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Households' attitudes towards schools reopening during COVID-19 in Ethiopia

Evidence from phone surveys



In brief

- This policy brief reports on the findings from a phone survey focusing on educational outcomes and plans in Ethiopia and how they were affected by COVID-19.
- The survey was conducted with households living in Addis Ababa and neighbouring areas of Oromia in the fall of 2020. It documents how parents and children responded to the reopening of schools.
- Prior to schools reopening in the country, there was some anxiety regarding parents' and/or children's willingness to go back, given the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Our survey indicates that these fears were unfounded, at least for our study population: most parents did send back their children to school as soon as it became possible. Any lack of attendance that we still observe at the end of the survey is due primarily to some local schools not having reopened yet.

*This project was
funded by IGC
Ethiopia*

Survey and sample description

The survey was conducted under the auspices of Stanford University’s Africa Urban Development Research Initiative (AUDRI). It started on November 12, 2020 (EC: Hedar 3, 2013) and was completed on December 6, 2020 (EC: Hedar 27, 2013). Respondents were selected among individuals having participated in AUDRI’s Urban Panel Survey project (AUPS). The first two rounds of the panel surveys were collected in-person in 2015 and 2018, giving us an accurate snapshot of conditions and trends before the onset of COVID-19. We conducted a short phone survey in 2020 in order to document potential challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. By describing how COVID-19 has changed work and living conditions for individuals, we hope to provide useful insights for the medium-to-long term policy response at the regional and city level.

Sampling methodology: For this phone survey, we sampled 2,000 individuals from AUDRI’s Urban Panel Survey (AUPS), accounting for approximately 51% of all panel respondents. Sampling from the AUPS was done using stratified random sampling, in the sense that we purposefully sampled all business owners included in the AUPS sample. This was motivated by the desire to specifically understand how COVID-19 affected small businesses and the self-employed in Ethiopia, who are a particularly vulnerable population.

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Table 1: Summary statistics of surveyed sample

Variable	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Respondents characteristics					
Is female	55%				
Age	36.35	11.6	34	18	82
No education	17%				
Primary Education	41%				
High School Education	32%				
Nb of children	1.73	1.39	2	0	8
Household characteristics					
Nb of adults	2.86	1.38	2	1	11
Nb of children					
Employment	1.85	1.39	2	0	9
Wage employed	23%				
Self-employed	32%				
Farmer	7%				
Region					
Oromia	79%				
Addis Ababa	21%				
Observation	1952				

Source: COVID Survey Ethiopia (2020)

After sampling business owners, the remaining respondents were sampled randomly within their geographic sampling unit, defined by the location where the respondent reported living during the second round of AUPS survey. Sampling units were defined as the *woreda* within the Addis Ababa city limits and as the *kebele* in Oromia. The targeted number of sampled individuals within a sampling unit was proportional to the share of respondents in that sampling unit found in the AUPS.¹ Non-sampled individuals were rank-ordered as replacements within their sampling unit to substitute for sampled individuals who either refused to be surveyed (less than 1%) or could not be reached (around 30%). This strategy allowed us to maintain sample sizes that are proportional to those found in the full AUPS survey. We ultimately reached and surveyed 1,979 respondents among which 1,952 still lived either in Oromia or Addis Ababa.

Educational module

At the request of the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, we included a module on schooling and schooling plans into the survey. This module was administered for every school-aged (6 to 16 in 2020) child living with the respondent. Just about half of our respondents (1,021) had at least one school-aged child living with them at the time of the survey, with an average of 2.14 children per respondent with children. This yields a sample of 1,568 children for which we have education outcomes. The survey answers we collected were typically given by one of the parents (87%). The characteristics of the children for whom educational outcomes and intentions were collected are shown in Table 2. Children are 10 years old on average. The great majority of the sample is in the Oromia region (83%), with the rest in Addis Ababa (17%). Two thirds were surveyed in November 2020, when almost all schools were still closed. The remaining third were surveyed in December 2020, when school started reopening.

Table 2: Child characteristics

Variable	Mean
Age of the child	10.1
The child is the son/daughter of the respondent	87%
Lives in Oromia	83%
Lives in Addis Ababa	17%
Surveyed in November 2020	67%
Surveyed in December 2020	33%
Observations	1584

1. Respondents who lived outside of the AUPS study area in Oromia were grouped into a generic “non-AUPS *kebele*” sampling unit. Similarly, respondents who moved outside of the AUPS sampling area within Addis Ababa were grouped into a generic “non-AUPS *woreda*” sampling unit.

Findings

We present the key educational outcomes measured in Table 3. We show overall averages in column 7. The other columns show averages separately by survey month (November or December); by child gender; and by region. Panel A shows current schooling and plans to return for those not enrolled. Panel B documents educational investments made while schools were closed.

Table 3: Schooling outcomes

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Surveyed in		Child gender		Child lives in		Overall average
	Nov 20	Dec 20	Female	Male	Addis	Oromia	
Panel A: Return to school							
The child is currently going to school	7%	61%	27%	23%	30%	24%	25%
<i>If child is not going to school:</i>							
Main reason: school is closed	97%	97%	97%	98%	97%	98%	97%
Main reason: Fear of COVID	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Child pre-enrolled in a specific school	91%	91%	91%	96%	91%	91%	92%
Parents plan to send child back to school	95%	95%	95%	98%	95%	96%	95%
Panel B: Education while schools are/were closed							
<i>While at home during school closure:</i>							
Weekly hours spent on educational activities	6.01	5.71	8.11	5.41	5.67	6.24	5.86
The child is/was with parent	86%	88%	89%	85%	86%	87%	87%
Tools used for at-home educational activities							
None	35%	33%	32%	36%	25%	36%	34%
Textbooks	37%	48%	44%	43%	30%	46%	44%
Material from school	16%	15%	17%	14%	27%	13%	15%
Television	14%	11%	14%	10%	14%	12%	12%
Homeschooling by household	11%	8%	9%	10%	12%	9%	9%
Text messages	10%	6%	10%	5%	2%	9%	8%
Internet	5%	7%	6%	7%	27%	2%	7%
Radio	1%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%
Homeschooling by other member of family	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Private tutor	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Observations	611	974	808	777	264	1321	1584

The first row of Table 3 shows schooling status at the time of the survey. Among those surveyed in November, 93% of children were out of school (column 1). This was almost exclusively because schools were closed: for 97% of children not in school, parents mentioned schools closure as the reason. Fear of COVID was the main factor for only 1% of children.

By December, a much higher share of children were back in school: 61% (column 2). This is thanks to more schools reopening. Still 39% of children were out of school, again exclusively because of schools being closed.

Intentions to return to school as soon as allowed are extremely high: 95% of the children out of school in the survey period intend to go back to school as soon as possible (column 7).

Panel B of Table 3 provides information on children's outcomes during school closures. The great majority of children were at home with their parents. They report doing only about 6 hours of educational activities per week on average. About a third of children living in Oromia and a quarter of children living in Addis Ababa did not use any educational material. Based on our data, only 13% of children living in Oromia used material supplied by the school to complete their education activities. In Addis Ababa, the proportion is 37%.