



GENDER & COVID-19: AUTONOMY AND PRIVACY

Autonomy and privacy among adolescents and young adults in Nairobi during the COVID-19 pandemic

November 2020

Why This Matters

- The COVID-19 pandemic and its mitigation strategies have brought profound social changes including isolating families in their homes and constraining school, work and social opportunities.
- Restricted mobility and increased time at home can affect adolescents and youth in particular, as their autonomy and privacy may be threatened during a critical developmental period in which they would otherwise be building towards independence, and freedom of decision and movement.
- Pandemic-related mobility and privacy constraints can affect adolescent girls and young women uniquely. Young women are often afforded less freedom of movement as compared with their male counterparts, reflecting norms as well as gendered hierarchies of labor and social power. Pandemic-related mobility constraints thus may amplify the gender gaps in agency and mobility for young women.
- The mobile connectivity of Nairobi can afford access to resources, social connection and economic participation even during social distancing, however the presence of additional household members can undermine privacy for accessing technology, and introduce new competition for use of devices.
- Gender norms and hierarchies that deprioritize women's needs, and gendered gaps in economic power, can serve to further limit women's ability to access technology safely and privately for education, labor force and access to supports. It is critical to assess gender differences in privacy and technology access during a time when technology can be most valuable.

Spotlight on Gender Analysis

A gender analysis is critical, inclusive of gender-stratified quantitative analysis and attention to gendered social and economic power dynamics, norms, and underlying inequities.

Key Findings: Privacy

- Since the start of COVID-19 restrictions, the majority of both young men (80%) and women (88%) report that the amount of time they spend at home has increased.
- They also report that other household members are spending increased amounts of time at home during COVID-19, though this time can vary by family member.
- COVID-19 social restrictions and widespread job loss limit social and work opportunities for youth and their family members, driving them into the home and into additional time with household members.



Key Findings: Privacy

Table 1. Changes in time spent at home and with partners among Nairobi youth since COVID-19 restrictions, by gender (N=1217)

		Total	Young men (N=605) %	Young women (N=612) %
Amount of time youth spend at home	Increased	84.9	80.1	88.2
	Unchanged	7.1	8.7	6.0
	Decreased	8.0	11.3	5.8
Amount of time other household members spend at home	Increased	76.5	71.5	78.4
	Unchanged	7.0	6.6	7.1
	Decreased	5.2	9.2	3.7
	Mixed- varies by family member	11.3	12.7	10.8
Amount of time youth spend with their partner	Increased	38.1	37.8	38.3
	Unchanged	14.3	15.5	13.4
	Decreased	45.2	44.9	45.4
	Not currently in a partnership	2.4	1.8	2.9

- Nearly half of young men and women (45%) for both are spending less time with their partners since COVID-19 restrictions.

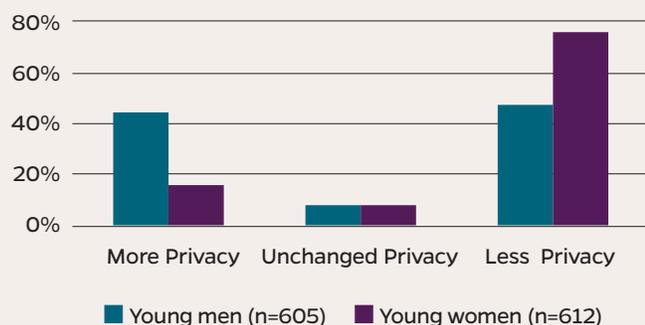
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As a girl you will find that parents are in the house and for you to leave and tell your mother that you are going to visit your boyfriend it will be hard. So you find the boy starts saying you do not have his time, you break up. **So it has led to breakups.**

– 18-year-old female FGD participant

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Figure 1. Changes in household privacy among Nairobi youth since COVID-19 restrictions, by gender (N=1217)



- Household privacy for Nairobi youth varies by gender, with young women (76%) disproportionately experiencing less privacy in the home during COVID-19.

“

Sometimes you want to dress... they [male family members] come and go... **you want to dress up** now you are stuck how you will dress and **those men are there... you say there is no privacy for you as a girl.**

– 23-year-old female FGD participant

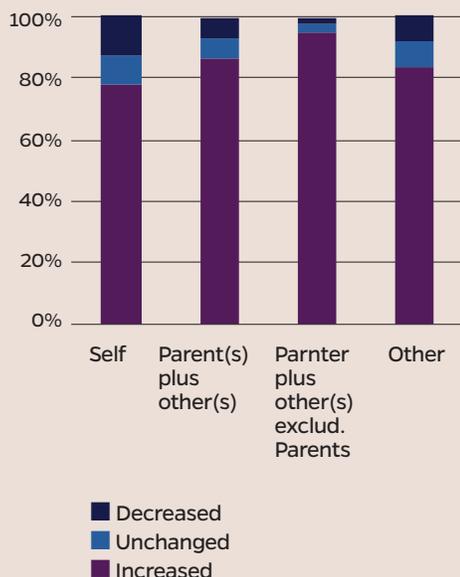
Someone like your sister, your mum, they are at home because they are not going to work, you find one day she goes to your room... **they find things like those [contraceptives]** so... due to privacy concern[s], we end up getting stressed.

– 18-year-old male FGD participant

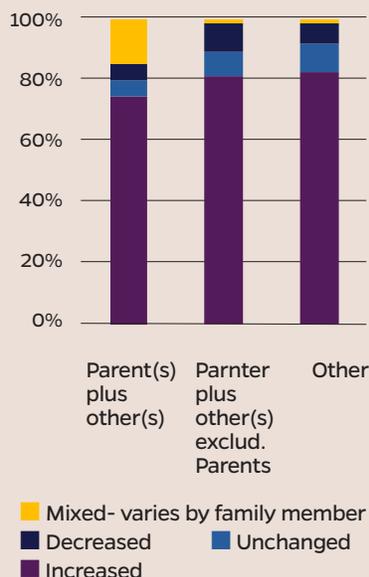
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Figure 2. Changes in time spent at home, household member time at home, and time spent with partners among Nairobi youth since COVID-19 restrictions, by current living situation

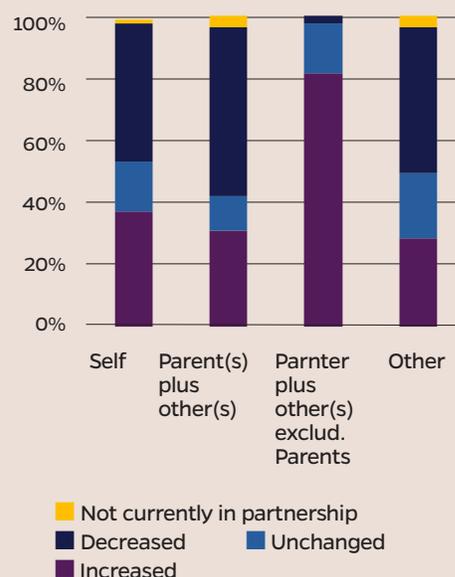
Amount of time spent at home (N=1217)



Amount of time other household members spend at home (N=918)



Amount of time spent with a partner (N=883)

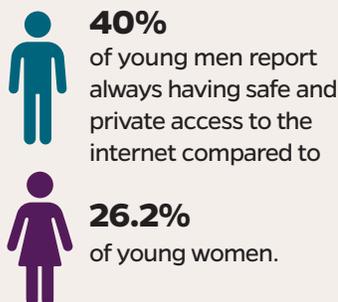


“**At the moment there is no one going to work in the house... So everyone is in the house, both parents.** COVID-19 has led to loss of jobs... So it forces parents to move to smaller houses.. Of which it will affect the privacy of every one... **You find that there your relatives have been chased away because of rent...** They come and stay with you in the house... **So you see if you had your own room you have to share.**”

- 19-year-old male FGD participant

Gender Differences in Privacy and Access to Technology

Key gender differences emerged in ability to safely and privately access the internet, with,



The majority of youth (both men and women) have access to a mobile phone.



Young men



Young women have access to a computer.

Key Findings: Autonomy

Figure 3. Safe and private access to the internet among Nairobi youth, by gender and household structure

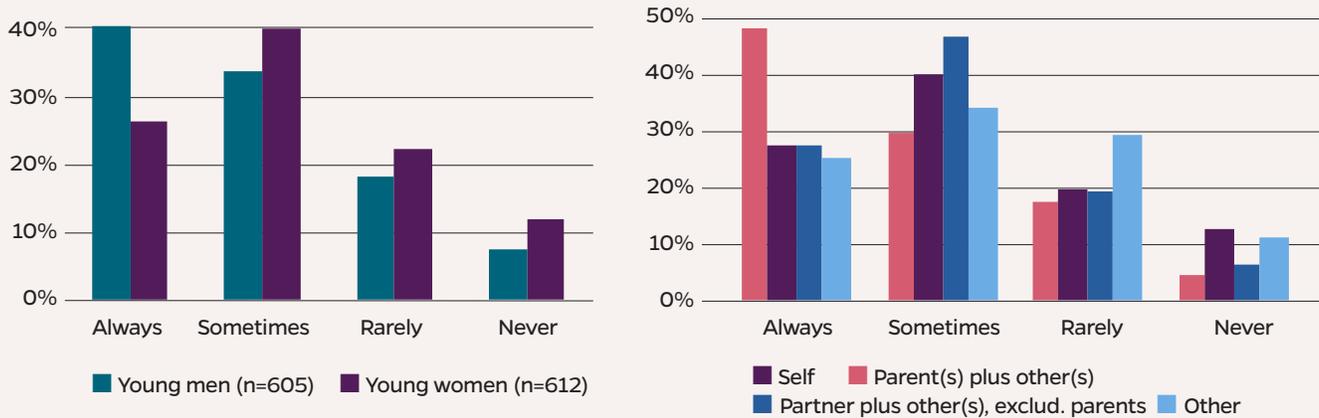


Figure 4. Limitations on internet access among Nairobi youth, by gender (N=1217)

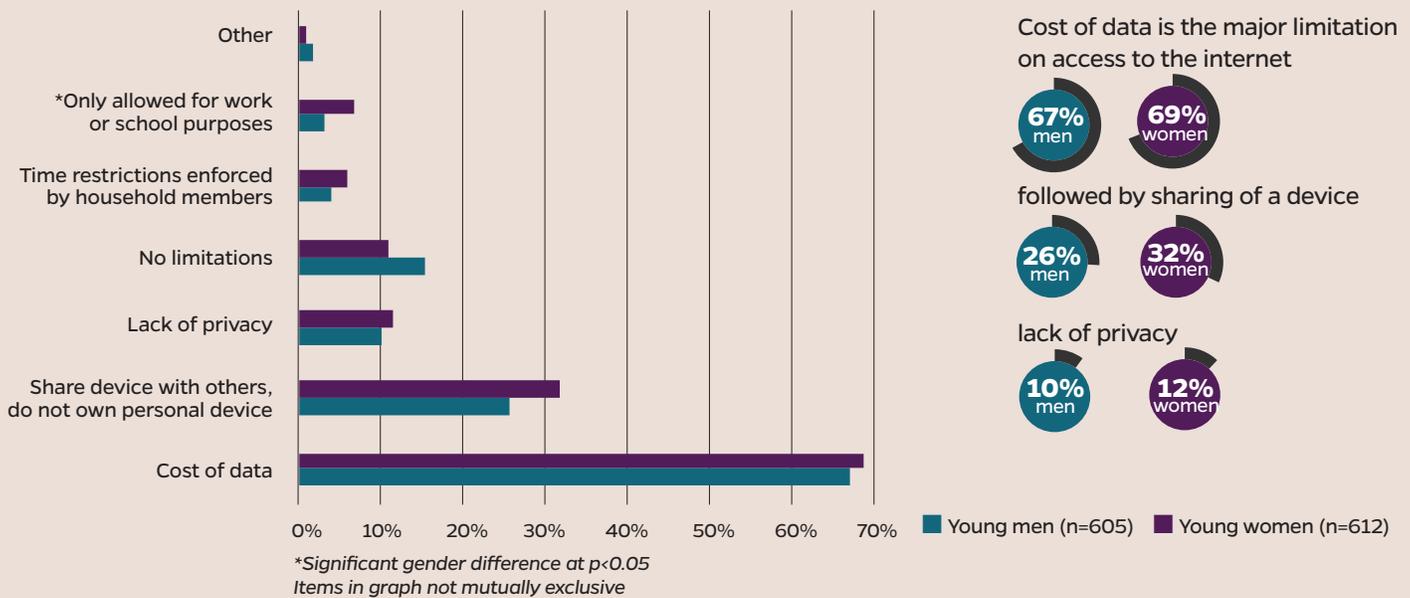


Figure 5. Decision-making power and autonomy among Nairobi youth (percent with full control), by gender (N=1217)

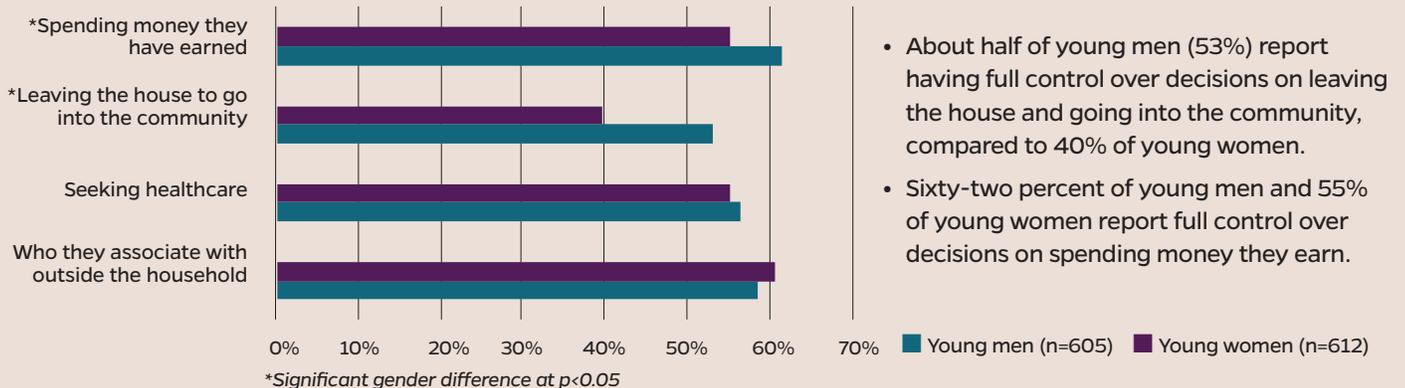
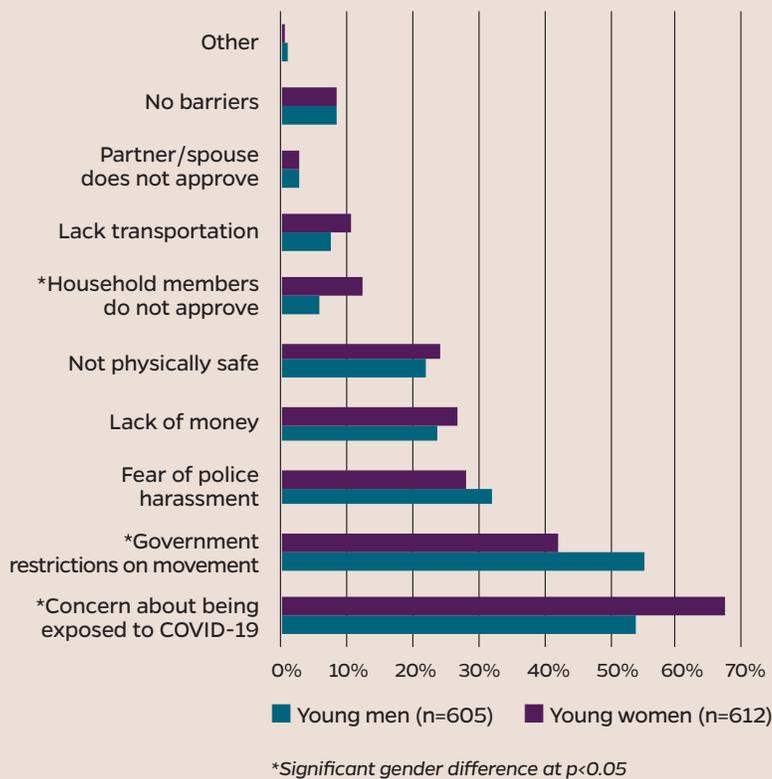


Figure 6. Barriers to mobility among Nairobi youth, by gender (N=1217)



Since COVID-19 restrictions started, youth are experiencing multiple, unique barriers to mobility, which vary by gender. primarily concerns about exposure to COVID-19, government restrictions and fear of police harassment.

Methods

In 2019, Performance Monitoring for Action (PMA) Agile carried out a Youth Respondent-Driven Sampling Survey (YRDSS) among adolescents and youth ages 15-24 (N=1357, male N=690 and female N=664) in Nairobi, Kenya between June and August. In 2020, a fully remote follow-up study was conducted with the study cohort (now ages 16-26) to track changes in contraceptive dynamics, and assess the gendered impact of COVID-19. The quantitative surveys were conducted by phone in two distinct sessions to limit participant burden: YRDSS Follow-up (N=1223, male N=610 and female N=613) and Gender/COVID-19 Survey (N=1217, male N=605 and female N=612). Sampling weights accommodate the RDS study design, post-estimation adjustment and non-response adjustment. Virtual qualitative methods included focus group discussions (FGDs) with unmarried youth ages 15-24 (N=64, over 8 groups), FGDs with youth-serving stakeholders (N=32, over 4 groups), and key informant interviews with higher-level stakeholders (N=12). Data collection was conducted from August to October 2020.

Suggested Citation

PMA Agile/Gender & ICRHK. [Brief Title]. 2020. Baltimore, Maryland, USA: Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health.

ACTION STEPS

- The mobility and privacy constraints posed to youth during the COVID-19 pandemic are felt by young men and young women alike.
- COVID-19 social restrictions as well as loss of jobs and income have driven Nairobi youth and their family members to spend more time in the home. Nairobi youth are subsequently experiencing less privacy in the home, particularly young women in addition to the emergent mobility barriers of COVID-19.
- During COVID-19, youth are less able to go out into their communities and interact with their social networks, with young women and girls facing disproportionate barriers to their autonomy.
- Young women and girls report lower decision-making control and mobility compared to young men and boys.
- Access to internet and technological devices is critical to youth during this time of limited privacy and autonomy, but young women and girls have more limited access to internet and technology, compromising their ability to connect with peers and other supports.
- Youth development and empowerment programs (such as microfinance, skill building and social groups) will be critical to Nairobi youth during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Programming will need to target young women and girls, who face distinct privacy and social constraints due to COVID-19.