



Gender and Family Wellbeing AMID Covid-19 Lockdown in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the extent at which Covid-19 pandemic affected families in river state, Nigeria. The study aimed at determining the level of impact on gender and the role of government in ensuring livelihood sustenance in post pandemic era. Crisis affect women, girls, men, boys, and all gender differently, government orders and legislations have disproportionate impact on different gender groups, as well as persons and families. During crises periods such as pandemics, the risk of gender based violence escalates. It therefore becomes imperative to examine these impacts and related consequences of the lockdown so as to help government make social provisions where and when necessary. A total of 200 questionnaires were purposively sent to individuals online. 10 different WhatsApp groups created for group discussions. Abusers were identified and interviews conducted. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Results indicate that due to the prolonged nature of lockdowns in the state with its psychological and emotional outcomes on families, abusers leveraged on the quarantine period as abuse became more frequent and violent, other issues were identified such as increased child abuse, hunger leading to malnutrition. Paper therefore recommends that help-lines be provided for reports of violence and cases of abuse. Government to adopt a systematic/data based palliative distribution for wider coverage. Equal access to COVID- 19 testing, treatment and vaccines as and when they become available.

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Introduction

The coronavirus outbreak, known as COVID-19, began in December 31, 2019, in Wuhan, China and has rapidly spread to over 150 countries across the globe (Johns Hopkins University, 2020). COVID-19 presented a number of problems that had varying degrees of impact on gender and family well-being. COVID-19, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), is a disease that spreads rapidly across a variety of ways, including body contact, inhaling droplets from an infected person's sneeze, and touching the surfaces of COVID-19-infected items, among others. In this regard, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, forcing countries to take adequate measures to stop the disease from spreading because it has the potential to be severe and fatal. As a result, the entire nations of the world, including Nigeria, went into lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the resulting rise in death rates. COVID-19 pandemic has over 155 million confirmed cases and over 3 million deaths as of May 7, 2021. (WHO, 2021). Accordingly, COVID 19 has over 160,000 confirmed cases and over 2000 deaths in Nigeria, according to the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC, 2021).

Prime, Wade, and Browne (2020) have stated that the COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to children's and families' well-being because of social disruption challenges such as financial insecurity, caregiving burden, and confinement-related stress (for example, crowding, changes

to structure, and routine). Situational risk transcends the structures and processes of family systems in many countries, including Nigeria. The effects of these difficulties in families are likely to last for a long time. This is because COVID-19 is threatening families' relationships, rules, rituals, and routines, which may have significant consequences for children's coping during this period. Due to their previous family circumstances, some families may be more affected than others, such as those with lower income, mental health and/or special needs, and/or histories of oppression or marginalization, as well as gender abuse, among others. Prime, et al. (2020) went on to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has a cascading effect on family adjustment, with social disruptions from the pandemic causing increased levels of psychological distress and affecting the quality of family relationships.

Concerns have shifted around the world in recent weeks about the situation's socioeconomic impact, particularly for low-income and vulnerable groups, which tends to affect family members. Early evidence suggested that poor people were bearing a disproportionate share of the virus's health and economic costs, increasing their risk of inequality, exclusion, discrimination, and global unemployment in the medium and long term (UN DESA, 2020). COVID 19 has also had an effect on the family's socioeconomic background, impacting the well-being of many families. According to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (2021), COVID-19's broad impact, such as employment losses, economic

hardship, mental health stressors, physical and social isolation, and drug abuse, are raising the family's risk. This is possible because, in the midst of COVID-19, stressors that hinder the functioning of one family member can lead to changes in the functioning of all family members, with the severity of the effects varying depending on the gender of the family member.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significant gender implications, and it is likely to worsen inequalities. This brief emphasizes the importance of incorporating a gender lens into the family's structure and how it impacts the family's well-being. Economic challenges during and after the pandemic, according to the United Nations (2020) pose significant threats to the income and livelihoods of men and women in the family. The findings of Olusola-Makinde and Makinde (2021) provide insights that men are more likely to contract COVID-19 disease because they are on the frontlines of the disease's fight, whereas women are more affected. Similarly, the findings of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) (2020) revealed that women are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, especially those who engage in micro-level businesses such as farming, street hawking, retail trading, and other domestic services. The threat to food security has sparked regional concern, especially because women control 70% of subsistence agriculture. As in the case of the Ebola crisis in the region, COVID-19 prevention measures are having a drastic impact on women's livelihoods and economic security.

In times of complex humanitarian disasters in West Africa such as the outbreak of Ebola and COVID-19, women and children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, child labour, and gender-based violence. Current statistics show that one out of every three women experiences abuse in her lifetime, which is compounded in times of humanitarian crisis (United Nations, 2020). The Ebola crisis in West Africa from 2014 to 2016 revealed a pattern in which women and girls were subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, unexpected pregnancies, and social stigma, leading to eviction from their homes, loss of jobs, and other socio-cultural violations in some cases. In the current pandemic, a similar pattern is emerging, as reports of sexual and gender-based violence have increased in most of the region's countries.

In Nigeria, the fear and uncertainty associated with the pandemic create an enabling environment that affects family members, especially women. Various types of violence against women can be intensified or sparked by the climate. Because violence against women and children is so widespread around the world, pandemic effects are almost certain to add to the burden of women and children who are already victims of domestic violence (Peterman, et al., 2020). Evidence from recent epidemics such as Ebola and Zika provides abundant information about increased levels of physical, sexual, and gender-based violence against women and children, particularly in poor settlements, conflict zones, fragile areas, and disaster-prone areas. Besides that, according to the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), (2020), over 92 per cent of jobs in the informal sector are women. The negative effect at this stage, as a driving force in most micro-economies, would result in substantial loss of family earnings and a 22 per cent rise in job losses in the area, affecting family wellbeing in the long run. This is also true for small and medium-sized businesses, where women dominate the market for essential products and services like food and clothing, which have been particularly hard hit by

the COVID-19 restrictions. Female-headed households are more likely to be the hardest affected by pandemic containment policies. This is because economic lockdowns trigger recessions and complete loss of income, which affects the family's well-being.

The wellbeing and gender dimensions of the family during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria, especially in River State, revealed how the measures implemented affected women's economic and livelihood activities and worsened food insecurity. In rural areas, food production dropped sharply as borders were closed, limiting cross-border traders and this significantly affected the socio-economic wellbeing of women. In similar cases like in Liberia where approximately 85 per cent of daily market traders comprised of women, travel and trade restrictions due to Ebola virus severely impacted women's livelihoods and economic security. This burden persisted after the Ebola crisis, as women-owned businesses and trade struggled to regain their previous economic strength (WANEP, 2020). The fear is that if these situations persist, especially during socioeconomic lockdown, the country's socioeconomic wellbeing and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), on which women have a significant impact, will be harmed, posing dangers to the lives of over 150 million Nigerians, particularly in Rivers State. It is against this backdrop that this paper sought to determine gender and family wellbeing amid the COVID-19 lockdown in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Man is a social being who associates with and relies on others for his life and continued existence. COVID-19 fatality rates have risen at both a national and global level, indicating a spike in both reported cases and death rates among those infected with the virus, which affected man's association and dependence on each other. During COVID-19, the family's well-being has been negatively affected in a variety of ways, including a lack of employment, food production, marketing, and social gatherings. In most cases, these circumstances will have an impact on the mentality and relationships of family members. These circumstances will, in the long run, have an impact on the gender dimension of the family, particularly on women. This also affects River State's socio-economic activities and, as a result, the state's economy's long-term development. To address the situation, this study looked at gender and family well-being amid the COVID-19 lockdown in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine gender and family wellbeing amid COVID-19 lockdown in Rivers State. The specific objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the difference in the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on families in Rivers State based on the gender
2. To ascertain the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on families' wellbeing in Rivers State
3. Determine the role of government in ensuring livelihood sustenance in post-pandemic era in Rivers State

Hypotheses

This paper tested the null hypotheses at 0.05 significant level;

H₀: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female on the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on families in Rivers State

H₀: COVID-19 lockdown has no significant level of impact on the wellbeing of the families in Rivers State

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study was made up of people in ten (10) different WhatsApp groups and the total population for the groups was 1960. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the ten (10) different WhatsApp groups. Also, simple random sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) persons from each of the WhatsApp group thereby making a total sample size of 200 persons. The instrument was a 32-item structured questionnaire titled: Gender and Wellbeing Amid COVID-19 Lockdown Questionnaire (GWACLQ). The questionnaire had four clusters, A to D respectively. Cluster A sought the personal data of the respondents. Cluster B sought information on the difference in the level of impact of COVID-19 on families in Rivers State based on gender. Cluster C sought information on the level of impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of families; while Cluster D sought information on the role of government in ensuring livelihood sustenance in post-pandemic era. The questionnaire was structured on a four Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was validated by three research experts; two of the three research experts were from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation all in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus (COOU). The questionnaire has an average coefficient reliability score of 0.89. The questionnaire was sent to the WhatsApps of each of the selected persons for the study. The following day, all the respondents were able to send the filled questionnaire back to the researcher's WhatsApp and the exercise lasted for 24hours. At the end of the exercise, 198, which comprised 90 males and 108 females represented 99% of the copies of questionnaire used for the study. Data gathered were presented in frequency distribution tables and analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations. Mann-Whitney U test was used to test hypothesis one while simple linear regression was used to test hypothesis two with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The linear model is given as:

Model Specification of Test of Hypothesis Two

H_0 : The level of COVID-19 has no significant impact on the well-being of the families in Rivers State

$$WB = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 LCI + \epsilon \quad (2)$$

Where WB = Wellbeing

LCI = Level of COVID-19 Impact

ϵ and α are constants to be determined.

Results

The results of the data analyses are presented below:

Bio-Data of the Respondents



Figure 1. Gender of the Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

In Fig. 1 above, 54.5% of women and 45.5% of male participated in the research exercise. This indicates more women participated more in the study.

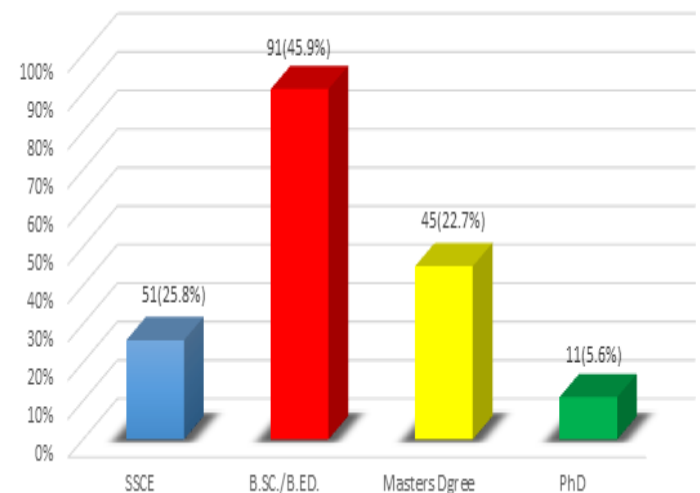


Figure 2. Academic Qualifications of the Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Fig 2. Shows the results of the academic qualifications of the respondents. The results revealed that 51(25.8%) of the respondents were SSCE degree holders; 91(45.9%) of the respondents have obtained B.SC./B.ED. and 45(22.7%) of the respondents have Master's degree while 11(5.6%) of the respondents have attained PhD level. These results imply that majority of the respondents were B.SC./B.ED. degree holders were able to give their views on the subject matter.

The results in table 1 show the mean ratings of male and females of the level of the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on the gender in the families of Rivers State. From the results, the highest mean score of 3.4 in item 7 revealed that women face more domestic violence than men during the COVID-19 lockdown. Also, the second-highest mean scores, which is item 1 and 5 respectively showed that men workers providing essential services are mostly hit by the disease than women while women's businesses in the informal sector are affected more than the men. On average, the mean score of the males is 2.88 while the mean score of the females is 3.12. These signify that women and mostly affected by the COVID-19 lockdown in Rivers State. In line with these findings, Alam and Kurtenabch (2020) found that the ongoing global lockdown has had an effect on daily wagers in the formal sector, which is consistent with these results (that is, apparel, construction, textile, and other manufacturing industries). For example, in Bangladesh, the world's second-largest textile exporter, millions of workers (mostly women) have lost their jobs. Malik and Naeem (2020) discovered that a similar situation exists in other major textile and apparel exporting countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2020), each additional three months of isolation is projected to result in an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence (Dekanosidze, 2020). Accordingly, Fund Sukhumi (2020) reported that under the crisis, the issue of domestic violence against women has worsened. The shadow pandemic of violence against women is rising and gaining traction around the world, according to UN Women's Executive Director in the sense of the COVID-19 pandemic. Domestic violence against women is intensifying during and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and access to services declined.

The results in table 2 show that the average mean score of both male and female were 3.11 and 3.12. This signifies that COVID-19 lockdown has an impact on the wellbeing of families in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with Cheng, Kim, and Koh, K. (2020) found that COVID-19 affected the wellbeing of many families because, with the introduction of a nationwide lockdown, life satisfaction remained below its pre-pandemic levels even after the lockdown is lifted. Individuals who report a drop in household income during the COVID-19 outbreak experience a decline in overall life satisfaction almost twice as large as those who do not report any income loss. In affirmation, Alradhawi, Shubber, Sheppard, and Ali (2020) found that COVID-19 social isolation interventions have had a significant effect on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of individuals across society. Many of the expected effects of isolation policies are important risk factors for mental health problems such as suicide, self-harm, drug abuse, and domestic and child abuse.

The results in table 3 revealed that the average mean score of males was 3.06 and the average mean scores of females are 3.07. This signifies that the government has a substantial role to play in ensuring livelihood sustenance in the post-pandemic era.

Test of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant level.

Hypotheses One

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female on the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on families in Rivers State

The mean rank of the female respondents (737.33) is greater than male respondents (248.50). This shows that COVID-19 lockdown has different levels of impact on male and females in the families; hence, the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on males is different from that of females. Moreover, the p-value value of Mann-Whitney U (4071.500) ($0.001 < 0.05$). On this note, the null hypothesis is rejected; thus, there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female on the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on families in Rivers State. This signifies that the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on males is different from that of females.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H_0 : COVID-19 lockdown has no significant level of impact on the wellbeing of the families in Rivers State

The results of the test of hypothesis two show the p-value (0.09) is less than the 0.05 significant level and on that note, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, COVID-19 lockdown has a significant level of impact on the wellbeing of the families in Rivers State. More so, the results revealed that COVID-19 has a 96.6% level of impact on the wellbeing of the families in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on Rivers State families is disturbing. Men who provide essential services are more likely to be affected by the disease than women, and women's businesses in the informal sector are more affected than men's. In Rivers State, women are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 lockdown, and as a result, many of these women face increased domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown. Moreover, the COVID-19 lockdown has an impact on family well-being because there is a rise in financial instability, with many people losing their jobs and food production declining. In view of that, across societies, many families have experienced severe psychological and mental health crises, including suicidal ideation, self-harm, substance abuse, and domestic and child abuse.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should provide help-lines for reports of domestic violence
2. Government should adopt a systematic/data based palliative distribution for wider coverage
3. Counsellors should partner with governments to dissuade people from involving in the increasing substance misuse
4. Families should get involved more in agriculture to boost food production
5. There should be a collaboration between government and NGOs in skills development so as to increase job creation
6. Government should ensure adequate welfare packages for frontline health workers so as to increase their motivation
7. Government should ensure an increase in salaries for government workers and a friendly business environment for businesses to thrive

Table 1. The Level of Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on the Families in Rivers State

S/N	Item Descriptions	Male (X)	SD	Female (X)	SD
1	Men workers providing essential services are mostly hit by the disease than women	3.2		2.9	
2	Women are psychologically affected than the men during the lockdown	2.8		3.2	
3	Female increased child abuse increase	3.0		3.0	
4	Men are affected more because their financial status depreciates	3.0		2.9	
5	Women's businesses in the informal sector are affected more than the men	3.2		3.1	
6	Male employees are mostly laid off in employment than the female gender	3.1		3.1	
7	Women face more domestic violence than the men	2.5		3.4	
8	Women's agricultural production is mostly affected than men because of strictly prohibiting women from farming	2.8		3.3	
9	Women face hunger than the men because of restrictions of staying at home	2.7		3.2	
10	Women's livelihoods are often overlooked, which pose risks of sexual exploitation and making women more vulnerable to the disease	2.6		3.1	
	Average Mean Score	2.89		3.12	

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 2. Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on the Wellbeing of the Families

S/N	Item Descriptions	Male (X)	SD	Female (X)	SD
1	COVID-19 affected family sources of income	3.1		3.4	
2	It causes financial insecurity to the family	3.2		3.2	
3	There is a caregiving burden in the family	3.0		3.2	
4	There is confinement-related stress such as crowding, idle sitting etc	3.2		3.0	
5	Social disruption that causes psychological distress	3.3		3.4	
6	There is worsened food insecurity	3.0		3.0	
7	There are job losses, which takes care of family expenses	3.1		3.2	
8	There is increasing substance misuse	3.1		2.8	
9	There is sharply drop of food production	2.8		2.8	
10	Increase in sicknesses as a result of isolation	3.3		3.2	
	Average Mean Scores	3.11		3.12	

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 3. The Role of Government in Ensuring Livelihood Sustenance in Post Pandemic Era

S/N	Item Descriptions	Male (X)	Female (X)	Decision
1	Government should provide help-lines for reports of domestic violence	3.2	3	
2	Government should adopt a systematic/data based palliative distribution for wider coverage	3.1	3.2	
3	Government should make equal access to COVID- 19 testing easily and timely	2.8	3.0	
4	Government always make available loans or grants to business owners to cushion the effect of the pandemic	3.0	3.2	
5	Counsellors should partner with governments to dissuade people from involving in the increasing substance misuse	3.1	3.0	
6	Families should get involved more in agriculture to boost food production	3.3	3.0	
7	Government should partner with private hospitals to reduce the costs of medical bill	3.0	3.1	
8	There should be a collaboration between government and NGOs in skills development so as to increase job creation	3.0	3.1	
9	Government should ensure adequate welfare packages for frontline health workers so as to increase their motivation	3.1	3.1	
10	Government should ensure an increase in salaries for government workers and a friendly business environment for businesses to thrive	3.0	3.0	
	Average Mean Scores	3.06	3.07	

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U Test on the difference in the level of impact of COVID-19 lockdown on families in Rivers State based on the gender

Ranks				
	What is your gender?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
The difference in the level of impact of COVID-19 on families in Rivers State based on the gender	Male	90	248.50	119031.50
	Female	108	737.33	391523.50
	Total	198		
Test Statistics ^a				
Mann-Whitney U	4071.500			
Wilcoxon W	119031.500			
Z	-30.712			
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.011			

Table 5. Coefficients^a Results of Hypothesis Two

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	16.236	1.281		12.672	.000
	COVID-19 lockdown	.259	.057	.255	4.544	.009
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.966 ^a	.932	.932	.330		

a. Dependent Variable: Family wellbeing

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