

COVID – 19 PANDEMIC, GENDER AND VULNERABLE GROUPS IN NIGERIA

ALEXANDER NGOZI ANICHE (PhD)
Department Of Sociology | Psychology.
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

&

JULIANA ANICHE
Department Of Sociology And Anthropology
Faculty Of The Social Sciences
Enugu State University Of Science And Technology
Enugu, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Corona- virus Disease (COVID – 19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona -virus. It was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Most people infected will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and may recover without requiring special treatment. Most common symptoms of Covid-19 are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global health emergency. Thus, Coronavirus affect both males and females. It cuts across gender but the vulnerable groups are the most affected by the Coronavirus. The first confirmed case in Nigeria was announced on 27th February, 2020. In Nigeria, the coronavirus is increasing the already existing inequalities between the rich and the poor and even creating new inequalities which are cutting across gender and hitting the vulnerable groups the hardest. Thus, the need for this work on Covid-19 pandemic, gender and vulnerable groups, especially in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized.

Key words: Covid-19, gender, sex, gender roles, vulnerable group.

INTRODUCTION.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus. According to David (2021) Covid-19 was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was initially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. According to Centres for Disease Control (CDC, 2020), Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered Coronavirus. Most people infected with the Covid-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. The most common symptoms of Covid-19 are fever, dry cough, and tiredness while preventive measures include social distancing, wearing face mask, regular washing of hands with liquid soap and the use of hand sanitizer.

According to World Health Organization (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two. Since its emergence in Asia late last year, the virus has spread to every continent. But the pandemic is much more than a health crisis, it is also causing socio-economic crisis. Thus, every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political effects that will leave deep and long standing scars. Every day people are losing jobs and income with no way of knowing when normality will return.

According to Centres for Disease Control(CDC,2020), the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is part of the worldwide pandemic of Coronavirus disease 2019 that started at Wuhan, China. The first confirmed case in Nigeria was announced in 27th February,2020. As the spread of the Covid-19 intensified, the impacts on

gender issues and vulnerable groups cannot be over emphasized and government of Nigeria has continued to respond accordingly.

CONCEPT OF GENDER.

According to Ogbuke (2013), gender can be defined as the distinction between man and woman as determined by sex. According to Hesse and Carger (2000), gender is determined socially as the societal meanings and roles are assigned to male and female. Society emphasizes particular roles that each should play. The World Health Organization (WHO,2000), sees gender as those characteristics of a man or woman which are socially constructed. According to Aroh (2011), gender can be defined as the distinction between man and woman as determined by sex. Also according to Haralambus and Holborn (2004) gender is socially constructed in the sense that differences in the behaviour of males and females are learned rather than being the inevitable result of biology.

The decision to regard another person as a male or female is socially produced in such the same way as gender roles. Oakley (1982) believes that gender roles are culturally rather than biologically produced. Whatever the biological difference between males and females, it is the culture of a society that exert most influence in the creation of masculine and feminine behaviours.

SOCIALIZATION AND GENDER ROLES.

Oakley (1982) outlines how socialization in modern industrial societies shapes the behaviour of girls and boys from an early age. Oakley (1982) discussed four main ways in which socialization into gender roles take place as follows:

1. The child's self concept is affected by manipulation. For example, mothers tend to pay more attention to girl's hair and to dress them in feminine clothes.
2. Differences are achieved through canalization involving the direction of boys and girls towards different objects. This is particularly obvious in the provision of toys for girls which encourage them to rehearse their expected adult roles as mothers and housewives. Girls are given dolls, soft toys and miniature domestic objects and appliances to play with. Boys on the other hands, are given toys which encourage more practical, logical and aggressive behaviour, for example bricks and guns.
3. Another aspect of socialization is the verbal appellations, such as you are a naught boy or that's a good girl. This leads young children to identify with their gender and to imitate adults of the same gender.
4. Male and female children are exposed to different activities. For example, girls are particularly encouraged to become involved with domestic tasks. In addition, numerous studies have documented how stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are further reinforced throughout childhood and indeed adult life. The media have been particularly strongly attacked by feminists for tending to portray men and women in their traditional social roles.

CONCEPT OF VULNERABLE GROUPS.

The term, vulnerable group is often used interchangeably with the term, disadvantaged group. According to Solbakk (2015) the term, vulnerable group is usually synonymous with group at risk. Vulnerable groups are the groups that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population. The term is applied to groups of people which include children, women, elderly people, malnourished, refugees, internally displaced persons, disabled persons, national minorities etc. These people are particularly vulnerable when a disaster like Covid-19 strikes, they take a relatively high share of the disease burden associated with emergencies.

In Nigeria, vulnerable groups according to Ekpe and Mamah(1997) can be classified to include:

1. Women: women face double discrimination and violence, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and restrictions. Patriarchy and accepted attitudes towards the position, role and violence against women are an important source of their vulnerability. Feticide, Infanticide, malnourishment, sexual abuse, child marriages, honour killing, domestic violence, unequal pay for equal work etc are the various issues that aggravate the vulnerability of women. Violence is almost universal problem of women and they face bias

due to socio – cultural practices. Women face a distinct disadvantage in the labour market as well as when compared with men, women are less than half as likely as men to be employed. Women face particularly discrimination in terms of ownership of and access to productive resources.

2. Children: Children form a very vulnerable part of the human societies. Children face discrimination religion, ethnicity and equally engaged in child labour even though they have constitutional guarantee of civil rights and protected by children law. Children's rights to basic services are affected and remain unaddressed. Education is believed to be the basic right of every child in the world and it has been denied in most parts of the Nigeria if not all parts. Poverty and malnutrition is another problem which makes children vulnerable. Nearly nine million children die every year from preventable diseases and infections like Diarrheal disease.

3. Aged: The vulnerability among the elderly is due to an increased incidence of illness and disability, economic dependency upon their spouses, children and other younger family members, changes in the family structure and characteristics, changing roles of women within families and migration resulting from globalization.

4. Disabled persons: Persons with disabilities face several forms of discrimination. Disabled persons have reduced access to education, employment, and other socio- economic opportunities. The percentage of disabled persons is about 2.13 percent. About one third of the disabled population have disability since their birth. The basic facilities like health, education and employment are denied to them. Access to public transport, toilets, public parks, hospitals, government offices, places of worship are still inaccessible to the disabled persons. Persons with disability suffer from both social and material disability.

5. Minorities: Nigeria is a multi – lingual and a multi religious country. Nigerian society is pluralistic in character from the religious and other points of view. Since a very long time, people belonging to various religious communities have been living together in Nigeria with serious religious crisis base on minority groups and other religious factors.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS.

According to Solbakk (2015) these characteristics include:

1. They suffer from discrimination and subordination.
2. They have physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart and which are disapproved of by a dominant group.
3. They share a sense of collective identity and common burdens.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GENDER AND VULNERABLE GROUPS.

According to Meeri (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic is first and foremost a public health emergency but the ripples of its effects extend far beyond the infected individuals. A major global recession – the worst the world has seen since the great Depression - has emerged as a result of countries being placed on coronavirus lockdown. A crisis of such proportions only serves to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities putting the vulnerable populations at even greater risk of poverty and suffering

According to Samuels (2020), the very measures taken by the government to protect Nigerians, left women, girls and other vulnerable groups to Covid-19 pandemic. According to Seema (2015), gender based violence were common during Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Although there were no reliable data on incidences of gender based violence in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic, wives battering was common. Violence against women and girls took the form, of rape, defilement and forced sex. Married men and women were forced by the restrictions and lockdown to stay at home. Many of the wives were sexually harassed and even raped by their husbands whether they like it or not because of their husbands' masculinity, these women were over powered by their husbands.

The vulnerable groups, especially the women, girls, children, disabled persons and elderly persons not only experienced exploitation but also denial of access to basic services and resources such as palliatives. According to Monica (2020), quarantine and school closure put in place to contain the spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria left vulnerable groups to coercion, exploitation and sexual abuses. The vulnerable groups were isolated from the people and resources that helped them and they also had few opportunities to distance themselves from their abusers.

CONCLUSION.

The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to be a threat to human lives and socio – economic development. Both men and women are faced with the sufferings emanating from Covid-19 pandemic but the most affected are the vulnerable groups in the society. Despite the efforts of the government in combating Covid-19 pandemic through enforcing preventive measures, the incidences of Covid -19 pandemic have continued to increase on a daily basis. The bottom line is that while some Nigerians, especially the vulnerable groups are suffering in the country without hope of when the disease will end, the some are gaining from the situation created by Covid-19 pandemic.

REFERENCES.

- Aroh, A(2011). Basic dictionary of sociology and social sciences. Enugu: Infinity publications.
- CDC (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019(covid-19): recommendations for cloth face covers. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>.
- CDC (2020).Novel coronavirus Wuhan, China.CD C. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/about/index.html>. Jan.26,2020.Accessed:Jan.27,2020
- Ekpe C.P and Mamah, S (1997). Social work inNigeria: a colonial heritage. Enugu: Unik Orient Prints Ltd.
- Haralambus, M and Holborn, M (2004). Sociology: theme and perspectives. London: Harpercollins Publishers Ltd.
- Hesse, B and Carger, G(2020). Working women in America: split dreams. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Meeri, K (2020). The impacts of covid -19 on vulnerable populations. New York: Springe ZumInhalt search. Offline. Indau-nobel. Org.
- Monica, A (2020).Sexual and gender based violence during covid 19: lessons from obola. Boston Univ.: Global Health.
- Oakley, R (1982). Sex, gender and society. London: Temple-Smith.
- Ogbuke, M(2013). “Issues in gender”in fundamentals of sociology: an introduction, edited by Okau, A. Metiboba, S. and Tinuola, F. Ado- Ekiti: Apex Publishers LtdSamuels, M (2020). Understanding the impact of covid-19 on domestic violence. Boston Univ. Today. April 16. Retrieved :<https://www.bu.edu/articles/2020/covid19-impact-on-domestic-violence>.
- Seema, J (2015).The roots of gender inequality in the developing countries. Dept. of Economic, North Western Univ..Evanston, Illinois 60208. (economic.annual reviews.org).
- Solbakk, J (2015). Vulnerable groups. Forskningsetikk: Morwegian National Ethics Committee.