
COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN, AND YOUNG GIRLS TOWARDS ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic outbreak remains a major problem experienced around the world and Nigeria to be specific in the recent years. This paper investigates Covid-19 pandemic and gender issues on women and young girls. The coronavirus (COVID-19) has now spread to over 177 countries and territories and an international conveyance since the virus first emerged in China in late 2019. Education is a continuous process that compasses teaching and learning which commences from birth till death. These processes is described as the aggregate by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviors which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. The global provision of schooling and economy is facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. More than 1.5 billion children from daycare, pre-primary to university-level have been affected by these closures. In the context of COVID-19 school closures, women and young girls have been affected tremendously by this pandemic at workplace, school, home etc.. Recommendations, government and all stakeholders should ensure education response plans are gender and age responsive and reflect the lived realities of girls, women and children with disabilities and other marginalized children throughout the life cycle of education.

Keywords: Covid19, Pandemic, Gender, Education,

Introduction

Education is a process of teaching and learning whose primary purpose is to develop individuals' knowledge, skills and behaviour (Antecol et al, 2018). This process can fairly be compared to that of reforming people, whereby people can be

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reformed perhaps by preventive detention like in police or by reading the Bible like in churches. People can similarly be educated through reading books, excursion, exploring their environment or even by attending classes. Furthermore, processes in education are viewed as tasks related to achievement; that is to refer to what people can consequently achieve in terms of production at individual, national and international levels (UNESCO, 2015).

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Lagos State on 27 February 2020. To enhance a comprehensive response to the crisis, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the 'Presidential Task Force for the Control of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disease' on 07 March 2020. The Task Force is responsible for implementing the Government's National COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Pandemic Response Plan. (UNESCO, 2020).

Measures to address the escalating COVID-19 crisis in Nigeria include the enforcement of movement restrictions in Lagos State, Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), and Ogun State - the regions at the epicenter of the pandemic in the country. All schools, universities and businesses in these states have been closed, except for businesses selling essential items such as groceries and medicines. Several states across the country including Adamawa, Bauchi and Kaduna states have also imposed similar lockdowns. All airports in the country are closed to international flights until at least 23 April 2020. These measures have been accompanied by the announcement of the Government's approval of N15 billion (\$38.6) million to support national efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The Federal Government also announced that cash transfers will be made to the most vulnerable, targeting an identified 10.65 million people across the country, and that Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) would receive two months of food rations.

In Nigeria, along with other countries, have decided to close schools and daycare facilities. Worldwide, more than 1.5 billion children were out of school right now. According to NCDC (2020) this has dramatically increased the need for childcare. In addition, grandparent-provided childcare is now discouraged due to the higher mortality rate for the elderly and given social distancing measures, sharing childcare with neighbours and friends is very limited. Thus, most families have no choice but to watch their kids themselves. Adams et al (2020) said that based on the existing distribution of child care duties in most families, mothers are likely to be more affected than fathers. Single mothers, of which there are many in Nigeria, and who are often in a disadvantaged economic position to begin with, will take the biggest hit. Taken together, these factors suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a disproportionate negative effect on women, young girls, their education and their employment opportunities. The effects of this shock are likely to outlast the actual epidemic.

The Objective of this study is to ensure that women and young girls are not affected and properly taken care of before , during and after OVID-19 pandemic.

What is Corona Virus

Albanesi (2020), defined Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.(China Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment.

Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

How can the virus be prevented?

According to Coskun et al (2020), the best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads.

Protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hands or using an alcohol-based rub frequently and not touching your face.

Practice physical distancing where possible, avoid unnecessary travel and stay away from large groups of people. Stay at home if you feel unwell.

How are children affected by coronavirus?

Acemoglu (2004) posits that disease outbreaks affect girls and boys, women and men differently. While children's health appears less impacted by COVID-19 than older adults, children's education will be interrupted, protective structures disrupted and their families and communities placed under stress by health and economic burdens.

Farre et al (2020) also added that children are also at risk of psychological distress at times of crisis as well as increased risk of violence, abuse exploitation and neglect.

Education and coronavirus

Adams et al (2020) said that groups that are already disadvantaged, such as adolescent girls, experience the greatest risks and impacts when their education is interrupted. They also suggested that government must take steps to mitigate the effects of school closures on girls, boys and their families by ensuring education continues and also schools should be supported to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19, with attention paid to protecting students and staff from discrimination and stigma associated with infection

Employment, economic and livelihood impacts

The steep decline in oil prices and the adverse impact of the pandemic on economic activity will have a profound impact on Nigeria's economy. According to Servilla et al (2020), Nigerian women are particularly vulnerable to economic recession as they are over-represented in insecure lower paid jobs in the informal sector and mainly operate small and micro enterprises to ensure their day-to-day survival. Further more, they also stated that the direct implications of prevention measures such as travel restrictions will have adversely impact livelihoods and economic security of women in the informal sector. While government-imposed restrictions on the physical movement of citizens are currently necessary, they tend to increase women's burden of household care, which leaves them with less time to access or choose potential livelihood options. Foucault (2020) supports that this creates multiple economic disadvantages for women, which heighten their overall vulnerability to the pandemic, particularly from the occupational epidemiology and mental health perspectives

Child protection and coronavirus

According to Summer et al (2020), disease outbreaks and the measures taken to control them can increase children's risk of violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect. Essential ongoing support and case management for vulnerable and at-risk children may be blocked by social distancing measures.

Hupkau (2020) added that national and local responses must assess and address those risks, including in quarantine situations and in communities facing restrictions on movement.

It is vital that governments prioritise services preventing and responding to violence and deem them essential services.

How are girls and women affected by coronavirus?

Disease outbreaks increase girls' and young women's duties caring for elderly and ill family members, as well as for siblings who are out of school. (Hupkau et al, 2020).

Girls, especially those from marginalised communities and with disabilities, may be particularly affected by the secondary impacts of the outbreak (Farre et al ,2020)

Gender-based violence and coronavirus

According to Summer et al (2020), economic stress on families due to the outbreak can put children, and in particular girls, at greater risk of exploitation, child labour and gender-based violence. Quarantine measures should be accompanied by support for affected households

Adams et al (2020), said that women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing increased gender-based violence including domestic abuse, as a result of

prolonged periods of confinement within homes and increased tensions within households due to economic hardships. The security and investigation reports from Nigeria suggest a threefold increase in domestic violence since the COVID-19 outbreak began. The closure of schools for an extended period is also likely to lead to increased drop-out rates among girls, which can increase the prevalence of child marriage in communities where early marriage is already widely practiced. Furthermore, with health and law enforcement services burdened with responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, access to GBV and sexual and reproductive health services will be limited.

Health services

According to Coskun et al (2020), evidence from past epidemics indicates resources are often diverted from routine health services. This further reduces the already limited access of many girls and young women to sexual and reproductive health services, as well as maternal, new-born and child health services.

The COVID-19 pandemic must not be used as an excuse to restrict or rollback girls and women's access to essential sexual and reproductive health rights, which must continue to be prioritised, funded and recognised as lifesaving.

Economic well-being

Economic challenges during the outbreak pose a serious threat to young women's work and business activity and expose them to 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. (Foucault et al, 2020).

Summer et al (2020), added that the responses to the outbreak must protect and support young women's economic empowerment and recognise the additional burden of unpaid and domestic work on women and girls.

The health and wellbeing of care workers, the majority of them women, must be a core part of the response to the outbreak (OECD, 2020).

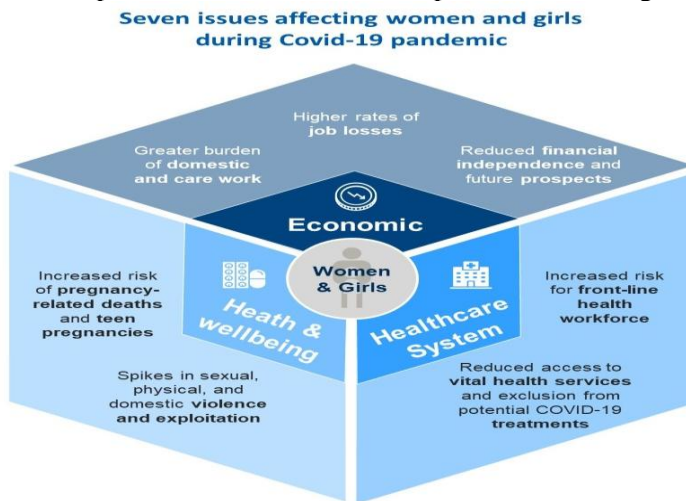
Key Issues Affecting Women and Girls During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

According to Foucault et al (2020), despite its wide geographic spread, the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected everyone in the same way. The attempts of key decision-makers to limit the damage of COVID-19 involve each one of us, but the impacts of these choices are neither equally shared nor highly visible. The researcher found that with the Ebola crisis in West Africa and other pandemics, attempts by key decision-makers to curtail the negative impacts of COVID-19 on public health and the economy, in fact, generate a multitude of unintended negative consequences for women and girls, and in most instances further exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

Kureishi et al (2013) found out that the challenges women face are complex and interrelated. For instance, a woman's financial independence may be hindered by unequally distributed domestic burdens and low decision-making power at home. The lack of women in leadership positions can result in policies that perpetuate existing

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gender norms and inequities across entire nations. Listing these issues as isolated events does not do justice to the interconnectedness between them. However, being aware of the range of challenges that disproportionately affect women has helped our clients and partners think about their responses in a more gender-sensitive way.



Source; UNESCO (2020).

The severity and prevalence of all of these issues differ between and within countries. These issues also intersect with age, sexual orientation, economic class, race, religion, and physical abilities. Yet one thing is clear: the negative effects are disproportionate for women everywhere.

In your Home

- **Ensure that men and boys share domestic and care work equally with women and girls:** According to Hupkau et al (2020), it is necessary to create time to discuss with everyone in your household what needs to be done and how to divide this work. Creative tactics to facilitate these conversations can include games, such as Fair Play. Beyond conversations at the household level, you can have discussions with your employers about how you can flex your capacity to share the domestic and care load with others in your home. Examples include modified schedules, reduced hours, and adjusted expectations and workflow.
- **Explore how to compensate those doing domestic work and care:** Adams (2020) posits that women lead a large proportion of the informal and formal care economy. If you have the means, consider how you can provide financial support to those who usually help you, such as caregivers and cleaners. In India, for example, the Prime Minister urged citizens in a televised speech to continue to pay support staff during the nation-wide lockdown.

In Your Organization

- **Include (and demand) female voices in decision-making:** Antecol et al (2018), said that if women are not already represented in key decision-making positions, bring them in now. Organizations with greater gender balance have been found to outperform male-dominated ones by almost 2% on average each year in non-crisis settings. Balance in perspectives and experiences is even more vital in times of crisis. From global health to economic decision-making, being intentional about having women in leadership positions is critical to designing more equitable solutions. Efforts like Operation 50/50's crowd sourced list of women health security experts can provide ways to boost female representation in decision-making.

Adopt gender-inclusive workplace practices, measure their impact, and celebrate their success: According to Summer et al (2020), the pandemic offers an opportunity for employers across sectors to support the shift to more equitable practices among male and female employees. Offer flexible working solutions for all and offer shifts at sociable hours for women to reduce their risks of travelling alone. For employees with young children or elderly who need care, sensitize managers to explicitly recognize the burden of care on both male and female colleagues. Do not assume that men will continue to work at 100% capacity—doing so will only exacerbate gender inequities at the household level. Make sure to measure and track adjustments to inform which work practices you should retain after the pandemic. For example, research has found that companies that do not offer flexible working underperform over a five-year period.

Could flexible working provide a way forward for your organization? It is important to also ensure that performance management does not favor those without additional care responsibilities during the pandemic. Sevilla et al (2020) said that instead, celebrate and reward shared care—recognizing your employees' efforts can demonstrate your commitment to their wellbeing and normalize a more equitable division of household labour.

Be proactive in offering support and assistance: Albanesi et al (2020) noted that as you think about your organization's internal pandemic response, ensure that leadership and management explicitly consider gender differences when examining the risks of confinement and the stress placed on teams. Nonprofits and companies can consider a financial support model for lower-wage staff, many of whom are typically women. Magazine Luiza, a Brazilian retail firm, has offered financial assistance to lower-income employees, including a day-care allowance for nearly 5,500 women employees in stores and distribution centers. Make sure that support systems are in place for accessing comprehensive health care (including for reproductive health) and domestic and sexual violence support. This can include circulating contact numbers for help-lines and support services, as well as providing additional support to individuals.

Inclusive response planning, decision-making and coordination at all levels

According to Coskun et al (2020), the front-line health professionals and workers most exposed to the infectious diseases are likely to be women: nurses, nurse aides, teachers, cleaners and those providing care to the sick, though they are very often not at the forefront of decision-making in the management of health crises. Albanesi, (2020) also added that this is even more so for the most marginalized women and girls, including women with disabilities, women in IDP camps, prisons and detention centers. Yet, understanding the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different categories of women and drawing on their contributions to shape planning response interventions and resourcing is necessary for attaining sustainable outcomes.

The Effect of COVID-19 on Child Care Needs

According to Hupkai et al, (2020), another salient aspect of the COVID-19 crisis is that it involves large-scale closures of daycare centers and schools, implying that children stay at home, where they have to be cared for and (if possible) educated. This poses particularly severe challenges for single parents. For parents who raise their children together, the division of childcare will depend on how much work flexibility each parent has in terms of working from home while also taking care of children. It will likely also depend on the current division of childcare within each family. In this section we characterize the family arrangements and work flexibility of parents in our households as well as the current division of labor on childcare among married couples.

The Effect of COVID-19 on Workplace Flexibility and Gender Norms

The discussion so far shows that the COVID-19 shock is likely to place a disproportionate burden on women. Unlike regular recessions, the COVID-19 downturn is likely to reduce employment in sectors where women make up a large fraction of the workforce. Perhaps even more importantly, women will be affected by the increase in child care needs that stems from closings of schools and daycare centers. This impact is the most severe for single mothers, who out number single fathers by a large margin (Acemoglu et al, 2004). In families where both parents are present, mothers usually did the majority of child care before the crisis. If the relative division of labor in the family persists during the crisis, this suggests that there will be a disproportionate impact on women even for these families. Nevertheless, there are also counteracting forces that may promote gender equality during the recovery from the current crisis. Observations show that two channels are likely to be important. According to Farre et al (2020),

1. More flexible work arrangements: Many businesses are currently adopting work-from-home and telecommuting options at a wide scale for the first time. It is likely that some of these changes persist, leading to more work-place flexibility in the future. Given that mothers currently carry a disproportionate burden in combining work and child care duties, they stand to benefit relatively more than men from these

changes. Gold in (2010) points to lack of flexibility in work arrangements and hours, particularly in financial and business services, as one of the last sources of the gender pay gap.

2. Changes in social norms and role models: Many fathers will now also shoulder additional child care and home-schooling responsibilities. In a sizeable number of families, fathers will temporarily turn into primary childcare providers. These changes are likely to push social norms towards more equality in the provision of child care and house work.(kureishi,2019).

Conclusion

Observations shows that the challenges for families during the current crisis are unprecedented, severe, and falling disproportionately on those least able to respond, such as low-income single mothers. There are a number of policy options available that governments could use to address specific challenges families are likely to face during the coming crisis. Examples of policies that might be considered to address these challenges includes, Government subsidies to replace pay for workers who need to provide child care during the crisis due to school and daycare closures and are there-fore unable to work, conditional on a continued employment relationship(that is workers can return to work immediately after the crisis),suspending work requirements for government assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid until school and daycare centers re-open, removing the requirement to be actively seeking work to be eligible forum employment insurance over the same period and extending unemployment benefits to workers voluntarily separating from employment to provide child care.

Recommendations

Girls- and youth-led groups should be safely and meaningfully involved in the development of plans, and plans should assess and monitor the risk and prevalence of violence.

- The Ministry of Education and partners in the education sector should support the distribution of home-schooling resources and materials as part of efforts to ensure continuity of girls' learning and education.
- The expertise of the Ministry of Women Affairs must be solicited to inform the work of the Presidential Taskforce and other national-level pandemic coordination efforts, and similar mechanisms established at state levels
- Community engagement teams established to support outreach efforts should be gender balanced and include young women. Existing structures through which women mobilize and lead, such as peace committees, camp management structures and cooperatives should be harnessed to shape and guide local response effort.

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