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## **PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE: A STUDY OF COMMUNITIES' ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KENYA.**

COVID-19 is a global pandemic impacting negatively on global societies. The pandemic has touched almost all facets of human life. It is therefore critical that governments find preventive and curative solutions to this disease. Communities play a key role in the mitigation processes being put in place. This study aims at investigating communities' perceptions on public health communication for behavior change among vulnerable communities. The specific research questions are; How are communities in pandemic situation communicated to, what type of messages are communicated to them, how do communities perceive public health communication on covid-19 and what communication challenges communities are facing in pandemic situation. The study adopted a social constructivist-interpretive philosophical worldview and a qualitative-case study design. The target population comprised of ministry of health representatives, communities' elders (both men and women), men and women, public health officials, doctors, nurses, youth and youth leaders, media representatives. A sample size of 100 participants was selected. Purposive, quota and random sampling techniques was used. Data generation techniques were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation and document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically. Key findings indicate that communities' perceived public health communication as having empowered communities in understanding the pandemic and preventive measures though economic and social challenges were being experienced in implementation of the government directives. Community gatekeepers as a key communication media should be widely used among other media strategies key messages were; washing hands, wearing masks and social distancing. The study will inform further research in communication studies specifically, development Communication and health communication in dealing with vulnerable communities. It also provides a framework for understanding communication needs in pandemic situations in similar contexts.

Key words: Communication, pandemic, Behavior change

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