

## *Impact of Covid-19 on Children, Women, Girls and the Youth in the Area of Education, Socioeconomic Empowerment and Health*

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### **Abstract**

*The research work took an overview on the impact of Covid-19 on children, women, girls and the youth in the area of education, socioeconomic empowerment and health. It aimed at considering the impact the Covid-19 as it relates to these set of people as named above. The work gave a brief explanation on the concept of Covid-19 and how it has collapsed the economies, health and education in the world. The work proceeded to state the impact the pandemic had on different set of people that make up humanity. It also gave opinions on the role people, government and the society has to play to actively combat Covid-19. The source of data for the work is secondary which was aided by available information on the Internet. The work concluded by recommendation of steps to be taken by all and sundry to ensure the pandemic is well managed. Some of the measures were washing of hand with soap and constant application of alcohol based hand sanitizers.*

### **Introduction**

Due to the pandemic ravaging the world, the health and human toll has obviously grown, the economic alteration is already glaring and reveals the largest economic shock the world has ever come to terms with in decades.

According to June 2020 Global Economic Prospects, both the present and near-term outlook for the consequence of the pandemic and the long-term effect it poses to prospects of growth. The baseline forecast envisages a 5.2 percent diminution in global GDP in 2020, considering market exchange rate weights—the heaviest global recession in decades, with all the extraordinary exertions of governments to antagonize the

downturn with fiscal and monetary policy aid. Over the longer horizon, the heavy recessions activated by the pandemic are anticipated to leave behind lasting scars which will be evident through lesser investments, an erosion of human resources due to lost work and education, and fragmentation of world trade and economic process linkages.

On the part of emerging market and developing nations, many of which face intimidating vulnerabilities, it is essential to beef up public health systems, see to the challenges posed by informality, and enforce reforms that will aid strong and sustainable growth once the health crisis abates.

On the flip side, the Covid-19 era has had some impact on the lives of children, women, girls and the youth in the area of education, socioeconomic empowerment and health. According to Gavin (2020), thousands of girls, women and the youth are battling with their psychological health amid the Corona virus lockdown. Almost a quarter (23%) of young girls between the ages of 11-14 admitted that the lockdown has had a negative effect on their mental health, according to the research.

Over a third (38%) of girls aged 4-10 admitted that they were sad most of the time, while a third of girls aged 11-14 confirmed that they contended with loneliness.

A speedy assessment of the impact of the lockdown on women all around Nigeria undertaken by Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN), has shown that amongst other issues on women, that there has been an increment in the reportage of sexual and gender-based violence and related offence around the nation since the beginning of the lockdown. The economic situation of Nigeria has not been spared, even the organized private sector which encompasses the airlines, bank, fashion

and manufacturing industry to name but a few; the small-scale businesses are also not excused.

Though it is widely believed that a large percentage of COVID-19 victims are the old and unwell people with very weak immune systems, there are strong grounds proving that the youth are also affected directly and indirectly and many have paid the disastrous price with death Frank (2020). Based on a news reportage from the United States, about 1 in 5 people in the hospital are for COVID-19 infection and they are between 20- to 44-year-old, likewise a recent investigation by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that more than 1 in 8 of the youth was admitted to intensive care. One other myth about the disease that went viral rapidly was that Africans residing on the continent are resistant to the virus as it cannot hold up in hot climatic regions. Recent facts from many of these African nations have revealed otherwise and have shown glaringly that no country and person irrespective of status is resistant to the virus. For instance, in Nigeria, by 4th April 2020, about 180 people had already been infected with the virus and 2 deaths had been recorded.

With every sense of obligation, the Nigeria government has not really shown a conflict-sensitive approach to combating COVID-19. Though the Federal and state governments have done a great deal in terms of the health sector but the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic on the general public can be considered below average. The trends of national responses thus far have shown that the positive and negative impact of government interventions especially on young people, especially girls, and also women was not seriously considered. Nigeria has a population of over 180 million people and about 65% are youth. For young people aged 15 to 35, 55.4% of them are without work and have no meaningful source of livelihood. Andrew (2020)

These observations and more necessitated this research work in which the author aims at assessing the impact of covid-19 on children, women, girls and the youth in the area of education, socioeconomic empowerment and health.

### **A Brief Overview of Corona Virus (Covid-19)**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) website, Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as an illness that is caused by a novel corona virus now known as severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; once called 2019-nCoV), which was first noticed amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was ab initio reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO announced the COVID-19 outbreak a world health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such name since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009.

The illness originating from SARS-CoV-2 was named COVID-19 by the WHO, the acronym is a derivative from "corona virus disease 2019." The name was considered to avoid stigmatizing the virus's rootage when it has to do with populations, geography, or animal associations.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on Women**

For women, who make up 1.5 billion of the world's low-wage manpower and twice as many of its careers, it is perchance ironical to say that are the most indefensible to the economic and health crises that characterizes the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is the piteous fact on ground.

Prior to the pandemic, a relative number of women worked as low earners in the manufacturing, service and informal sectors. Regrettably, these low earners

employments suffer social safety net which includes compensable sick leave, parental leave, or retirement pensions to be able to cope with the economic realities of the current pandemic. Based on this, girls are now exposed to child marriages in order to palliate the home of another mouth to feed; women now face greater financial challenges and sexual violence has become rampant in many homes.

According to researchers, to ensure that women do not fall deeper into poverty and marginalization, measures taken by the general public and private stakeholders must consider these obvious and unseen costs. This is evident in research reports by global research which informs that women's financial inclusion and empowerment has positive advantages for their families, the society and the world at large.

The widespread regression in almost all sectors of socioeconomic activities has been one of the most noted after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The world has come to see an unprecedented social and economic shock during this outbreak and almost all entities are only now coming up with plans of action to aid relief. This has driven regions across the world to join in on global communal strategies to alleviate the suffering of millions.

A report by The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) revealed evidence that the economic outcome has been felt more intensely, especially in the lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income nations. Its publicized numbers projects a 22% and 24% average loss respectively, in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) across nations. The social impact of the Covid-19 outbreak has also stunted optimistic moving curves, most significantly among women. These numbers were only just about to gain positive force and now, there are signs that a lot of progress will be undone in the post-pandemic time period.

Elderly and children age groups in dire need of higher amounts of care have been helped predominantly by women and a large part of this care is managed with little to no financial compensation. Lockdown measures to curb the pandemic that have spanned across the world have necessitated a rise in this kind of labour. A large number of women have been forced into taking up the mantle of care for the young and the old. This also includes women who are on paid employment and women who are not.

In Nigeria, the wage differences and the financial situation of women are not outside the regular. A large number of women in the country are still financially left out. They generally receive less than men and based on this, they are closer to the poverty line. The COVID-19 outbreak has further worsened the situation. Recent reports reveal that 70% of women in developing economies like Nigeria find themselves in the informal economic sector. The situation has led to little coverage against sack, parental leave, a lack of paid sick leave, retirement pension, and total restricted access to social protection and packages which are the crux of global social protection relief in response to corona virus.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on Youth**

In 2019, Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 6.11% while adult illiteracy was at 35%. Many of the rural dwellers still believe that COVID-19 is a hoax, "a kind of rich man's disease" or God's judgment for wicked people.

Many youths who are owners of small business have been affected negatively because of short-lived market lockdown. Those whose employers cannot meet up to set up 'work

from home' options have been advised to stay back at home without pay until resumption of work. Many have been surviving at the mercy of philanthropists and celebrities on social media who are into giveaways of cash for beneficiaries to stock up food during the lockdown period. Those that are involved in daily jobs and those working in the informal sectors have been badly hit due to the restriction in movement. There have also been reported cases of daylight armed robberies in different parts of the nation and many youth are at risk of deteriorating mental health.

The youth have a major role to play if Nigeria must surmount the current menace. As a nation, we must intensify on our support for communal preventive and response initiatives while not making our personal and public safety vulnerable. We must strictly sustain the physical and social distancing rule and abide by all safety guidelines suggested by the appropriate health authorities like the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and other government ministries.

Just like the Ebola era, the battle against Corona-virus will soon end. One of the lessons that can be taken from the current pandemic is the need to improve on the Nigerian health sector. An average Nigerian hopes our leaders would not forget this lesson in a short while and hence urgently rejig our health systems, build preventive measures, invest to a great extent in disaster risk reduction for effective proactive and reactive responses and not tarry for another pandemic before they start running helter-skelter. The government should also show seriousness in ensuring that budgetary allotment to the health sector is not less than 15 percent as agreed at the Abuja Declaration.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on Children**

Apparently, millions of children could be adversely affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, and we expect that the greatest consequence could be on those that fall into

the poor socioeconomic class, who obviously are already defenseless and deprived. Nevertheless, some positive changes could possibly be achieved out of this global pandemic as it affects children.

First, children's education is anticipated to be grossly affected by school closures. UNESCO has actively encouraged distance learning options, and this has to do with adopting digital teaching aids. Children who have the opportunity to use these will be given the access to learn educational methods that will be of advantage to them later in life. They also get actively involved in different personal, learning, and creative activities during the closure of schools that will assist them in developing new skills.

Second, the impact of the pandemic on children is in the area of family bonding. According to Johnson (2020), the pandemic has helped to create family bond especially as it affects children. He posited that children spending time with their parents has helped some children to develop closer ties with them hence becoming aware of the impact of the outbreak which has also help children to develop more love for mankind and empathy towards humanity, as they come to terms with the value and sanctity of human life.

Furthermore, there has been less vehicular traffic which has led to a cut down in general pollution and noise, and there are glaring proofs that this has led to changes in our natural environment and climate. It has also created more opportunities for children to see, feel and value wild life.

However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children is not without its advantages. One, closure of schools and facilities like libraries which is obviously the only means of some children accessing the Internet will have a negative impact on children's education in various ways. Ayodeji and Adekunle (2020) state that



non-school factors are a firsthand source of inequalities in education for children. They are of the opinion that focusing on e-learning, due to closure of schools, will emphatically widen the learning disparity that already exist between the children from low and high socioeconomic roots. As a matter of fact, they have considered the alliance of school closures and child poverty as a trending social crisis. It is believed that the worst effects will be felt more in the poorest communities and in rural areas with no electricity, no Internet access or slow Internet speeds. Many families will also contend with the high cost of Internet broadband services because of the economic downturn.

Two, health issues will also be of great concern. The COVID-19 pandemic has overpowered many health systems globally, even in advanced countries, and this has led to a decrease in many routine health systems while many parents have been reluctant to visit hospitals. In Nigeria, vaccinations rates were already an issue especially for those in rural areas before the pandemic and the present-day health crisis has worsen this situation further. Closure of schools may also imply that children sit endlessly for hours, for instance at computers, and this could be a pointer to health issues like back pain, eye strain and insomnia. Nduka (2020) states that children residing in developing nations may also contend with higher infections rates, especially those residing in slums, immigration detention facilities, orphanages and other institutions. These children live and bond in closeness with other children, with narrow access to hospitals, clean portable water and sanitation, which are likely to aid the spread of the virus.

Additionally, due to closure of schools, many children are likely to be actively supported to go online to carry on with their education. They will also want to stay connected with their peers, and this apparently could grow their use of social

media, which could be a distraction to them when they are suppose to be engaged in school work. They could also be exposed to the wrong content and cyber-bullying. According to a study carried out by Ibanga (2017) before the pandemic outbreak, it was evident that social media divulge children to a greater risk of cyber bullying that is a leading factor in anxiety, stress, low self esteem and even attempts of suicide. Other dangers of staying online can also have to do with inappropriate content and discourse, which may include sexual images and pornography. Social media is also a major trigger of addiction to various harmful substances for the children. Onuoha (2015), in his study, gave evidence that alcohol commercials encouraged a number of students to drink, even those below 18 years of age. Research conducted by Johnson (2020) has shown a strong bonding between acquaintance to mass media messages and adolescents smoking.

Finally, child exploitation cannot be ruled out as one of the negative impacts of the pandemic. UNESCO has posited that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a destructive impact on children in low socioeconomic communities and rural areas, especially the girl child. It is believed that many job losses and greater economic anxiety could lead to special problems in poor areas globally. These could include a rise in child exploitation, like child labour, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and early child marriages. Already many children have lost family members and are orphaned.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, just like Ebola, the battle against Corona-virus will soon come to an end. However, one of the great lessons from the current pandemic and its impact on Nigerian youth, women, girls and children is the demand to revitalize the Nigerian health sector.

There should also be a call for reorientation in our societies, whereby more men are called upon to take up increased roles in domestic and informal care work to ease the burden on women a bit. With these efforts properly considered, there are strong pointers that there would be a greater number of financially included women and reduced health risks among children, women and young girls.

Obviously, the COVID 19 pandemic have a far reaching, long term impacts on the young ones globally. Although some of these impacts are positive, it is believed that the negative impacts will be crushing and could have effect on millions of children in some way. Global healthcare organizations and government needs to work together in order to minimize the impact the pandemic will have on children in the post-COVID-19 time period.

Meanwhile, it is strongly advised that we stay safe and follow the precautions laid out by reputable health organizations, such as W.H.O. which is washing our hands with soap and hot water for the length of time it takes and also applying hand sanitizers regularly.

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