THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID ON WOMEN AND GIRLS: A STUDY OF LAGOS AND ABUJA

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on identifying evidence on the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls in Nigeria. The questionnaires were administered to female respondents between the ages of 16 and above in the cities of Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria in November 2020. Factors assessed include social determinants and secondary impacts of the pandemic and Reproductive Health (SRH), girls' and women's rights, harmful social norms, leadership, and empowerment. 42% of respondents who were below the age of 25, 31% reported being offered sex for benefits via social networking platforms during the lockdown and they were willing to sell sex in other to survive, while 6% reported rape cases. Of the 53% who retained their job during the lockdown, 24% of them reported intimate partner violence because their partner was not working. Government and relevant agencies must consider the gendered nature of the impact of COVID-19 when designing palliatives.

Keywords*:* Women, girls, socioeconomic issues, COVID, Intimate Partner Violence

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BACKGROUND/STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The rapid spread of COVID-19 globally forced countries across the World to adopt several public health measures intended to prevent its spread, including social distancing, and the closure of businesses, schools, and community centres (Ozili, 2020). Apart from that, mass gatherings were prohibited, and lockdown measures were immediately imposed in many countries, allowing travel only for essential needs. The first case of the novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) in Sub-Saharan Africa was confirmed on 25 February 2020. before the first recorded case, there was an earlier warning from international bodies such as World Health Organization (WHO) on Africa's fragile health system and its vulnerability to the COVID pandemic. In the subsequent weeks, scores and hundreds of cases across the major cities in Nigeria were reported. This equally prompted the government's decision on obtaining passenger manifests from the airline career of the index cases and contact tracing Government also deployed doctors at Lagos and Abuja airports to optimize screening. The epidemiology of COVID-19 in Nigeria has since evolved, with cases identified in 35 of 36 states in the country, plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). These also came with the halting of flights from affected countries and quarantine of those travelling into Nigeria and a total lockdown of economic activities nationwide starting in March 2022. By the end of the year 2020, data from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that over 70 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported in 220 countries around the world with over 1.5 million fatality cases recorded. COVID-19 is caused by the novel beta coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which is genetically similar to but distinct from other coronaviruses responsible for global outbreaks such as SARS-CoV-1 and MERS-CoV (Yazdany & Kim, 2020).

However, the severe effects of COVID became apparent socioeconomically more than the symptoms. Individuals' and families' sources of livelihood were grounded without proper notice before it started, and a structured palliative mechanism was put in place to cushion the effects of the lockdown. Following months of lockdown, the country's economy encountered many challenges and this brought hardship to the citizens most especially women, girls, and children. The

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The socioeconomic effect of COVID-19 on women and girls is also complicated by their earnings, their dependency on significant others for their daily upkeep, cultural prejudices that limits their right to control their finances and right to tangible properties, their little or no savings, and poor job security UN Women (2021) reported close to fifty million women around the world moved from average to the poverty line in the third and fourth quarter of 2020. Part of the cofounding factors included acting as caregivers for both their children who are home as a result of schools being shut down due to the pandemic and live-in elderly relatives increasing girls and young women's duties caring for elderly and ill family members, as well as for siblings who are out of school. Evidence shows that policies that do not consult women or include them in decision-making are less effective, therefore women's representation across planning and policies is critical. UN Women (2021) reports show that Women-led countries such as New Zealand, Taiwan, and Germany have by and large fared better in their emergency responses.

Bishagazi (2021) opined that due to the economic impact of the pandemic, adolescent women and girls' exposure to gender-related issues was heightened. These include early and forced marriage, violence, early and unplanned pregnancy, and sex trafficking, as well as limited or no access to education when schools are closed and a heightened risk of never returning. Economic challenges during the outbreak pose a serious threat to young women's work and business activity and expose them to an increased risk of exploitation and abuse. Girls and young women facing severe economic shocks are more likely to take on high-risk work for their economic survival.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at identifying the evidence on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on women and girls in Nigeria and was explored through the specific objectives of how COVID-19 impacted the following:

- Formal and informal employment, the livelihood of women and girls in Nigeria.
- Examine possible correlates between Gender Based violence (GBV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and COVID-19
- Understand the impact of COVID-19 n the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls in Nigeria

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the socio-economic standard of living of many poor communities in different places of the World. Scholars such as Binder (2020) and Ozili (2020) forecasted a severe gloomy impact on economic activities. It was not just in Nigeria, other African countries, in an attempt to protect their citizens from COVID-19, mandated a lockdown of most socio-economic activities. This decision landed its heaviest burden on the large population of those at the lowest socio-economic pyramid who mainly depend on daily wages to survive. These burdens vary from avoidance reactions due to social distancing measures to loss of labour, production, disruption of services, travel, and others. Lacey (2021) inferred that consumer behaviours changed both during the immediate imposition of the lockdown and months later. Nonetheless, in any disaster women and girls are impacted the most because of their social status in the community. In the Nigerian context, women are less educated than men whereby men and women living in cities are more likely to have more education than rural residents.

According to the UN Women (2020), women are hit harder by the economic impact of pandemics because most women work in low-paying, insecure and informal sectors. Populations that are most prone to risk during pandemics such as COVID-19 are those depending heavily on informal sectors and sectors which are endogenous and

hence disposed to shocks. In Nigeria, the majority of women who work in the informal sector are employed or running micro and small enterprises. The main attributes of this sector include daily wages, limited social protection measures and savings, and reliance on entrepreneurs (owner cum operator) which cumulatively make women vulnerable particularly at times like these (National Bureau of Statistics NBS 2021). In rural areas where women mostly depend on agriculture, the sale of crops to city dwellers has been disrupted, affecting both small & large-scale farmers. The sudden emergence of unsold crops within the domestic market pressurized prices to a level that was not profitable.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of a cross-sectional design. The geographical locations covered in this study were limited to two locations within Nigeria, Lagos the commercial capital, and Abuja the administrative capital. A quantitative survey was conducted to generate evidence on both the direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls in Nigeria. The factors assessed were the correlation between total lockdown during the pandemic and their social and economic impact on livelihood, formal and informal education, GBV, and sexual and reproductive health of the woman in Nigeria. A Face-to-face Structured questionnaire was administered to women above the age of 16 years in November 2020. Using Cochran's sample size formula at 0.05 (error of 5%) = n0=(t)2*(p)(q)/(d)2=384. Multistage sampling techniques were utilized. The first was clustering the women based on religion. Nine clusters were purposively selected, three from Lagos and six from Abuja.

	Category	Location	Number of respondents
1	Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOWAN)Lagos: Ebutemeta, Alimosho, Mushin, Lagos-Island and Badagry	Lagos	142
2	Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) Diocese of Lagos: parishes in Ebutemeta, Alimosho, Mushin, Lagos-Island, and Badagry	Lagos	71
4	Women's group of Redeem Christian church of God Redemption camp	Lagos	71
5	Central Mosque Abuja	Abuja	20
6	Al nur Mosque Wuse 2 Abuja	Abuja	20
7	Utako Mosque Abuja	Abuja	20
8	Mother's Union of ECWA Wuse 2 Abuja	Abuja	20
9	Dunamis International Gospel Church Airport road Abuja	Abuja	20
	Total		384

Data from the National Population Commission (2021), Lagos state is about thirteen times the size of Abuja. The population of the city of Lagos, Nigeria is 13,123,000 people and Abuja is 1,352 679, thus, Proportionate sampling was used to determine the sample size for each of the categories from the clusters. the Random driven sampling snowballing technique for the recruitment of the respondents into the study. Respondents were screened by a member of the study team and scheduled for interview appointments. The research assistants were trained using the Kobokollect electronic data collection platform where the questionnaire instrument had been uploaded. All the interviews

were conducted in English or native pidgin English. The interviews lasted between one and two hours depending on the data and information each interviewee had. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics such as tables.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Categories	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Socio-demographic characteristics		
Age		
16-25	41	11
26-35	119	31
36-45	203	53
46 -55	13	3
56 and above	8	2
Religion		
Islam	165	43
Christian	173	45
Traditional African religion	27	7
Others	19	5
Education		
No formal education	35	9
Primary	81	21
Secondary	165	43
Tertiary	42	11
Quranic	23	6
Vocational school	38	10
Marital Status		
Single-no child	100	26
Single mother	31	8
Widowed	43	11
Separated/Divorced	23	6
Married	146	38
Cohabiting	43	11

Number of children below the age of 18 years		
Yes	284	74
No	100	26
won't tell	0	0

Source: Ifekandu (2021)

The socio-demographic data shows almost three-quarters (74%) of the respondents have children below the age of 18 years living with them, this implies that aside from themselves, they have other individuals to take care of. Most of these individuals have between 4 to 6 children. 25% are either single mothers, widowed, separated, or divorced. Only 11% had tertiary education and this shows they may not be academically qualified for jobs paying $200 or more. Although there may be an increased number of women in various sectors of the economy, due to their academic qualifications, fewer women belong to the management cadres in those sectors. About 41% of the respondents are still youthful (between the ages of 16 and 35) and thus are still energetic and employable.

Table 2: Sexual and reproductive health issues of the respondents

Categories	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Sexual and Reproductive Health issues		
Pregnant during lockdown		
Yes	50	13
No	323	84
Won't tell	12	3
Planned Pregnancy		
Yes	39	77
No	9	18
can't tell	2	4
Unplanned pregnancy		
Yes	7	89

No	2	11
Offered sex in exchange for money or other benefits		
Yes	119	31
No	265	69
Medium of offering sex		
social media	37	31
Physical space	45	38
Both of them	37	31

Source: Ifekandu (2021)

During the lockdown, 13% of the respondents became pregnant, out of these numbers, 77% were not prepared to become a new mother, and 89% of them went ahead to keep the babies probably because of their religious inclinations or because abortion is illegal in Nigeria. During the lockdown, while interacting with the opposite sex. 31% of the respondents reported being offered money in exchange for sex. Although these happened marginally often in the physical spaces (38%), social media use for exploitation during the lockdown was equally significant (31%), users of these popular applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Badoo, and Coded Runs were more susceptible to virtual sexual exposure.

Table 3: Gender-based violence-related issues of the respondents

Categories	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
GBV during lockdown		
Yes	104	27
No	280	73
IPV during lockdown		
Yes	92	24
No	292	76
GBV attributed to lockdown		
Yes	83	91

No	5	5
Not really	12	4
Form of IPV during lockdown		
Physical assault	35	38
Verbal assault	42	46
Rape	6	6
Blackmail	2	2
Bullying	8	8
Others		
Person responsible IPV		
Spouse/boyfriend	53	58
A male relative	11	12
A female relative	4	4
Neighbour	8	9
Stranger	3	3
Schoolmate/Work colleague/ religious member	11	12
Others	2	2
Report the incident to the police		
Yes	4	4
No	88	96

Source: Ifekandu (2021)

More than a quarter (27%) of the respondents reported gender-based violence and 24% was from intimate partners of the respondents and almost all the respondents (91%) attributed it to the effects of the lockdown on their relationship. While most of the respondents encountered either physical or verbal abuse (38% and 46% respectively), rape (6%), blackmail (2%), and bullying (8%) were equally significant. Expectedly, more than half (58%) of the IPV incidents were in the hands of their spouse/boyfriend. Relatives such as brothers, uncles, and fathers also contributed considerably to the IPV (12%) while respondents equally suffered IPV from either neighbour (9%), schoolmate/work colleagues/religious member. Sadly 96% did not report the incident to the police, thus, could be struggling

psychologically in silence, which could lead to depression if not properly handled.

Table 4: Employment and livelihood status

Categories	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Employed before and during the lockdown		
yes	252	65
No	118	31
Can't say	14	4
Job Description/status		
Not working	115	30
Media-related	19	6
Health-related	69	19
Non-health related	171	45
Currently employed after the lockdown		
yes	142	37
No	179	47
Can't say	63	16
Type of employment		
Self-employed	51	36
Private sector	37	26
Public sector	39	28
Housewife/domestic job	15	10
Average monthly wage		
Less than $100	79	56
$100-$199	37	26
$200-$299	11	8
$300 and above	15	10
Spouse job status the COVID-lockdown		
Lost my job	227	59
Still have my job but no salaries	49	13
Still working	108	28
Change in Family Expenses increased during COVID		

Yes	273	71
No	85	22
The same	26	7
The main reason for the increase		
price hike of products (Inflation)	319	83
Kids and spouse at home	35	9
Others	31	8

Source: Ifekandu (2021)

Before the lockdown, 31% of the respondents were formally unemployed and this increased by 16% after the lockdown (47%). This shows that a significant number of women must have lost their jobs in Nigeria as a result of the COVID lockdown. Almost half of the women who still have a job after the lockdown was either self-employed (36%) or domestic workers (10%). More than half of the women (56%) live on below one hundred US dollars monthly. In most cases, they are expected to pay for their utility bills, contribute to the children's school fees, and carter for their other dependents which are customary in most Nigerian families. Of those who have spouses, 59% report job loss after COVID, while 13% still have their job but no salary. 71% of the respondent reported an increase in family expenses due COVID lockdown and this was largely blamed on inflation.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Beyond the number of COVID-reactive cases reported and deaths recorded, the socioeconomic effects posit a long-term impact that could take more than a decade to recover. Women who have lost their source of living will struggle to provide quality education and three-square meals for their children and this gets worse for women who depend on their spouses and they equally lost their jobs too. For Nigeria, the likelihood of sliding into another recession since 2016 was marginally higher. COVID from an economic standpoint is not a piece of welcome news to Nigeria. This implies that the forecasted economic growth has to be readjusted. People at the lowest rung of the economic

ladder, most especially women and girls were at the receiving end of the indefinite long period of the lockdown in Nigeria.

The pandemic affected this integral subpopulation of Nigerian society in terms of job opportunities. So many of these women return from the lockdown back to the streets in search of new opportunities either because their former has shut down, or downsizing or because they have a new baby and their office has no friendly policy protecting the rights of nursing mothers. The existing labour laws enshrined in the Nigerian constitution recommend six months' maternity leave yet the domestication of these laws has not been enforced especially in the private sector.

In most Nigerian communities, Intimate partner violence is expected to be resolved within the kindred and not as a civil issue. Women who dare to involve the authorities are treated as an outcast and stigmatized by their environment. Access to justice for those experiencing GBV is made even more difficult during situations of lockdown. Enforcement of lockdown directives by police and law enforcement agencies as well as the diversion of resources toward other public health needs may see GBV responses fall even lower down the priority scale

COVID-19 has exposed the need of having a structured contingency plan on the ground and the possible risk of sole reliance on crude oil. If Nigeria were an economically prosperous country, our leaders could dish out economic stimulus, welfare packages, and other financial handouts to millions of poor people, who are caught in the web and quagmire of the national lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Generally, Bahazagi (2021) in a similar study in Tanzania reported that adolescent pregnancy rates have increased drastically as a result of school closures and partial lockdowns. His study further revealed a record of 30 pregnancy cases in 72 primary schools within three months or six months of their data collection. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher fears a similar situation in Nigeria. The forecast points toward an increase in teenage pregnancies most pronounced in vulnerable communities and suburbs in Abuja and

Lagos. There is a strong correlation between GBV and HIV new infections as well as unplanned pregnancies during these lockdown timelines. Most of the facilities that offer free condoms and rapid HIV tests as well as STI syndromic management have scaled down their activities, which makes it even more difficult to measure its sexual reproductive health impact on a short-term basis.

Another anticipated impact involving young women and girls during school closures, particularly in Abuja and Lagos was the commercial sex. They are being encouraged into prostitution by their mothers or grandmothers to obtain money for their basic needs such as food and clothes. closures of schools and daycare centres individuals had massively increased childcare needs, which had a particularly large impact on working mothers. This puts more parental pressure on these women during the closure of schools.

CONCLUSION

The aftermath of COVID-19 is creating a plunge in the standard of living for most low-income households in Nigeria, in worst cases, limiting their continued involvement in the formal labour market. The recoveries from the last economic recession of the last years would be lost to impact of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. They are most likely to fall back into these most vulnerable subpopulations of Nigeria. The pandemic of COVID-19 has necessitated the need for attention to the underserved and marginalized populations, particularly women and girls holistically, to prevent long-lasting adverse outcomes. Economic stressors on these marginalized groups will need mitigation and quick policy changes.

As the world relaxed stringent COVID restrictions, businesses have reopened but unfortunately, some of them may never return due to several factors. The economic road to recovery from both micro and macro levels is miles away. Women and girls in Africa will bear the economic consequences more than anyone else. Those who got married off during COVID-before completing their tertiary education would struggle to get a good job and provide for their children and extended families. Vaccinations arrived in the shortest time and possible cures

may arrive but the solutions to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in Nigeria are yet to be understood. The COVID-19 pandemic poses a threat to Nigeria's progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the medium to long term if the response is not swift and effective for affected women and girls. Finally, the main emphasis of this paper is that appropriate and relevant policies to reduce conditions of vulnerability and strengthen capacities to tackle crises are crucial to enable girls and women to better weather and recover from the shocks of the pandemic.

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