

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Paediatrics Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of Bissau-Guinean religious (Quranic) schoolboys during a state of emergency: A qualitative study
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Boiro, Hamadou Einarsdóttir, Jónína Gunnlaugsson, Geir

### VERSION 1 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Reviewer name: Dr. Raul Gerardo Mercer Institution and Country: Social Sciences and Health Competing interests: None
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	03-Oct-2021

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p><b>Introduction:</b> Where it says "human rights abuses" I suggest "human rights violations" considering that abuses involve violations of HR.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> Why the authors refer to "patients"? Who they are? Please clarify. In order to facilitate the reading, it will be important to mention the themes evaluated during the interviews (general, knowledge/experience, education, family, neighborhood, friends, internet, and future).</p> <p><b>Results:</b> Not all the themes that were part of the instruments do not appear in the narratives. Any reason?</p> <p><b>Discussion:</b> In terms of the scope of the study the authors refer (quoted) "to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of Quran schoolboys...", Perhaps this aim is too ambitious regarding the duration of the study, the period of implementation and the methodological aspects. In other words, this was a study done at an early stage of the pandemic, during a short period of evaluation and considering the preliminary effects of the pandemic (emergency and lockdown) in the perceptions, experiences and responses of the schoolboys. With this approach it is difficult to talk about "impact". On the other hand it is relevant to confront the situation expressed by the schoolboys regarding their intimate lives and "corona hunger" and "crowdedness", in terms of highlighting the importance of local context and how to deal with the consequences of the emergency.</p> <p>With the purpose of harmonizing the approach of the study, "begging" as a multifactorial phenomenon should be considered within a child rights based approach (CRBA). All this, assuming that the child rights organisations are truly based on rights and not on needs or charity approaches.</p> <p>It is a very interesting work to characterize and provide information on the pandemic in cultural diverse settings and its consequences in children and youth..</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Reviewer name: Dr. David Wood Institution and Country: East Tennessee State University James H Quillen College of Medicine, Pediatrics Competing interests: None
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	05-Oct-2021

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>The authors conducted in-person, qualitative interviews with 14 Quran schoolboys on the streets of Bissau and Gabu. Their goal was to obtain the perspective of these youth on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives. The work is very compelling and produced some important perspectives of these youth. They analyzed the transcribed and translated results using Atlas ti. The authors formulated very insightful findings including that the boys were knowledgeable of Corona and that the pandemic had severely impaired their ability to obtain alms and food, and threatened the continuation of their religious studies under the chernos. I have three criticisms of the paper regarding its content.</p> <p>First, Based on the questions listed in the table entitled, "Questions for the beggars on the street", the authors conducted much more extensive interviews than reported in this paper. The paper would be greatly strengthened by reporting on additional themes that they found, such as how COVID19 has impacted their families or the psychological impact of COVID on themselves or their families.</p> <p>Second, the authors point out in the introduction that the youth are considered as trafficked youth by some but supported by their families and communities in their religious studies, which included begging. I gathered that the larger study is seeking to better understand this tension so that appropriate public social policy can be developed. However, the authors never address this issue further in the paper beyond what they do in the last paragraph of the discussion. Some of the results from the interviews offer more specific insights into this complex social issue, such as the support of the parents for the youth's activities, but at the same time, expressing concern for their continued attendance in the school or even requiring them to come home. More information from the interviews should be used to inform this tension and more insights should be offered on how to address it in the time of the pandemic or beyond.</p> <p>3. While they report that they analyzed the transcripts of the interviews in Atlas Ti, however, they do not provide any additional information on the details of this analysis, including the themes identified by words or phrases, etc. This would lend support to the more general results that they report.</p>
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### VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Comments to issues raised by Editors

Formatting Amendments (where applicable):

1. Supplementary file / Appendix

Please be informed that this should be in PDF Format.

Answer: As requested, supplementary material is now in PDF-format

2. Table/box

The table/box you have supplied is a separate file; this should be embedded in the main document. Make sure these are editable in the word document. They should appear where the table should be cited in the main text and in numerical order.

Answer: Box has been embedded in the ms, as requested.

Editor in Chief Comments to Author :

Please confirm that you had ethical approval for the study and add this to the text.

Answer: The revised ms includes more information on ethical approval.

Replace "Quran" with "religious". It is the religious institution's use of schoolchildren that is the problem and unfortunately it occurs with many religions. Most readers will not understand what a Quran schoolboy is.

Answer: In the revised ms, we have addressed this issue with due consideration given to this comment by more frequently talking about the local name of almudu (in the local Fula language, a student studying the Quran) and cherno (teacher in the study of the Quran). We have also used the word "Quran" only for the Book, and changed the expression to Quranic schoolboys. In fact, these schools are recognised by the denomination of Quran/-ic schools, locally and internationally, and they are the first level of Quranic schools where students learn to recite the Quran, emphasised in the revised ms. The references give further evidence to this, see, e.g. references no. 11, 13, and 16-18.

Title amend to "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of schoolboys in religious schools in Guinea Bissau during a state of emergency: A qualitative study."

Similarly change the text in the abstract, What is already known and What this study adds sections. The schools are Islamic schools not Quran schools. Use the word Quran for the religious book only.

Answer: The title has been changed in line with the suggestion of the Associate Editor, see below, yet with the modification of using the word "Quranic" rather than "Quran", as explained above.

Clarify whether only boys can go to these schools

Answer: Thanks for this observation. We have clarified the issue in the second paragraph of the Introduction.

Associate Editor

Comments to the Author:

This is a fascinating area of research inquiry and I commend the authors for undertaking long term work with these children in Guinea Bissau. Based on the reviewers' comments and suggested edits, I invite the authors to respond and provide edits and clarifications which would strengthen the message of this paper.

In addition the title should be changed to: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of Bissau-Guinean Quran schoolboys during a state of emergency: A qualitative study.

Answer: Thanks for the positive comments on our ms. We have changed the title as proposed.

Also, Under What is Known about the Subject: please replace "threaten beggars' survival" with "threaten children and young people's survival".

Answer: We agree and have changed accordingly.

Comments to issues raised by the Reviewers

Reviewer: 1

Dr. Raul Mercer

**Comments to the Author**

Introduction:

Where it says "human rights abuses" I suggest "human rights violations" considering that abuses involve

violations of HR.

Answer: We agree and have changed accordingly.

Methods:

Why the authors refer to "patients"? Who they are? Please clarify.

Answer: The Author guidelines include the following: To support co-production of research we request that authors provide a Patient and Public Involvement statement in the methods section of their papers, under the subheading 'Patient and public involvement. We have decided to keep the current formulation, as requested by BMJ, but leave the final decision to the Editors.

In order to facilitate the reading, it will be important to mention the themes evaluated during the interviews (general, knowledge/experience, education, family, neighborhood, friends, internet, and future).

Answer: In the revised ms, we have identified four themes for a better understanding of the issues raised within each theme.

Results:

Not all the themes that were part of the instruments do not appear in the narratives. Any reason?

Answer: That is correct as participants often discussed issues that were not directly relevant to the research aims. In the revised ms, we have expanded the results section focusing on the most relevant themes we identified.

Discussion:

In terms of the scope of the study the authors refer (quoted) "to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of Quran schoolboys...", Perhaps this aim is too ambitious regarding the duration of the study, the period of implementation, and the methodological aspects. In other words, this was a study done at an early stage of the pandemic, during a short period of evaluation and considering the preliminary effects of the pandemic (emergency and lockdown) in the perceptions, experiences, and responses of the schoolboys. With this approach, it is difficult to talk about "impact".

Answer: We agree with the reviewer and have revised the ms with this comment taken into consideration while we want to keep the word impact in the title. At the same time, we want to highlight that it is especially during the initial phase of the pandemic that its effect was felt more profoundly, suddenly impacting the daily lives of this vulnerable group of children, followed by gradual adaptation.

On the other hand, it is relevant to confront the situation expressed by the schoolboys regarding their intimate lives and "corona hunger" and "crowdedness", in terms of highlighting the importance of local context and how to deal with the consequences of the emergency.

Answer: Thanks for this comment. We agree and have had this comment in mind during the revision.

With the purpose of harmonizing the approach of the study, "begging" as a multifactorial phenomenon should be considered within a child rights-based approach (CRBA). All this, assuming that the child rights organisations are truly based on rights and not on needs or charity approaches.

Answer: In the revised ms, we have expanded on the CRC and the rights of children to express themselves.

It is a very interesting work to characterize and provide information on the pandemic in culturally diverse settings and its consequences in children and youth..

Answer: We appreciate constructive comments that have helped us to improve the ms.

Reviewer: 2

Dr. David Wood, East Tennessee State University James H Quillen College of Medicine

### **Comments to the Author**

The authors conducted in-person, qualitative interviews with 14 Quran schoolboys on the streets of Bissau and Gabu. Their goal was to obtain the perspective of these youth on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives. The work is very compelling and produced some important perspectives of these youth. They analyzed the transcribed and translated results using Atlas ti. The authors formulated very insightful findings including that the boys were knowledgeable of Corona and that the pandemic had severely impaired their ability to obtain alms and food, and threatened the continuation of their religious studies under the chernos. I have three criticisms of the paper regarding its content.

First, Based on the questions listed in the table entitled, "Questions for the beggars on the street", the authors conducted much more extensive interviews than reported in this paper. The paper would be greatly strengthened by reporting on additional themes that they found, such as how COVID19 has impacted their families or the psychological impact of COVID on themselves or their families.

Answer: Following this comment, and that of Reviewer 1, the revised ms has now four main themes: Hardship, Circumvention of calamity, Relations with others, and The future. Under each of these headings, sub-themes identified in the analysis are integrated into a narrative rather than being listed as such.

Second, the authors point out in the introduction that the youth are considered as trafficked youth by some but supported by their families and communities in their religious studies, which included begging. I gathered that the larger study is seeking to better understand this tension so that appropriate public social policy can be developed. However, the authors never address this issue further in the paper beyond what they do in the last paragraph of the discussion. Some of the results from the interviews offer more specific insights into this complex social issue, such as the support of the parents for the youth's activities, but at the same time, expressing concern for their continued attendance in the school or even requiring them to come home. More information from the interviews should be used to inform this tension and more insights should be offered on how to address it in the time of the pandemic or beyond.

Answer: We agree with the above, and have taken the comments into consideration during the revision. The article rests on interviews with the boys with a focus on how they had fared during a state of emergency, which may explain why this tension is not in particular focus; we have highlighted this tension in other published work found in the reference list. In our discussions with the parents, the Quran teachers, and NGO representatives, this tension tends to become central.

3. While they report that they analyzed the transcripts of the interviews in Atlas.ti, however, they do not provide any additional information on the details of this analysis, including the themes identified by words or phrases, etc. This would lend support to the more general results that they report.

Answer: As explained under Comment #1, we present now four main themes that are expanded on in the results section that highlight narratives relevant to each theme. We have added new sub-section on how the pandemic has affected the boys' relations with others, e.g., neighbours, chernos, parents, etc. We have also expanded on the sub-section addressing concerns about the future.