YOUTH REALITIES DURING COVID-19
A YOUTH SURVEY ACROSS CITIESRISE CITIES
JUNE 2020
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic that has swept the world in 2020 will leave deep scars across many aspects of life. By May 2020, 319,000 people around the globe succumbed to the virus, and the medical and economic impact continues to affect billions of people. Adversity is a well-established risk factor for short and long-term mental health problems. Adolescents and young people are an at-risk group, as most mental health conditions develop during this period of life.

citiesRISE is a multi-stakeholder initiative challenging cities around the world to turn the tide on mental health and wellbeing by increasing opportunities for coping, connectedness, and access to a caring ecosystem for young people. We were particularly impacted in our programming as well as in linking up with young cities across cities during the initial days of the pandemic. Very soon we decided we had to do a rapid situational analysis to assess physical and mental health needs of young people and their families. This exercise is one of the first set of inquiries we launched in March of 2020.

In response to this crisis, our team has been working to understand the realities of young people during these times. On March 18th 2020 we launched a rapid assessment on young people’s experiences of COVID-19 across our cities - Bogotá (Colombia), Chennai (India), Nairobi (Kenya), Sacramento and Seattle (USA). In April 2020, we strengthened these findings and significantly broadened the reach of our youth response. We conducted an online survey that attracted 1000+ responses globally. This report shares our key findings from this survey and our recommendations for youth-serving organizations and policy makers.

OUR KEY FINDINGS

The survey highlighted the challenges young people around the world face. Responses from 31 countries showed that anxiety, fear, and uncertainty are common emotions experienced by young people during COVID-19. Youth preferred to seek help from family members and peers around their mental health challenges. Importantly, young people were asking for more information on mental health in the context of physical distancing and public lockdown measures existing at that time.

Our findings bolster the results from our March 2020 rapid assessment. While there are regional differences, a number of key themes resonate with young people globally. The highlights below are a result of data analysis from citiesRISE’s five focus cities: Bogotá, Chennai, Nairobi, Sacramento, and Seattle:

- COVID-19 has impacted young people in many ways, but its effects are most acutely felt on a personal level compared to the other domains of finance, mental health, family and basic needs. Nairobi respondents reported greater severity of COVID-19’s impact overall, while those in Chennai and Bogotá reported milder effects, compared to the cities surveyed.

- Family and friends were the predominant sources of information across the five cities, favored by 50% of respondents to provide immediate support. This was closely followed by support and information sought through social media, particularly Instagram and WhatsApp.

- The vast majority of respondents, 88%, felt they were well informed about COVID-19, particularly those located in Chennai and Sacramento. Notably, those who reported social media as their main information source felt significantly less well-informed.

- Almost all respondents, 96%, were able to abide by social distancing measures and were doing so to preserve their mental and physical health. However, very few, only 7%, are talking to a mental health counsellor or therapist; Nairobi respondents were more likely to seek professional support than respondents in other cities.

- Young people consistently sought information on stress reduction, relaxation and positive thinking to better support their mental health. Information on suicide prevention was most highly noted by youth in Nairobi, indicating a more substantial need that other cities.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD

This survey augmented our understanding of youth needs during the pandemic and helped us align ourselves closer to mental health challenges in this emerging situation. We make recommendations on two levels: for youth-serving programs and services; and for policy makers. We recommend programs, services and policies reflect young people’s realities and behaviors, including how they seek information, the type of information they seek and how they prefer to receive support.

For youth-serving programs or services:

- Prioritize social media as a key communication channel to disseminate health messages, provide mental health and psychosocial support and engage with young people.

- Develop tools and spaces for young people to connect other people and resources, ensuring these are virtual and further support connections between friends and family.

- Empower young people to better support their peers with necessary mental health, social support related literacy tools and resources.

- Disseminate resources that help young people to cope with mental health challenges, specifically evidence-based resources on a range of coping mechanisms, specifically how to reduce stress, relax and think positively. This should include suicide prevention.

For public health policy makers:

- Provide clear, unambiguous public health COVID-19 messaging. This need is heightened by the dependence of young people on family and friends for news.

- Strengthen proactive, focused public health messaging directed to young people ensuring it includes access to coping resources that include how to manage individual mental and physical health concerns, family stresses and financial instability.

- Increase access to digital support and strengthen young people’s internet and social media literacy, specifically their ability to use these as a reliable information and news sources.

- Support youth engagement through resource
allocation toward training youth to be peer advocates for mental health and establish policy design processes to directly listen to young people.

Finally, we recommend engaging young people directly as part of the COVID-19 response. While not explicit from this survey, we know from our experience of working with young people that it is important they have an active voice in co-designing solutions that address their immediate and long-term mental health concerns.

INTRODUCTION

On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. Two months on, we are still in the midst of the crisis, with the number of deaths continuing to rise. At the time of the survey, the reported death was at 319,000 globally in May 2020. Today, that number stands at over 1 million.

Physical and socio-economic adversities are a well-established risk factor for short and long-term mental health problems. The United Nations has noted COVID-19’s impact on brain health and the corresponding reported widespread psychological distress in affected populations. A United States emergency hotline for people in emotional distress registered a more than 1,000 percent increase in April 2020 compared with the same time last year. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, nearly half of Americans report the COVID-19 crisis is harming their mental health. Moreover, the routine delivery of mental health services globally has been disrupted. In many lower-income and middle-income countries the substantial demands on mental health care imposed by the pandemic are intersecting the already fragile and fragmented care systems.

The United Nations cites adolescents and young people as an at-risk group in the COVID-19 crisis, as most mental health conditions develop during this period of life. A survey of roughly 1,500 American teenagers conducted in May 2020, found that seven out of ten teenagers were struggling with their mental health in some way. 64% of youth surveyed believe that the experience of COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on their generation's mental health. The need to address young people’s mental health needs during these times is therefore critical and cannot be done in isolation of local, national, and regional COVID-19 strategies.

The citiesRISE approach seeks to mobilize youth to have them drive solutions that will improve youth mental health and connect young leaders to systems that impact their mental health and wellbeing. As the pandemic spreads all over the world, we witnessed the shutting down of offices and programs of work, except for essential services. At citiesRISE we have had to calibrate our thinking and programs of work and we felt it was critical to start listening to what young people are experiencing and what they are doing to cope in these challenging times.

We are firmly committed to keeping our work moving and relevant to young people in these challenging times. On March 18th 2020 our team launched a rapid assessment on young people’s experiences of COVID-19 across our cities - Bogota (Colombia), Chennai (India), Nairobi (Kenya), Sacramento and Seattle (USA) – interviewing 46 participants in total. We found that young people were anxious and concerned about the lack of COVID-19 information but nonetheless were proactive about seeking support for their mental and physical health. While they acknowledged more support was required, they were optimistic about the future.

We strengthened these findings and significantly broadened the reach of our youth response during April 2020 by conducting an online survey that attracted 1000+ responses globally. In line with our rapid assessment, the survey had 20 questions that sought to understand young people’s perceptions of:

- The severity of COVID-19’s effects across key domains (e.g. personal, family, mental health, finances, and basic needs)
- Sources of information on COVID-19
- Methods of coping with mental health, well-being and our participants' physical safety

This report starts with an explanation of the methodology before sharing the findings per city. It concludes with our recommendations for youth-serving organizations and policy makers.

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3. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. https://4-h.org/about/research/#/healthy-living
The Path Forward at citiesRISE: Cross-City Snapshots

Here at citiesRISE, in light of these findings, we have adapted, and continue to adapt, our strategies and programming around all five cities and globally.

We share select examples below:

- **SACRAMENTO**
  - Virtual Pop Ups - Training providers on implementing virtual youth pop ups (technology and logistics) and how to a) incorporate a mental health component into the pop up programming; and b) how to connect pop up participants to local mental health youth advocates.
  - Messaging and Outreach - Developing youth-focused/ youth-friendly messages to help youth know they are not alone and can find help if they need someone to talk to and working with youth influences (e.g. artists, sports figures, etc.) to push out these messages and provide venues for youth to express themselves.
  - Mental Health First Aid including Suicide Prevention Awareness programs - Working with the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) and ACEs connection to develop trainings for youth development organizations (e.g. extended learning providers, pop up providers, youth employment agencies, and other non-traditional mental health workers) to help adults better respond to the anxiety, isolation, and fear youth are having from the pandemic and shelter-in-place order.

- **SEATTLE**
  - Caring Conversations – Launched project with University of Washington (UW) and Seattle University to implement caring text message intervention for UW students. Caring messages have been sent out to 1,000+ UW students. Second message touching on racial injustice is next.
  - Stages of Activism - citiesRISE Youth Challenge Award winner Arch Nova launched their Stages of Activism toolkit and campaign that provides youth with a guided set of tools on how to start their own activism campaigns.
  - Webinars and Digital Support – Jim Vollendroff with UW’s Behavioral Health Institute conducted webinar focused on ways to build and maintain meaningful connections. 500+ participants joined the webinar. UW’s Behavioral Health Institute also launched a new center of digital health to connect public sector community-based digital mental health solutions for Washington residents.

- **BOGOTÁ**
  - YCA Collaboration – YCA winners are working to adapt their programming to physical distancing requirements and find creative ways to continue their work. For example, Pepaso Foundation have adapted by making tutorials for youth to make at-home bike workout stations. Other groups in the network are hosting virtual wellness pop-ups focused on meditation and breathing.
  - Webinars – YCA winners are conducting weekly webinars to discuss how to support each other and their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Exploring Digital Platforms: Platforms, such as Sexperto, Piensalo, and Hablalo, currently support the sexual and reproductive health of young people, prevention of substance-abuse and promotion of emotional well-being and mental health. Currently exploring how citiesRISE can be a content development partner for this network to help create and adapt material related to mental health and wellbeing.
Nairobi

- Virtual Buddy Groups - Holding digital opportunities for young people to get together and interact meaningfully, staying socially connected while physically apart.

- Webinars - Conducting weekly webinars convening mental health experts and young people to discuss how to support each other and their communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Messaging and Outreach - Created youth-focused COVID-19 fliers in partnership with the Ministry of Health around protection for young people and their families, stigma, mental wellbeing, and more. Supported the development of a comprehensive guide on mental health and psychosocial support during the COVID-19 pandemic, distributed by the Ministry of Health.

- Awareness and Campaign - Running a campaign alongside the Kenyan Psychiatric Association (KPA) to celebrate May Mental Health Awareness Month highlighting the following topics: Mental Health at home, Mental health impact of losses from COVID-19, Gender based violence and maternal mental health, Challenges of young people and the elderly.

Chennai

- Art for Wellbeing – Nalanda Way Program – A Parent’s Guide: It consists of a set of 20 activities that focuses on helping the parents engage with the children through art activities, which would assist in providing a tool for well-being in stressful situations such as being confined in homes. This has been prepared for various age groups keeping in mind their cognitive abilities and emotional intelligence. This module is available in different languages including English and Tamil and is implemented among 4000 primary school students and their parents.

- Take it easy – Nalanda Way Program – art for wellbeing for 10th grade students: This program empowers 10th grade students to manage their emotional balance and improve self-confidence. In the present scenario, several students are feeling low and anxious. There are multiple stressors which affect the students' psychological state and these socioemotional challenges are addressed through audio-based solutions using integrated voice response system (IVRS).

- Youth mobilization: This program engages and trains young people in positive mental health that includes altruism, resilience, hope, optimism and coping skills using technology and web platform.

- Reducing stigma around Covid-19: The youth cohort are engaged to dispel the myths and mis-concepts surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. Through social media and other tech platforms, the ‘right’ information will be disseminated in the community thereby defeating the stigma attached to Covid-19.

- SEL intervention: Implementing SEL program for the parents of middle school students delivered through the IVRS platform. The focus will be on enabling parents to effectively engage with their children during the lockdown and to take care of their own mental health along with that of their children.

The citiesRISE Chennai team will be collaborating with local partners (NalandaWay Foundation, SCARF, rYMS and Thrive Foundation)
METHODOLOGY

The survey had 20 questions, focused on the following areas:
- The severity of COVID-19’s effects
- Sources of information on COVID-19
- Methods of coping with mental health, well-being and physical safety

The citiesRISE team surveyed 1,083 participants across the globe, with 597 participants across our five citiesRISE cities.

The age brackets surveyed were:
- Under 18
- 18 to 24
- 25+

Most of the participants were between ages 18 to 24 and identified as female (65%). 89 participants were from Bogotá, 57 from Chennai, 188 from Nairobi, 277 from Sacramento and 60 from Seattle.

All the survey questions were structured and multiple choice. The survey was posted through social media channels.

Moving forward, citiesRISE will be developing a more nuanced needs and intervention preference assessment survey in all our cities. Our ambition is to use this data to unify the cities under a common program of action around mental health.

Survey Questions

1. Please select the country you are taking the survey in?
2. Please write the city or county you live in (include zip/postal code if possible):
3. What is your current gender/gender identity?
4. Please indicate your age.
5. How has COVID-19 affected you personally, from 1 to 4?
6. How has COVID-19 affected your mental health, from 1 to 4?
7. How has COVID-19 affected your family, from 1 to 4?
8. How has COVID-19 affected your financial stability, from 1 to 4?
9. How has COVID-19 affected your access to basic needs such as food, housing and medicine, from 1 to 4?
10. Please describe your general feelings about the COVID-19 pandemic in 1-3 words. (short answer)
11. What are your primary sources of information for staying mentally healthy during COVID-19, select two options from Instagram, Snapchat, TV news, radio, WhatsApp, Google News, Twitter, friends, family, World Health Organization, government agencies, other?
12. Do you feel well-informed about prevention of COVID-19?
13. Are you staying home as much as possible?
14. How are you taking care of your mental health and physical safety at this time, rate top 3 from staying home as much as possible, talking to friends and family via social media, talking to friends via phone and text, reading, playing video games, learning something new, making art, talking to a mental health counsellor/therapist, helping others in my community, meditating/yoga, physical exercise, making TikTok videos and sharing, other?
15. If you require mental health support, who would you like to reach out to? Volunteer, social worker, physician/family doctor, psychiatrist, counsellor, family member, friend, other.
16. How do you like to receive the mental health support? Tele counseling to individual, video counselling, digital applications, group counselling through Zoom, other.
17. What additional information would you like to have in order to support your mental health and well-being, select up to 3 from thinking positively, stress reduction, relaxation, coping when overwhelmed, time management, managing uncertainty, combating loneliness, making connections via social media, help with basic needs and assistance, how to access a therapist, how to access a peer advocate or crisis counsellor, suicide prevention and crisis resources, other?
18. How are young people staying connected with each other during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please describe up to three ways:
19. What brings you hope right now during this shut down? Please describe up to three examples:
20. Do you know of any specific organizations, local programs or social services providing mental health support to young people right now? Please describe and also provide feedback on options, resources, or youth mental health ideas you have or have seen elsewhere that you want to see in your community.
OUR **LEARNINGS ACROSS CITIES VIA RAPID SURVEYS**

Although there are regional differences, we saw a lot of similarities across the 1000+ young people surveyed. These findings largely resonate with those from our rapid assessment completed in March 2020.

**COVID-19 has impacted young people in many ways, but its affects are most acutely felt on an individual level**

Young people felt that COVID-19 has had an impact on their personal mental health, family members, financial stability and to a lesser extent access to basic needs such as food, housing and medicine. The severity of effects are felt most strongly however on a personal level, particularly in Nairobi and Sacramento. These views were fairly consistent across age groups, however 18-24 year olds across cities but particularly in Nairobi, reported greater financial instability. Nairobi respondents reported greater severity of COVID-19’s impact overall, while those in Chennai and Bogota reported milder effects, compared to the cities surveyed.

**Family and friends were the predominant sources of information across the five cities**

To stay mentally healthy during COVID-19, the majority of participants, 60%, use their family and friends as their primary information source. This is particularly true for participants in Chennai, Sacramento and Seattle. Instagram and WhatsApp are also popular sources of information. Respondents across all cities overwhelmingly felt informed about COVID-19, at 88%, particularly those in Chennai and Sacramento. However those who report social media as their main information source felt significantly less (~50% reduced odds) well-informed.

**Young people were able to abide by social distancing measures and are doing so to preserve their mental and physical health**

Almost all participants, 96%, reported being able to stay home, and are doing so to preserve their mental and physical health. This was consistent across cities, except Nairobi, where respondents felt less able to stay at home. Talking to friends and family via phone, text and social media is another key source of mental health support. Very few, only 7%, are talking to a mental health counsellor or therapist. Although Nairobi respondents did seem to seek professional support at a greater rate than those in other cities. This also speaks to the fact that Nairobi has a strong youth leadership network where mental health resources and conversations have had most impact. Nairobi is also CI’s most expansive program.

**Young people were consistently seek information on stress reduction, relaxation and positive thinking**

Young people reported needing information on thinking positively, stress reduction and relaxation to better support their mental health. Information on suicide prevention was highly rated with youth in Nairobi, indicating a more substantial need than other cities based on results of the survey.
BOGOTÁ
DATA FROM BOGOTÁ
DEMOGRAPHICS

89 Participants

Gender identity of participants
76.4% Female 22.47% Male 1.13% Non-binary

Age of participants
Under 18 18-24 25+

TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SEEKING

- Stress reduction: 51%
- Time management: 42%
- Relaxation: 40%
- Positive thinking: 31%
- Managing uncertainty: 28%
- Coping when overwhelmed: 24%
- Help with basic needs: 21%
- Connections on social media: 20%
- How to access a therapist: 19%
- Suicide prevention: 19%
- Combatting loneliness: 15%
- How to access a peer advocate: 6%

SEVERITY OF COVID-19 EFFECTS

Personally Mental Health Family Financial Stability Basic Needs

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- Social Media
- News Media
- Official
- Family/Friends

79% WELL-INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19

8 | YOUTH REALITIES DURING COVID-19 | A Youth Survey Across citiesRISE Cities
INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM BOGOTÁ

Young people felt the negative impact of COVID-19 most severely on their families compared to the other domains of personal, mental health, finances, and basic needs.

Young people in Bogotá are impacted most strongly by concern for their families, in contrast to other cities surveyed. This was followed closely by COVID-19’s impact on themselves and then their financial stability. The severity of COVID-19’s impact on their own mental health is ranked the lowest. Those aged between 18-24 experience its impact more acutely than those aged 25 and over. Compared to other cities surveyed, respondents in Bogotá ranked the overall severity of COVID-19’s impact lower.

Family and TV news were the primary sources of COVID-19 related information.

Young people get information on COVID-19 and how to stay mentally healthy mainly from their family and the news on TV, both of which 38% of respondents selected as their primary news source. This was followed by social media, such as Instagram and WhatsApp. 70% of young people in Bogotá consider themselves well informed on COVID-19, the lowest across the cities we surveyed.

Everyone was able to abide by social distancing measures, and did so to take care of their health alongside other activities.

All respondents are staying at home during the pandemic, and cited this as a method of taking care of their mental and physical health. Talking to friends and family on social media and via phone or text, exercising and reading are other ways young people were taking care of their mental and physical health. Few across age groups are talking to a mental health professional or using TikTok.

Young people reach out to their friends and family for mental health support.

Young people in Bogotá predominantly reach out to their friends (expressed by 56% of respondents) and family (expressed by 41% of respondents) when they need mental health support.

Young people sought more information on stress reduction and relaxation.

There is need for information on stress reduction (expressed by 45% of respondents) and relaxation (expressed by 40% of respondents), followed by time management (expressed by 37% of respondents).
CHENNAI DATA FROM CHENNAI

DEMOGRAPHICS

57 Participants

Gender identity of participants
- 70.2% Female
- 29.8% Male
- 0% Non-binary

Age of participants
- 18-24
- 25+

TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SEEKING

- Relaxation: 54%
- Positive thinking: 48%
- Time management: 44%
- Managing uncertainty: 42%
- Coping when overwhelmed: 39%
- Stress reduction: 33%
- Combatting loneliness: 19%
- Help with basic needs: 14%
- Connections on social media: 12%
- How to access a therapist: 10%
- How to access a peer advocate: 7%
- Suicide prevention: 3%

SEVERITY OF COVID-19 EFFECTS

- Personally
- Mental Health
- Family
- Financial Stability
- Basic Needs

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- Social Media
- News Media
- Official
- Family/Friends

96% WELL-INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19
INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES
FROM CHENNAI AND THE REST OF INDIA

At the time of the survey, young people, specifically those aged 18–24, felt the negative impact of COVID-19 most severely at a personal level compared to the other domains of mental health, family concerns, finances, and basic needs. Young people in Chennai, and the rest of India, are impacted most severely on a personal level, followed closely by the impact on their mental health. This feeling is largely consistent with age across the country; however, those aged 18 to 24 report greater strain on their own mental health. The impact on family, financial stability and basic needs are relatively low in Chennai as compared to the rest of the country.

Family and friends were the primary source of COVID-19 related information
The majority of participants rely on information from their family (54% of participants) and friends (44% of participants) as their key source of information on COVID-19 and staying mentally healthy. News media is moderately used as a source of information, followed by social media where WhatsApp and Instagram are the most popular. 97% of young people surveyed consider themselves well informed on COVID-19, well above their global peers.

Almost everyone was able to abide by social distancing measures, and did so to take care of their health alongside other activities
Close to 100% of respondents were staying at home during the peak pandemic lockdowns, and more than 80% cited this as a method of taking care of their mental and physical health. Engaging with family and friends, learning a new skill, exercising and making art are other common activities young people are doing to take care of their mental and physical health. This is consistent among the various age groups and across the country.

Young people seek mental health support through a variety of means
In Chennai, the support seeking preference is equally distributed towards psychologists, counsellors, family and friends. However, those aged 18–24 prefer psychologists and counsellors while those aged 25 and above primarily prefer to engage with family and friends for support. The latter is particularly preferred across the rest of the country. Young people choose to receive support via video counselling closely followed by tele counselling.

Young people sought positive mental health strategies and use of relaxation to manage stress better
Half of the respondents seek more information on relaxation and 30% want to know how to reduce stress. This is consistent across age group and across the country. In Chennai, more than 40% of the respondents are seeking information on managing uncertainty, thinking positively, time management and coping skills.
NAIROBI
DATA FROM NAIROBI

DEMOGRAPHICS

188 Participants

Gender identity of participants:
- 53.2% Female
- 46.8% Male
- 0% Non-binary

Age of participants:
- 18-24: 53%
- Under 18: 46.8%
- 25+: 0%

TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SEEKING

- Positive thinking: 50%
- Relaxation: 39%
- Stress reduction: 39%
- Coping when overwhelmed: 33%
- Managing uncertainty: 30%
- Time management: 28%
- Help with basic needs: 27%
- Connections on social media: 22%
- Combatting loneliness: 21%
- Suicide prevention: 15%
- How to access a therapist: 10%
- How to access a peer advocate: 10%

SEVERITY OF COVID-19 EFFECTS

- Personally
- Mental Health
- Family
- Financial Stability
- Basic Needs

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- Social Media
- News Media
- Official
- Family/Friends

84% WELL-INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19
INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES
FROM NAIROBI

Young people felt the negative impact of COVID-19 most severely on their financial stability compared to the other domains of personal, mental health, family concerns and basic needs.

Young people in Nairobi are impacted most strongly financially, in contrast to their global counterparts. This is followed closely by concern for themselves personally. Financial concerns are particularly true for respondents over the age of 25. Those under the age of 18 felt COVID-19’s effects more severely on themselves personally. Its impact on access to basic needs are ranked the lowest. The overall impact of COVID-19 was felt most severely in Nairobi compared to other cities.

TV News and social media, such as WhatsApp, was the primary source of COVID-19 related information

The majority of respondents, 63%, rely on information from social media as their key source of information on COVID-19 and staying mentally healthy. This is true across all age groups. The news media is also a key source of information for those aged 18 – 25 and 25+, however is not used by the under 18s. 84% of young people in Nairobi consider themselves well informed on COVID-19, slightly below the average across all cities surveyed.

Almost everyone was able to abide by social distancing measures, and did so to take care of their health alongside other activities

The vast majority of respondents, at 90%, are staying at home during the pandemic where possible, however, this is lower than the other cities surveyed. In line with global peers, this was cited as a method of taking care of their mental and physical health. Talking to friends and family on social media is the second most common way young people are taking care of their mental health. Very few across age groups are talking to a mental health professional.

Young people reach out to their friends and family for mental health support

Young people in Nairobi predominantly reach out to their friends (expressed by 38% of participants) and family (expressed by 28% of participants) when they need mental health support. This is followed by a counsellor and a psychologist, both of which are more likely amongst respondents aged 18 – 25. Respondents report reaching out to mental health professionals at a higher rate than the other cities surveyed. Video counselling is the medium of choice for mental health support.

Young people sought more information on multiple sources of support

There is need for information across a spread of issues from thinking positively, stress reduction, relaxation and coping mechanism. A small but worrying percentage of youths, at 15%, expressed a need for information on suicide prevention. This is significantly higher than the average across the cities surveyed.
277 Participants

Gender identity of participants:
- 68.6% Female
- 28.2% Male
- 3.4% Non-binary

Age of participants:
- 18-24: 25%
- Under 18: 28.2%
- 25+: 3.4%

TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SEEKING

- Stress reduction: 58%
- Relaxation: 49%
- Positive thinking: 46%
- Time management: 43%
- Coping when overwhelmed: 32%
- Combatting loneliness: 28%
- Managing uncertainty: 25%
- Connections on social media: 16%
- Help with basic needs: 13%
- How to access a therapist: 13%
- How to access a peer advocate: 7%
- Suicide prevention: 3%

SEVERITY OF COVID-19 EFFECTS

- Personally
- Mental Health
- Family
- Financial Stability
- Basic Needs

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- Social Media
- News Media
- Official
- Family/Friends

88% WELL-INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19

DATA FROM SACRAMENTO

PERSONALITY

- SACRAMENTO
- DATA
- FROM SACRAMENTO
- DEMOGRAPHICS
INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM SACRAMENTO

Young people felt the negative impact of COVID-19 most severely personally compared to the other domains of mental health, family concerns, finances, and basic needs.
Young people in Sacramento are impacted most severely on a personal level, followed closely by concern for their families. On both indicators, respondents reported its impact more severe than their global counterparts. The severity of COVID-19’s impact on their financial stability and access to basic needs is ranked lowly. This feeling is consistent across age groups.

Family and friends were the primary source of COVID-19 related information.
The majority of respondents, at 69%, rely on information from their family and friends as their key source of information on COVID-19 and staying mentally healthy. Social media is also a key source of information, with those aged 18 and under 50% more likely to use this as their key information source alongside news media. 88% of young people in Sacramento consider themselves well informed on COVID-19.

Almost everyone was able to abide by social distancing measures, and did so to take care of their health alongside other activities.
Close to 100% of respondents are staying at home during the pandemic where possible, and cited this as a method of taking care of their mental and physical health. Talking to friends and family on social media and via phone or text, exercising and playing video games are other ways young people are taking care of their mental and physical health. 25% of those aged 18 and under are using TikTok and younger respondents are more likely to be learning new things to maintain mental health. Few across age groups are talking to a mental health professional.

Young people reach out to their friends and family for mental health support.
Young people in Sacramento predominantly reach out to their friends (expressed by 65% of respondents) and family (expressed by 47% of respondents) when they need mental health support. They do this at a much higher rate than the other cities surveyed.

More information is sought on stress reduction and relaxation.
There is need for information on stress reduction (expressed by 58% of respondents) and relaxation (expressed by 50% of respondents), higher than the average across cities, followed by thinking positively. Time management was expressed by some respondents.
SEATTLE
DATA FROM SEATTLE

DEMOGRAPHICS

- **60** Participants
- Gender identity of participants:
  - Female: 80%
  - Male: 20%
  - Non-binary: 0%
- Age of participants:
  - Under 18: 25%
  - 18-24: 18%
  - 25+: 6%

TYPE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SEEKING

- Stress reduction: 40%
- Managing uncertainty: 40%
- Combatting loneliness: 38%
- Positive thinking: 35%
- Coping when overwhelmed: 33%
- Relaxation: 27%
- Time management: 25%
- Connections on social media: 13%
- How to access a therapist: 12%
- Suicide prevention: 5%
- How to access a peer advocate: 5%
- Help with basic needs: 2%

SEVERITY OF COVID-19 EFFECTS

- Personally
- Mental Health
- Family
- Financial Stability
- Basic Needs

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- Social Media
- News Media
- Official
- Family/Friends

93% WELL-INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19
**INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES**
**FROM SEATTLE**

Young people felt the negative impact of COVID-19 most severely personally and on their mental health compared to the other domains of mental health, family concerns, finances, and basic needs.

Young people in Seattle report personal effects of COVID-19 and its effects on their mental health. This feeling is largely consistent across age groups, however overall severity of impact for those aged 18 and under are slightly lower. COVID-19’s impact on respondents and their family are felt more strongly than its impact on financial stability or access to basic needs. Overall, young people in Seattle ranked the effects of COVID-19 as less severe compared to the other cities.

**Family and friends were the primary source of COVID-19 related information**

The majority of participants, 70%, rely on information from their family and friends as their key source of information on COVID-19 and staying mentally healthy, more so than their global peers. Under half of the participants report using social media as a key source of information. Participants aged 18 and under are 50% more likely to use social media as a key information source. Upwards of 95% of young people in Seattle consider themselves well informed on COVID-19, well above the average of all cities surveyed.

**Everyone was able to abide by social distancing measures, and did so to take care of their health alongside other activities apart from exercise**

All participants report being able to stay at home during the pandemic and almost all are doing so to preserve their mental and physical health. Talking to friends and family on social media or via phone or text is another important way they are taking care of their health. Young people in Seattle did this more than their global counterparts. Few are talking to a mental health professional and no one uses exercise to preserve their mental or physical health.

**More information is sought on stress reduction and managing uncertainty**

There is need for information on stress reduction and managing uncertainty, both expressed by 40% of participants, followed by loneliness, coping, and thinking positively.
RECOMMENDATIONS

COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable populations across the globe. Although we think of young people as a strong brigade of social change and creativity in many cultural contexts, their voices are subdued and unheard. We do think they are then part of this vulnerable population that experiences significant marginalization. In developing countries, populations will be thrust into further poverty, food insecurity will rise and the informal sector destabilized. The pandemic illustrates the necessity of health system strengthening and ensuring access to healthcare for vulnerable populations. In developed countries, internal disparities and systemic discrimination compounds problems in access and quality care and support.

In Washington State, where Seattle is, the number of new COVID-19 infections appears to have already peaked at the end of March. While in California, where Sacramento is, along with Kenya, Colombia and India, new cases continue to rise. There is much uncertainty as to how long this pandemic will last. Even as lockdown restrictions continue to lift, the full extent of COVID-19’s short- and long-term effects are unknown. What is clear is the strong need for youth focused mental health and psychosocial considerations in COVID-19 national responses.

The United States Government has terminated its relationship with, the World Health Organization and withdrawn its funding commitments. This is a worrying development given that our survey has found the World Health Organization to be a valuable and credible resource of information for young people in an age of increasing levels of misinformation through social media.

The survey has augmented our understanding of youth needs during the pandemic. Young people globally are affected personally by the COVID-19 crisis, but are also concerned for their families, their own mental health, and it some cases their financial stability. Our results confirm that they continue to be informed on the crisis, and are proactive in seeking support for their mental and physical health. However, there is an expressed need for more information on stress reduction, relaxation and positive thinking.

This survey has strengthened our recommendations from our rapid assessment in March 2020. We make recommendations on two levels: for youth-serving programs and services; and for policy makers. We recommend programs, services and policies reflect young people’s realities and behaviors, including how they seek information, the type of information they seek and how they prefer to receive support.

For youth-serving programs or services:

- Prioritize social media as a key communication channel to disseminate health messages, provide mental health and psychosocial support and engage with young people.
- Develop tools and spaces for young people to be connected to other people and resources, ensuring these are virtual and further support connections between friends and family.
- Empower young people to better support their peers with tools and resources.
- Disseminate resources that help young people to cope with mental health challenges, specifically evidence-based resources on a range of coping mechanisms, specifically how to reduce stress, relax and think positively. This should include suicide prevention.

For public health policy makers:

- Provide clear, unambiguous public health COVID-19 messaging. This need is heightened by the dependence of young people on family and friends for news.
- Strengthen proactive, focused public health messaging directed to young people ensuring it includes how to manage individual mental and physical health concerns, family stresses and financial instability.
- Strengthen young people’s internet and social media literacy, specifically their ability to use these as a reliable information and news sources.

Finally, we recommend engaging young people directly as part of the COVID-19 response. While not explicit from this survey, we know from our experience working with young people that it is important they have an active voice in co-designing solutions that address their immediate and long-term mental health concerns.

Recent global events demonstrate the volatility of our world. Beyond the pandemic, recent protests in the United States against black deaths in custody have highlighted how racial prejudices, inequities and issues of social justice remain unaddressed and continue to divide societies across the world.

These events have a profound impact on young people and their mental health. We need strong institutions, policy makers and leaders who are mental health friendly and committed to mental health friendly cities to address disparities, equity and youth participation.

There is a huge opportunity for public action and youth empowerment.

citiesRISE sees its role as mobilizing youth to help develop champions who will always prioritize equity and social justice and engage leaders and policy makers to shift their thinking to incorporate social justice and psychological mindedness.
YOUTH REALITIES DURING COVID-19: A Youth Survey Across citiesRISE Cities