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**The Situation of COVID-19 Generation
in the Schools of Al-Hasakah Governorate**

since March 2020/2021



ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies

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Introduction:

The COVID-19 virus has spread across most parts of the world, directly affecting global economies at all levels. However, in poor countries, where the health and economic system is deteriorating without a pandemic like Covid 19, it has led to a forced disruption of all walks of life. Let alone a region that has been experiencing a civil war for more than a decade, and that suffers from siege, scarcity of economic resources, and drought in the areas of Northeastern Syria. The difficulty of dealing with this pandemic has led to the declaration of inability in the administration and the need to adopt quarantine in the world, and thus the educational process has stopped along with the rest of the fields of work. According to UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore, "No matter where we live, the pandemic affects all of us and children have never been at so much risk. But worse is to come as the global economic crisis unfolds."¹

Al-Hasakah Governorate in Syria has a special status in light of Covid-19 crisis. The war damaged what was already destroyed in the infrastructure, and caused great social instability, due to migration, displacement and the raging war. This coincided with drought and the lack of local administrative expertise to manage daily problems, let alone managing a health crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. What has contributed to the increased risk is the local community's living conditions in Al-Hasakah Governorate and the impact of the pandemic on household and private sector budgets. As well as, its impact on school students, particularly with bodies who share relative control (the Self-Administration – the Syrian government) not providing the necessary medical services for schools and students.

Due to the weak health awareness in the region as a whole, misinformation about the infection and its effects quickly spread. This contributed to people neglecting health controls that were little deterrent to prevent the spread of infection. The local community maintained its social habits in family visits and meeting friends in large groups without using masks or maintaining healthy distance between individuals. People also believed that students and young people do not transmit the virus to each other, nor do they transmit it to the older age groups. UNICEF analysis² of the Max Planck Institute database as of November 2020 shows that among the 87 countries included in the database with age disaggregated data, 11 per cent of the 25.7 million COVID-19 infections (54 per cent of the total global infections) are among children and adolescents under 20 years. Prevalence ranges from 1.13 per cent to 30 per cent across countries. Of these, 68 per cent occurred among adolescents ages 10–19, and 32 per cent among children ages 0–9.

Data available by sex in 63 of these 87 countries also suggest more infections occurred among males than females. As a precautionary and preventative measure, the Self-Administration has repeatedly adopted the comprehensive closure of the area. This includes partial and total

¹ Averting a lost COVID generation: A six-point plan to respond, recover and reimagine a post-pandemic world for every child, World Children's Day 2020 Data and Advocacy Brief, UNICEF Publications, 2020.

² Ibid.

lockdowns and their recurrence from March 2020 until the report was prepared. This included the prohibition of opening commercial markets, the closure of crossings, the shutting down of bus movement, with the exception of certain segments, like students, closing large markets and public facilities, and limiting the work of restaurants to delivery orders only.

Based on the data of the Self-Administration and daily observations, the virus is widespread throughout Al-Hasakah governorate. Therefore, the report will follow the different trends of students in different levels and segments of education, and the extent to which the student was harmed as a result of measures taken to combat the virus, in particular the economic impact and drop-out rate of transitional classes. In addition, the threat posed by the pandemic and how students at the preparatory and high school levels can deal with it. The research will be limited to schools in Qamishlo, which can be generalized to the remaining areas of Al-Hasakah governorate.

The various impacts the pandemic has on students:

A. The economic impact the pandemic has on school students:

Economics has played a key role in deepening class differences between students over the past ten years in the areas of the Self-Administration, as regards the receipt of necessary treatment and medical care, and how to access conventional services like nutrition, education, health, entertainment, and mental and physical development. This was confirmed by teacher Hassan al-Wafi, the director of a school under the control of the Syrian government, "A segment of the students cannot pay the annual 'cooperation and activity' fee, given their limited financial resources."

The "cooperation and activity" fee are among the resources that help schools secure simple classroom supplies, such as pens and exam papers. It is a decision that has prevailed for decades through the Syrian Ministry of Education and the "cooperation and activity" fee is set at approximately 100 SYP, divided among school needs, sports supplies, and a share for education in paying water and electricity bills and laboratory equipment. etc.

The director added, "In the past few years, a small number of students have refrained from bringing the money, and we used to overlook it. Moreover, the repeated lockdown, particularly the total, provided a clear indication of their impact on people's economic situation and the inability of many people to pay the fee, in particular those who have more than one student at school, as 10% of students in each school are exempted from paying the fees. This was another factor influencing the simple economics of schools.

The pandemic has affected household incomes, which are dependent on the flow of markets between daily workers, merchants and sellers, and caused a number of students to be deprived of obtaining their usual pocket money, because of their parents' work suspension due to total or partial lockdowns.

Economist and academic, Khorshid Alik, considers that the lockdown has significant economic consequences by "affecting the import and export movements between the crossings and the shortage of workers needed at the specified time because of the pandemic. This, in turn, increases the transport costs and wages of workers. Consequently, higher prices for goods and services lead to the idleness of daily workers and their inability to obtain the necessary income in order to secure the family's expenses. Moreover, it reduces labor hours for workers and shop owners, and thus reduces the income they receive, with the increase in the prices of goods and services."

Based on findings and interviews conducted by the author of the report with some students in schools under the control of the Syrian government or the Self-Administration, the majority of students complain about the impact of this pandemic on their personal expenses. Khansa Al-Ahmad, a high school student, says, "The total lockdown has directly affected our livelihood and my school expenses. My family depends on the daily income more than the monthly salary. Our clothing shop, which we rely on for our livelihood, is affected." Rojin and another student in the tenth grade, also complained that the lockdown "has a great economic impact on my family, especially my father who works as a taxi driver. We need medicines, supplies and provisions, yet no one asks or cares about our situation."

While Sara al-Hussein, a 12th grade student, says, "The lockdown has severely impacted people's livelihoods, and no one cared how they were going to secure their expenditures. It's the month of Ramadan where expenses are doubled, and only the poor are victims of the lockdown, especially students who are afraid that their expenses will be reduced, besides fees. In addition to, course fees that we cannot secure. The lockdown suspended studies, schools, and private institutes."

In addition, schools, in general, lack entertainment tools, playgrounds, gymnasiums, and even public facilities, especially since the parties that control education and schools do not have knowledge of the financial expenses required for schools. Rania Hassan, an educational specialist, said, "The majority of parents are unable to meet the needs of their children, particularly those at the primary and preparatory levels, who are impacted by market and social media temptations. This generation wants trips, picnics and fast food, while the majority of parents rely on daily work to secure their livelihood. This is reflected upon the students, and we sense it directly through communication and interaction with them."

In the early stages of the spread of the virus, the World Bank blogs, tweeted about the impact of the new Corona on educational systems around the world, "The impact on education will probably be the most devastating in those countries where learning outcomes are low, school dropout rates are high, and resilience to shocks is fragile."

B. Impacts of the virus on children's health and nutrition:

Tests to detect the virus in Al-Hasakah governorate are relatively few, and the available data partially reflect the geographical distribution of infection levels in the governorate. This, in turn, to some extent, reflects the spread rates of the virus among school students and

contributes to the interpretation of trends in increasing the spread of the pandemic in defining the strategy of testing and response, especially students and schools.

Doctors and specialists that ASO contacted believe that "Crowded schools and socializing are among the main reasons for the spread of the mutated virus. In the absence of preventive measures against the virus, the majority of children and students at schools are susceptible to transmission of the virus and are not asymptomatic. It is not recommended to take medical doses and vaccines for those under the age of 16. In contrast, adults may have severe structural problems up to 3 months after Corona, blood clots, long-term weakness and sometimes short memory problems and other miscellaneous complications.

Furthermore, the lockdown has reduced the quality of food students need in elementary school to keep their bodies healthy (such as milk, eggs, and citrus fruits). This is along with an almost complete lack of financial or relief expenditure by the Self-Administration for poor families affected by the imposition of the lockdown, which resulted in poor health, medical and food services; due to the suspension of the work of students' parents. Exorbitant prices are prevalent in the region and the repetition of total lockdown, has caused an enormous number of people to lose their livelihood. This affects the quality of food that students and families need for immunity enhancement. All of the foregoing contributed to weakening the immune system of children who, like others, suffer from a polluted environment and an unstable diet. Not to mention the lack of need for vitamin supplements, primarily vitamin D and the other vitamins that are available according to an economic hierarchy, and therefore very few children in the region benefit from them.

As the case of the student Sherin Omar, who talks about the impact of the economic situation on her infection with the virus, "I needed medicines and food to strengthen my body's immunity while I was infected with the virus. The lockdown affected my father's work, which made it difficult for him to secure it in the right form and time. Providence and the attention of the parents helped me recover." Joetiyar Yousef, a student in the fourth grade of primary school, complains about the loss of his favorite foods, "My father used to bring us milk, yoghurt and eggs every morning. Since leaving the house has been prohibited, he no longer secures all of them." Joetiyar's father works as a concrete carpenter, he says, "We work as daily laborers, with a salary that does not exceed \$4 per day. The repeated total lockdown negatively affected securing home services and the needs of my children."

C. Psycho-educational impacts of the virus:

1. Psychological impact on the infected students:

According to the doctors ASO interviewed, "the repercussion of Covid-19 and imposing lockdown are some causes of disturbance of the daily routine_Dropping out of school leads to a change in students' psyches, in our region, which suffers from complex psychological crises, Not to mention the children losing the school yards, which are almost the only place to play, due to the lack of other places such as parks or sports grounds for children to gather after

school. " The student, Ala Jaafar, says about her psychological condition during her infection with the Coronavirus, "My condition has worsened in every respect, especially psychologically. I felt mentally sick, as far as OCD and anxiety were concerned. I was thinking about total lockdowns and the spread of the pandemic, and I came up with the conclusion that there is an increase in the incidence of hunger and poverty in addition to theft. What affected my psyche extremely was people's negligence in not wearing masks. And the fact that no institution has distributed food baskets to the poor."

Mohammad Ali Othman, a psychological counselor and expert in human development, talks about the psychological effects of Coronavirus on students "fear of the future, anxiety and obsessive behavior have been prevailing among certain children, due to the new habits related to protective measures for Corona. The low demand for education; is due to the lack of educational motivation among students, which is caused by the absence of the elements of 'reward and punishment', academic decline because of the weak educational structure regarding the remote learning mechanism, and the weak interaction, if any. There is also difficulty in evaluating students and exams, as well as students' demand for electronic games and their negative effects.

Some of the infected cases underwent bullying, especially at the beginning of the spread of the virus among students, which made it difficult to deal with the infected person and the social environment. For example, the case of the student Sherin Omar who told ASO, "It's been a very difficult time for me. I felt lonely as everybody was away from me, which affected my health. Even after recovering, I committed to staying at home for a period of time. And I didn't dare socialize with others."

Mohammad Othman prefers educational interruption during periods of lockdown, as he explains the negative dimensions of this preference. "Academic decline, especially for students whose circumstances do not allow them to receive remote education or any other educational support, such as private lessons or parents taking on this educational role."

2. Educational Loss and Failed Alternatives:

The educational process in Al-Hasakah governorate is divided into two parts, one of which is controlled by the Self-Administration throughout the cities and countryside of Al-Hasakah with a number of schools ranging about 1900 schools. The other is under the control of the Syrian government. The number of primary, middle and secondary schools in the cities and countryside of Al-Hasakah and Qamishlo, including a number of schools in one building only, is about 50 schools. Schools in the countryside are witnessing overcrowding and huge numbers per classroom, which in some schools exceeds about 70 students. In addition to 10 private schools in the city of Qamishli, where only one of them is within the areas controlled by the Self-Administration and 9 are under the control of the Syrian government. During the periods of the total lockdowns, all schools are closed, while during the partial lockdowns, schools remain open, except for the evening-time school, which closes approximately two hours earlier."

The student, Maya Murad, one of the preparatory school students talks to ASO, "The spread of Covid-19 impacted my school attendance and the closing of private educational institutes, affected my psyche a lot, especially with the follow-up of my parents, which turned into pressure, and their constant inquiry about the reason of not following up on my studies at the same level. All my reliance, like everyone else, is on courses, whether private lessons at home or in institutes." Maya did not apply to the first and second preparatory classes due to family circumstances, which forced her to sit for the preparatory certificate exams under the "free study" system, that is; without commitment to school attendance. Maya continues, "Securing course premiums was not an easy matter for my family, apart from the personal expenses. However, the virus and the lockdown affected my father's financial income and my studies were affected by frequent interruptions. Exams are approaching and we have not finished the assigned curriculum yet, no one thinks about the fate of families in need."

The general exams for the preparatory and secondary levels in their various branches begin at the end of May. On this, Sarah al-Hussein says, "Corona and the lockdown caused fear among all students, especially high school students, because we lack the possibility of focus and follow-up. Study, lockdown and epidemic are a difficult equation to solve. Our circumstances were, and still are, difficult. The periods when institutes and schools were closed are the most periods that we have to study and strive to take advantage of the time factor and not to accumulate, but the educational loss is difficult to compensate, our hope is in God."

Along with the impact of the pandemic on students and education, the fear factor plays the most prominent role in teachers' reluctance to attend school normally. The economist, Khorshid Alika, believes that "fear of infection results in many teachers and students not attending school. Wearing masks reduces the quality and strength of their voice and affects the possibility of delivering the idea of the lesson."

The purchase price of one mask varies between 250-500 SYP/ 2021 year. This places an extra burden on families, especially those with more than one student at school. Alika adds that what is most dangerous is that brothers are "using the same mask, or using it for several days without changing or washing it, so the mask turns into a tool for transmitting infection and other diseases between them. Covid-19 and the lockdown affect the continuation of school hours, and their inability to finish the scheduled curriculum. In addition to anxiety and fear of infection and transferring it to the parents, all of this distracts the mind and ideas and makes it difficult for the student to comprehend the lessons."

As alternative solutions, the idea of remote education was proposed, in particular, for students of secondary and preparatory levels. However, the experiment failed. According to the teachers whom ASO met in a brainstorming session, "the e-learning technology has failed. Not everyone has been able to access the Internet at the same speed, especially rural students, due to the poor speed of the Internet and the lack of continuous electricity. It is a new experience that students are not accustomed to. Also, Lack of computers in all homes, not utilizing websites and radio stations to serve students and the curriculum, and the school's loss

of the Internet, in addition to the lockdown and work cessation affecting the security of Internet fees are just consistently."

These reasons, according to educational specialists, "reflected social and economic inequality, and a deep digital gap that affected groups lacking education due to their inability to benefit from distance education. It was the primary stage, and "the poor use of laptops by girls compared to young men," which was confirmed by Monther Ali, from Secondary school students, who said, "lockdown and COVID-19 took a heavy toll on us. I was infected, and I could not get high marks. Online lessons have not been of any benefit to us."

Third: Conclusion and Results

A year has gone by since the outbreak of the pandemic, and its multiple effects, economically and therefore socially, educationally and psychologically, as well as the deficit in managing the scarce solutions available in the region, has become clear, at least in the education field. The futility of some traditional solutions to compensate for school wastage, such as expensive private educational courses, remote education in areas where there is no adequate internet access, and where families are unable to secure the technical requirements for this alternative, requires is an urgent need to devise alternative means to save the educational process from the devastation caused by the pandemic. In addition to the conditions of war, siege, and others.

Therefore, some needs must be met immediately, including vaccines, and compensation for scientific losses by bridging the digital gap (the access to internet and using computers) among students, ensuring the provision of health and medical supplies and food, financial compensation for students with limited income, and launching television programs, in which students participate physically or remotely; to talk about their concerns under the pandemic. Also, ensuring gender equality in various services, especially the use of the Internet and digital devices. As well as work to launch future programs for those affected by educational loss, especially university students who may have fewer chances of finding equal job opportunities with others, which will be offset by increasing the gravity of violent practices and increasing poverty.

Charts 1/34 are from March 2020 to April 2021

Chart No. (1) - Qamishlo

Number of infected males under the age of 20 who are assumed to be school students or males of their age.

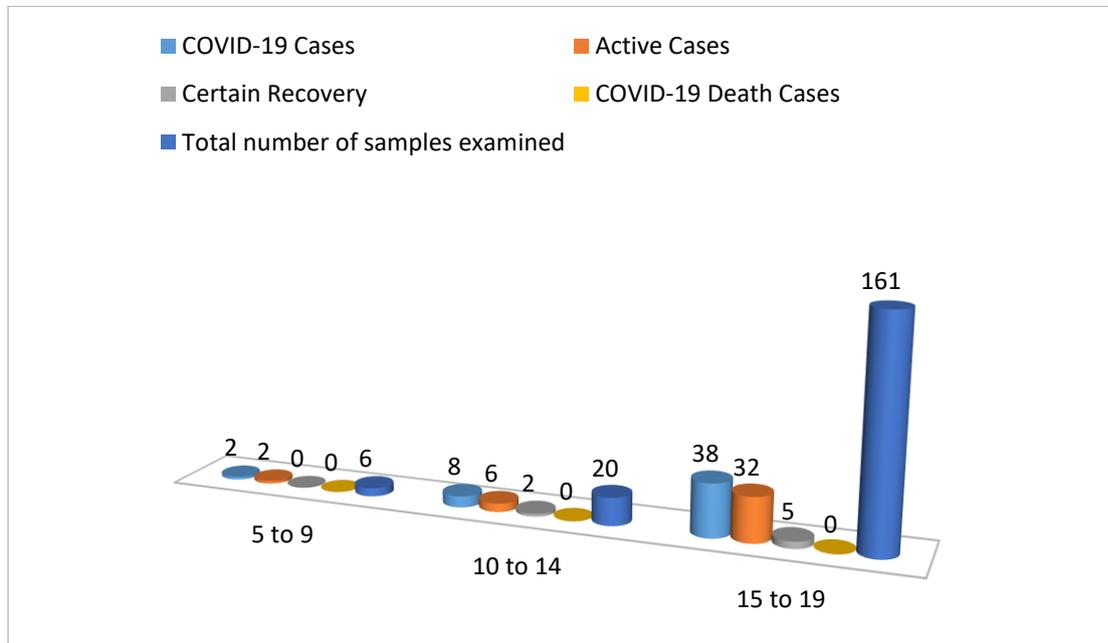


Chart No. (2)

Number of infected females under the age of 20 who are assumed to be school students or females of their age.

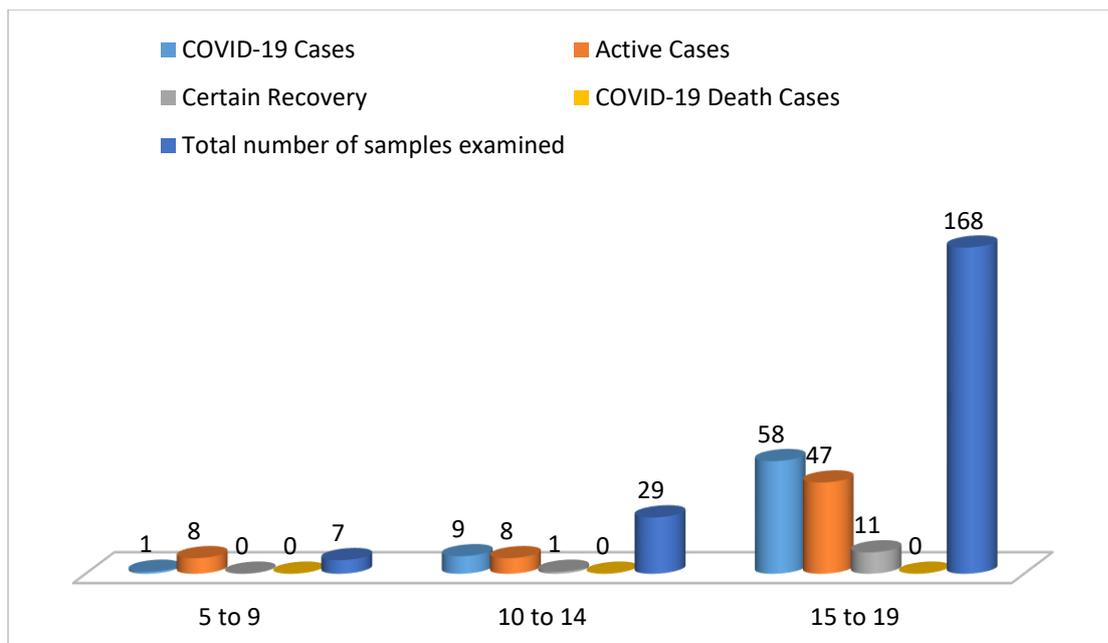


Chart No. (3)

Number of infected males under the age of 20 who are assumed to be school students or males of their age.

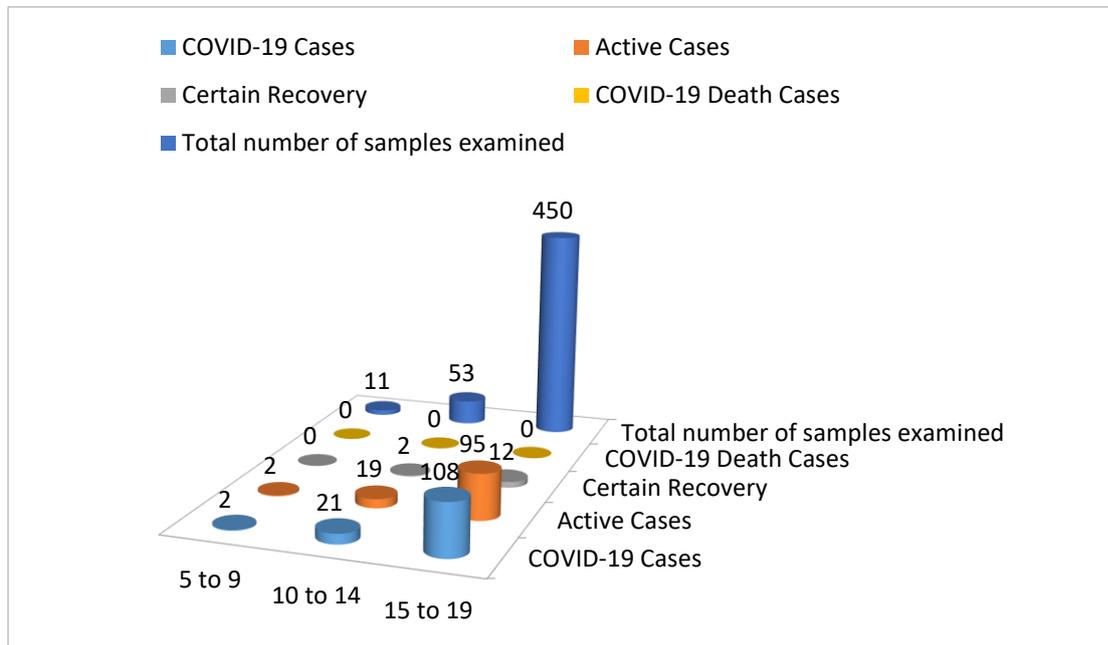


Chart No. (4)

Number of infected females under the age of 20 who are assumed to be school students or females of their age in Al-Hasakah governorate as a whole.

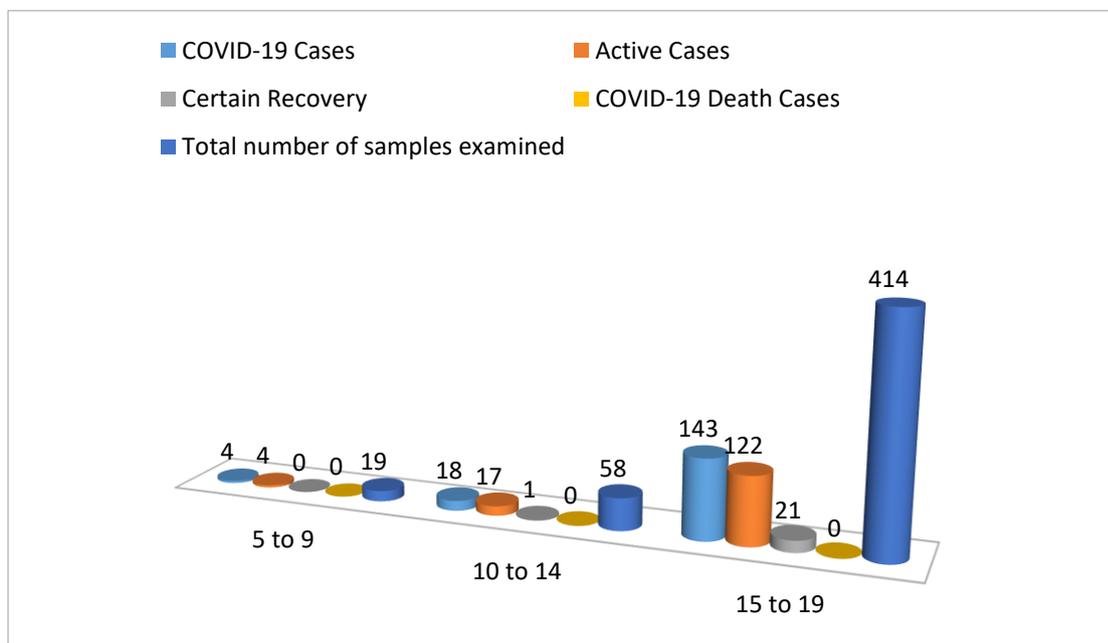


Chart No. (5)

Number of drop-out days due to various reasons, including COVID-19, in the Self-Administration's schools. As for the schools of the Syrian government, they were not officially suspended, yet students refrained from attending within the cities of Qamishlo and Al-Hasakah during periods of total lockdowns and military operation. As for schools under the control of the Syrian government in Arab villages, their working hours were not affected, neither during the period of the military operation, nor during the lockdown imposed by the Self-Administration.

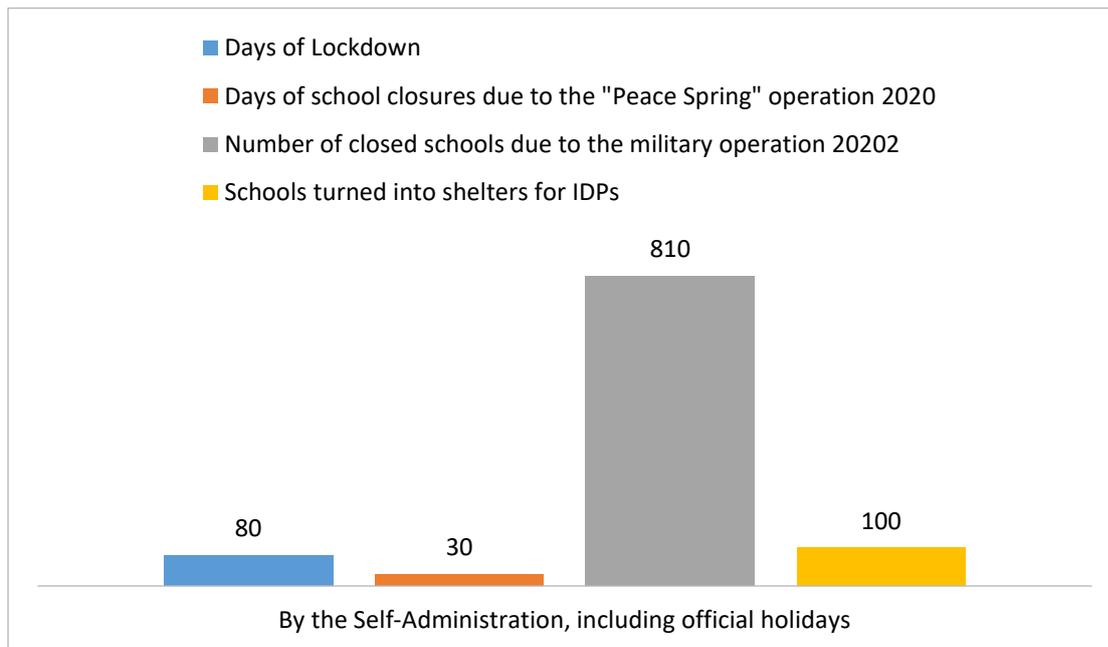
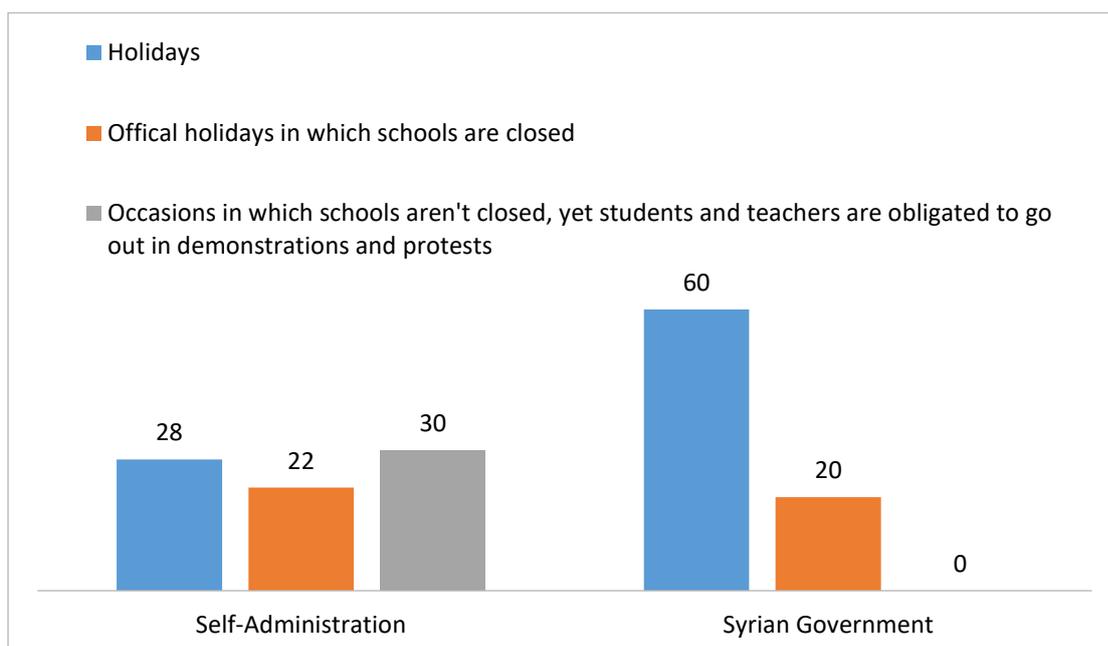
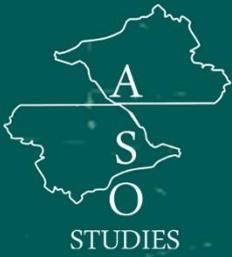


Chart No. (6)

Estimated figures for the days of school closures concerning schools of the Self-Administration and the Syrian government before the outbreak of Corona.





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