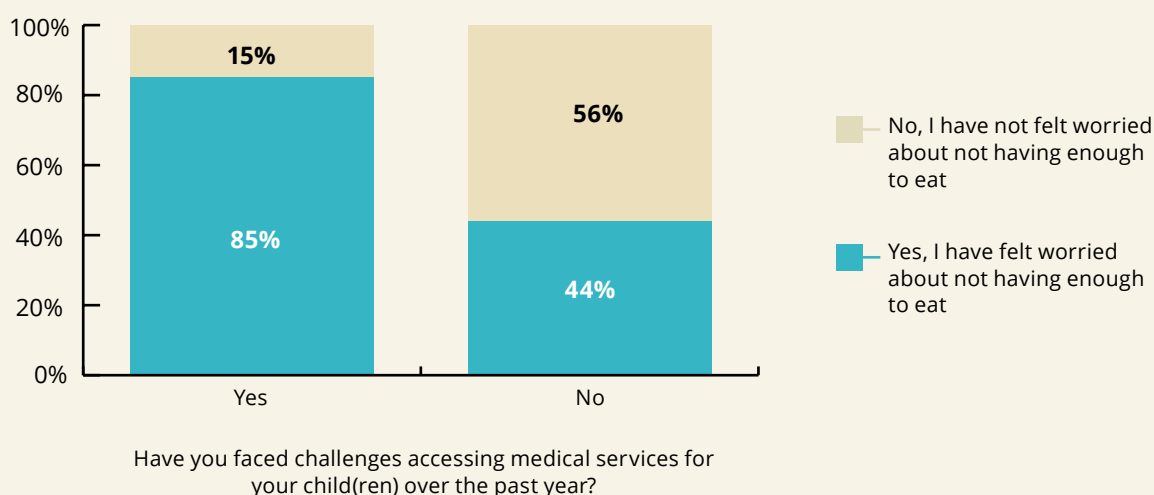
Access to medical services for children

Access to medical services is key for children to reach their full potential. In Ghana, most health care is provided by the government, and it has improved significantly throughout the years thanks to the introduction of the National Health Insurance Service (NHIS) in 2003 and other initiatives to promote universal access to healthcare. However, its services can vary a lot across the country. A WHO report²⁰ states that the population per doctor in Ghana can range from 3,186 in the Greater Accra region to over 30,000 in the Upper West region. Urban areas are generally well-served with hospitals, clinics and pharmacies, while rural areas have almost no modern facilities, which is a major structural issue for the public healthcare system.²¹

The findings from the survey are consistent with this background. Overall, 45 percent of parents experienced challenges in accessing medical services for their children in Ghana. Households living in rural areas were more likely to report this difficulty (47 percent). For the majority of parents (60 percent), unaffordability was the main challenge in accessing healthcare.

Challenges related to healthcare access and concerns over food were intricately linked. Out of those who reported challenges in accessing medical services, over four in five were also concerned about the food security situation of their family.

FIGURE 19: CONCERN OVER FOOD AND ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN



20 World Health Organization and Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research. 2017. [“Primary Health Care Systems \(Primasys\): Case Study from Ghana: Abridged Version”](#).

21 Maria Polychronis. 2018. [“The Limitations Of Ghana’s Rural Health Care Access: Case Study: GA East. Greater Accra.”](#)

Challenges faced by school-age children and youth

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

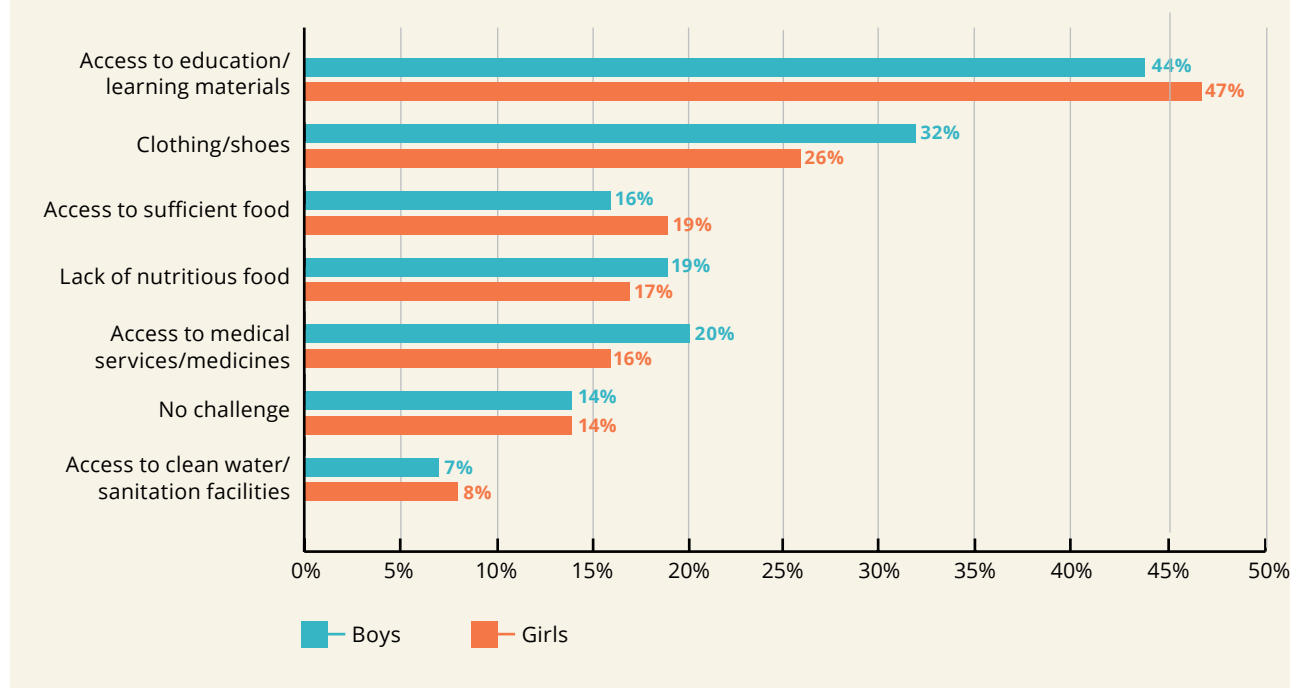
Overall, the main challenge reported by 45 percent of parents of schoolchildren was access to education, a figure that jumped to 54 percent among parents living in rural areas. Other challenges included getting clothing and shoes for their children, lack of sufficient and nutritious food, and access to medical services.

These findings are in line with parent responses in the open-ended questions. As a 39-year-old father expressed:

“As a parent and the breadwinner of the family, my greatest worry is how to give my children a bright future with good education. Money is an important factor, if I’ll be able to earn enough, I’ll be able to provide shelter and three meals per day for my family. Other needs will be also taken care of.”



FIGURE 20: MAIN CHALLENGES SCHOOLCHILDREN ARE CURRENTLY FACING BY SEX (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)



IN THE WORDS OF RESPONDENTS -PARENTS OF SCHOOLCHILDREN

The survey included an open-ended question to parents asking what worried them the most when it came to the future of their children. Many reported concerns about their own financial security, as well as access to health services and quality education for their children.



A father summarized these struggles well:

“First of all, I worry about the health of my children - luckily they never got very sick. Secondly, I’m worried about their education. I pay a lot to get them a good education, but it is challenging for me since I am self-employed, and my income is average at best.”



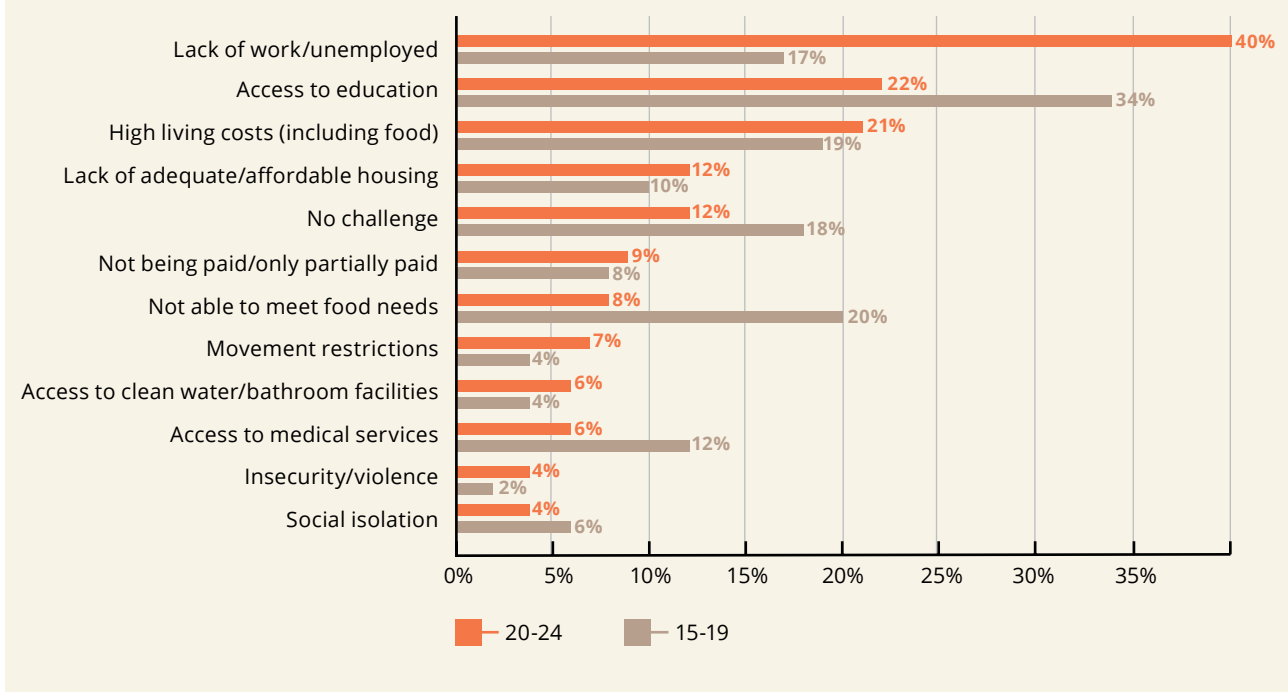
YOUTH

Overall, the most common challenges reported by Ghanaian youth were unemployment (29 percent) and lack of access to education (28 percent), challenges that were reported to a much higher degree by young men compared to young women. Young women were more likely to cite inability to meet their food needs and lack of access to healthcare as one of their main challenges. The high cost of living, including food, was reported as a challenge by around 20

percent of youth. Rural youth (26 percent) were more severely affected than youth living in urban areas (18 percent).

Figure 17 shows the challenges faced by different age groups. It was found that lack of employment (40 percent) was more likely to be perceived as a challenge by 20–24 year-olds than 15–19 year-olds, while the younger age group were more concerned about challenges related to access to education (35 percent).

FIGURE 21: MAIN CHALLENGES YOUTH ARE CURRENTLY FACING BY AGE GROUP (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)



Safety concerns

Ghana is a stable and relative safe country, but crime activities do occur and can range from petty crime to violent crime. In 2021, the Ghana Public Safety and Crime Report reported a 20 percent growth in robbery, burglary and serious assaults, compared to the previous year.²² This led to social unrest in July 2021 after several high-profile murders.²³

Despite the considerable effort made in Ghana over the last three decades to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, it is still a prevalent issue in the country²⁴ and still socially accepted by segments of the population, including youth.²⁵

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Parents of school-aged children and youth groups were asked about their perceptions of safety in their environment. One in two parents reported perceiving tensions in their community (45 percent), with 44 percent reporting these tensions severely affected their children and 29 percent reporting tensions affected their children “to some extent.”

The main reason for parents feeling unsafe were increasing crime rates (21 percent), followed by increase in violence and domestic violence (both 12 percent).

It is interesting to note that out of parents who felt unsafe, over 70 percent were also concerned about not having enough to eat for themselves and their children.

FIGURE 22: HOW HAVE INCREASED VIOLENCE/TENSIONS AFFECTED YOUR CHILD(REN)?

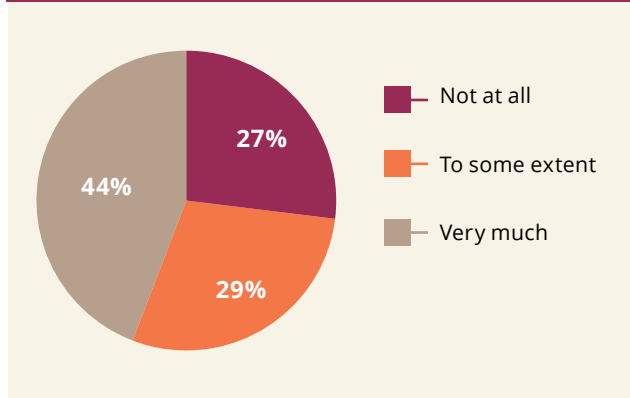
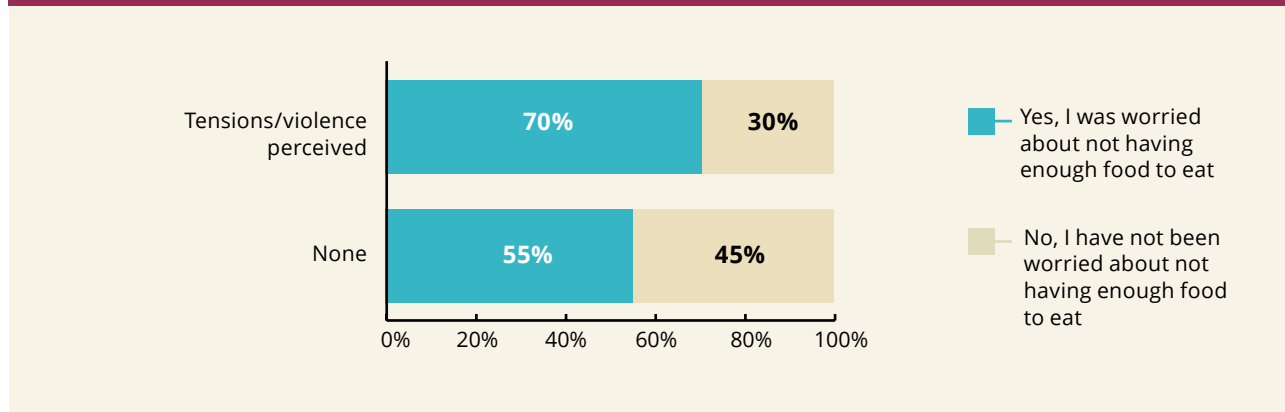


FIGURE 23: PERCEIVED TENSIONS OVER CONCERNS OVER FOOD



22 Bureau of Public Safety. 2021. “Ghana Public Safety and Crime Report – FIRST HALF 2021.”

23 Al Jazeera. 2021. “Ghana Opposition Supporters March against Killings.” accessed December 16, 2021..

24 Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) and Associates. 2016. “Domestic Violence in Ghana: Incidence. Attitudes. Determinants and Consequences”

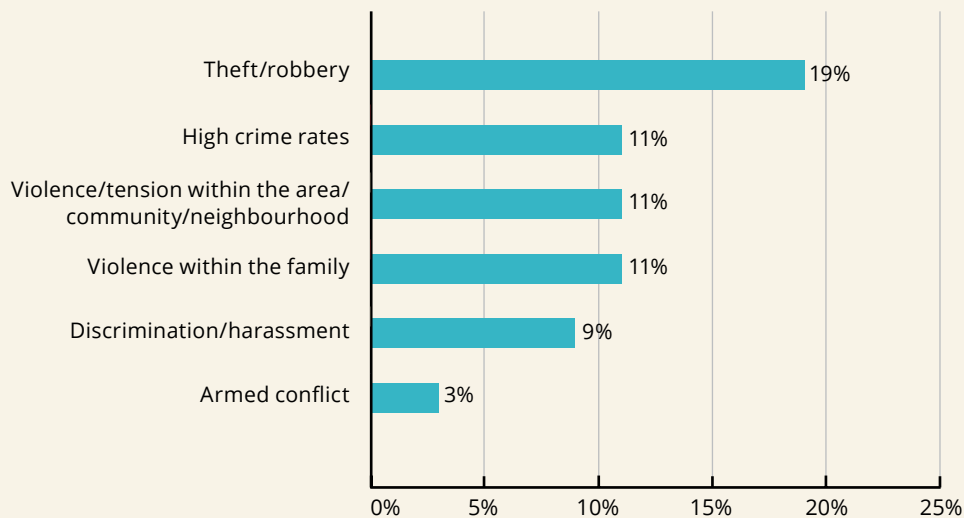
25 Emmanuel Anongeba Anaba et al. 2021. “Young People’s Attitudes towards Wife-Beating: Analysis of the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014.” PLOS ONE 16, no. 2

YOUTH

At the time of the survey, over a third of youth did not feel safe in their own environment, with slightly more 15–19 year-olds and rural youth reporting feeling unsafe than other groups. Figure 24 shows the main reasons why Ghanaian youth had safety concerns. For almost one in five youth, theft and robberies were the main cause of their unease, followed by high crimes rates, violence within the community, and violence within the family. Out of those who worried about safety, about a third also worried about not having enough to eat.



FIGURE 24: IF UNSAFE, WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON?



Future aspirations of the younger generation

When asked about the main factors that would allow them to have a bright and successful future, 26 percent of surveyed youth identified access to higher education, closely followed by access to job opportunities (23 percent).

Unsurprisingly, 15–19 year-olds were more likely to report that accessing higher education would be the main contributor to their success (37 percent), while access to employment opportunities was the top need for the youth aged 20–24 (29 percent).

It is interesting to note that a higher percentage of young women than young men identified access to higher education as a key factor for their future success, while more young men than women felt that access to technology and equipment would help them be successful in their future. The needs of urban and rural youth were very similar, yet young people in rural areas were more likely to perceive access to higher education (28 percent) and specialized training opportunities (10 percent) as important compared to youth living in urban areas (26 percent and 6 percent, respectively).



FIGURE 25: MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR TO BE SUCCESSFUL BY GENDER

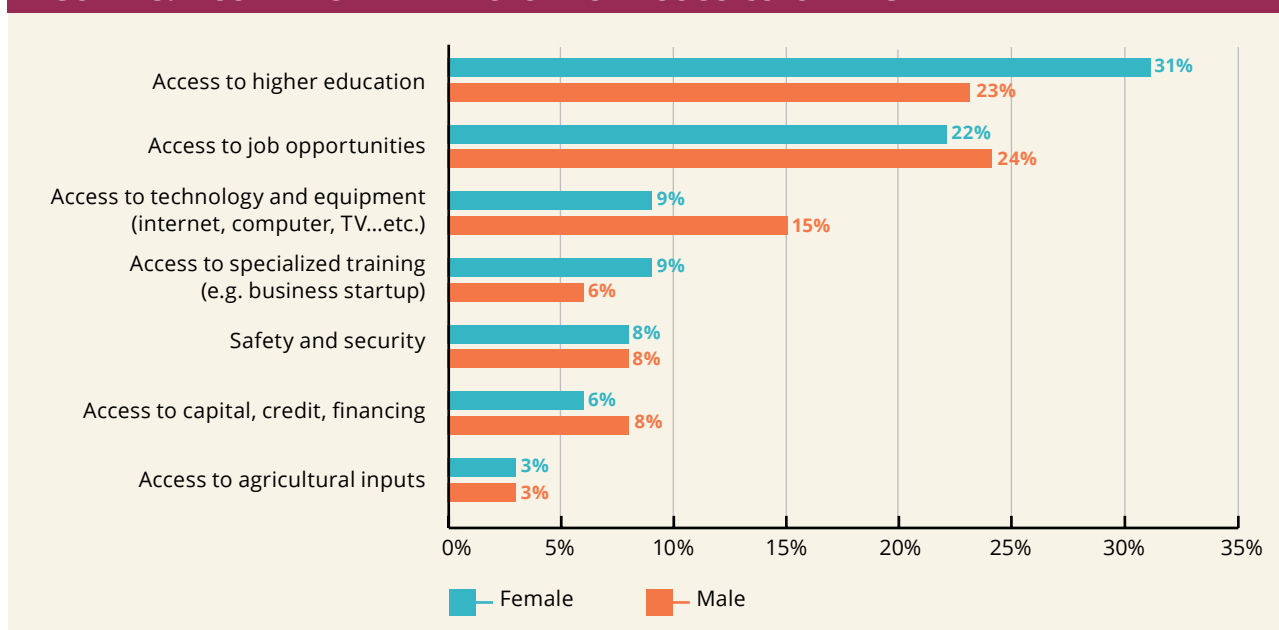
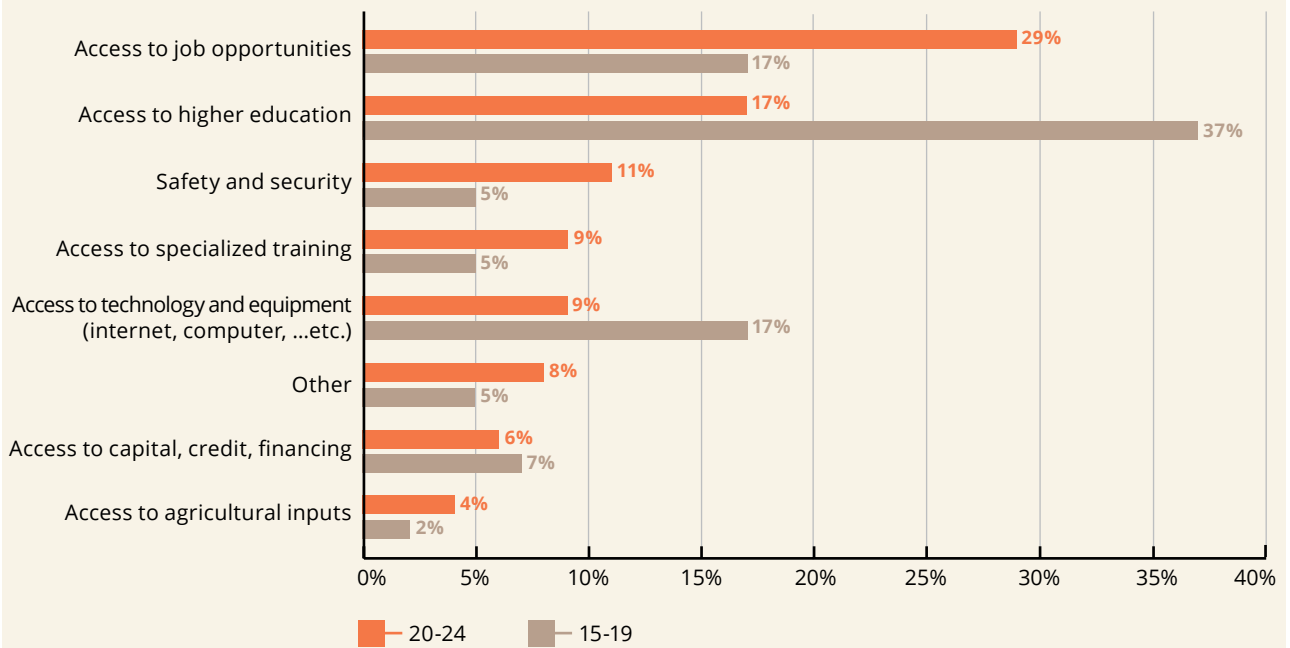


FIGURE 26: MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR TO BE SUCCESSFUL BY AGE GROUP



IN THE WORDS OF RESPONDENTS – PARENTS OF SCHOOLCHILDREN AND YOUTH

Both parents and youth were asked what would help the younger generations to get through the current crisis. Parents of school children reported being financially secure, including through governmental support and financial assistance, was a key factor that would help them – and in turn children – overcome the current challenges.

As one 34-year-old father said:

“Poor households should be supported with cash and food assistance to promote small-scale business. This in turn would strengthen education: if the parents are financially strong, the children won’t suffer”

Youth on the other hand focused more on access to educational and work opportunities, as well as vocational training and mentorship programmes.

In the words of a 23-year-old young woman:

“It would help the youth to have job opportunities and available resources on in-demand skills - working remotely while staying relevant to the job market.”

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study found that, just as in many other countries around the globe, COVID provided additional challenges for youth, children and their parents in accessing quality education and employment opportunities. COVID also led to greater income instability and unemployment, which in turn affected the ability of the surveyed population to get sufficient, nutritious food and access basic services such as healthcare. Sixty percent of parents and 50 percent of youth reported they were concerned about not having enough to eat, and an alarming percentage of both youth and children had their food security compromised and were forced to adopt coping strategies to survive.

While the pandemic has surely resulted in a deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions for the younger generation in Ghana, the surveyed youth and parents of school children believe that with better access to education and improved job opportunities and financial security, the current crisis can be overcome.

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Photo page 21: WFP/Derrick Botchway

Photo page 22: WFP/Derrick Botchway

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