

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF
WOMEN IN OGOJA: RESPONSE OF CENTRE FOR STUDIES AND
INTERVENTION**

Udemba, Chioma Maureen

&

Prof. A.B.C. Chiegboka

Department of Religion and Human Relation

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

cm.udemba@unizik.edu.ng

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.17689.19041

Abstract

The outbreak of coronavirus disease was declared pandemic and the virus spread to many countries and territories. While the impacts of the virus was felt across the globe, it fell disproportionately on the world's most vulnerable. Women in particular were more disproportionately affected by the pandemic. COVID-19 as it is called brought a lot of death, despair, hunger, sorrow as well as violation of human right in Nigeria. The impact of the pandemic varies from country to country; it has increased poverty and inequalities at a global scale. One of the preventive measures put in place by the World Health Organization, and adopted by Nigerian government is lockdown by which the citizens are advised and in most of the cases, made to stay at home brought more death than coronavirus itself. This paper therefore seeks to unveil the impact of COVID-19 in the lives of Ogoja women and the transformational deeds of CWSI toward helping women of Ogoja to survive the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Women, Ogoja, Nigeria

Background

The enduring marginalization of Ogoja women in their communities is worrisome. In spite of the adoption of the United Nation's convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1985, inequality persists. It continues to restrict women's involvement in all spheres of life. Discrimination against women affects availability of competent workers for public services and thwarts the fostering of culture

of excellence and merit. Gender prejudices impair economic growth of societies. During the period of COVID-19 pandemic, Ogoja women of all ages, social classes, and creeds face gender violence as: sexual abuse, poverty, femicide, and many others violence against the person of women. In Ogoja, CWSI is assisting communities to interrogate received cultural beliefs and to understand who the woman truly is. Consequently, the once enfeebled and subjugated Ogoja women were strengthened and liberated. The one who was once regarded as inept is being empowered.

The Origin of Centre for Women Studies and Intervention

CWSI is a mission/intervention of the Religious Congregation of The Handmaids of The Holy Child Jesus (HH CJ). Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus is a religious congregation of women founded in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria in 1931. The congregation was founded by Mother Mary Charles Magdalene Walker of the Religious Sisters of Charity (RSC) Mother Mary Charles Walker's mission apostolate centred on empowering women and girl-child: educating them on their dignity and fundamental rights as human beings. The desire to continue the apostolate of Mother Mary Charles Magdalene Walker propelled the establishment of CWSI. CWSI is a non-Governmental, non-profit organization registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 1999 with registration certificate (RC: 12,045). CWSI has its headquarters in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria and regional offices in Delta, Cross-River, Ebonyi and Kogi States. Through advocacy, capacity building, awareness raising, sensitization, research and documentation, partnerships and paralegal engagements, we advocate for good governance, economic, political and socio-cultural rights.

The Mission of Centre for Women Studies and Intervention

The mission of the organization is to uphold the dignity of women and other vulnerable persons through capacity building, advocacy, awareness raising, research and documentation. CWSI is one of the bold initiatives of concerned citizens outside government to address the issues of marginalization, oppression and violence against women and the girl-child in all form especially by culture and poverty. Since inception, CWSI has been a vanguard of training women especially at the grassroots. Women who face an ever-present risk of social relegation so that they become politically aware, socially responsible and economically independent in order that thus empowered, they might become active in the promotion of a better world, on a balanced basis with men. Centre for Women Studies and Intervention continue to organize grassroots trainings and mobilization campaign on the issues of inclusion of women in governance and violence against women across the country.

The vision of Centre for Women Studies and Intervention

CWSI is an organization which envisions women and other vulnerable person empowered, liberated and active in creation of a better world. CWSI is targeted at improved prevention of violence against women and girls especially in the areas of female genital mutilation and Gender Based Violence through changes in behaviour, practices and attitudes, increased effectiveness of legislation, policies, national action plans, and accountability systems to prevent and end violence against women and girls. This also involves promotion of social values of non-discrimination and equality for all. CWSI has over the years helped change lives of women and girls, Emphasis shall be made on projects implemented and currently running in Ogoja.

The impact of COVID-19 on the Socio-Economic Status of Women

The impact of COVID-19 has been immensely profound across the global economy, businesses were shut down, markets and supply chains disrupted and millions of people were left without jobs. This is increasingly harder on women as it is well known fact that across the globe women are largely working in the informal sector. The impact of the pandemic varies from country to country and from state to state; it increased inequalities and poverty at a global scale. Immediate responses during this crisis in Ogoja was taken by Centre for Women Studies and Intervention. The pandemic disrupted activities of schools and workplaces, and everyone was struggling to adjust to this new way. The pandemic affected especially women. Increased domestic violence is one of the devastating effects of the pandemic. Due to the stay-at-home orders, many women and children were stuck with their abusers. According to National Hotline on combating Domestic violence, calls increased by 25% during the first two weeks of quarantine. Due to the disruption of regular movement and activity, essential healthcare for women including prenatal, postnatal as well as lifesaving Gender Based Violence (GBV) response services were not easily accessible to survivors of violence and victims of domestic violence. Centres which offer support to victims of abuse and domestic violence were not considered to be providing essential services and remained shut. Women in Ogoja experienced an increased in gender-based violence, less economic opportunity, limited access to education and lack of adequate healthcare.

The pandemic also took a significant toll on women's livelihoods, as schools closure increased the burden of domestic care that typically falls on women. Travel restrictions affected service industries and informal labour mostly dominated by female workers. Economic uncertainties and changes to daily family lives as a result of the pandemic also increased tensions within households, compounding violent situations.

The pandemic brought hunger to millions of Ogoja women. National lockdowns and social distancing measures dried up work and incomes and disrupted agricultural production and supply routes-leaving millions worry how they will get enough to eat. Ogoja women became hungry and facing the prospects of starving.

Effects of Lockdown on the Rights of Nigerian Citizens

Nigeria went into lockdown on march 2020,a decision that built on a global consensus of what it takes to slow the rate of infection of COVID-19 in the population .Thousands of people around the world were found infected with the coronavirus and thousands of persons died of it. In Nigeria over 2000 cases were reported, and over two hundred death. There was no doubt that Nigeria had no choice than the lockdown to avoid the colossal toll the virus could take lives, or at least buy time as the country with poorly equipped and historically under funded health system prepares to face it. However, the lockdown was poorly conceived and declared without proper preparation. The coronavirus lockdown according to Nobel Laureate have caused more deaths than it saved. The measure violated human rights in many ways causing humanity many damages.

The preventive measures aimed at containing COVID-19 were also impediments to humanitarian aid, leaving Ogoja women without access to food. The president of Nigeria promised the citizens some palliative measure which include disbursing of funds and food items to those mostly affected. But the reality on the ground is a far cry from the promise made; only a small proportion of the population attest to receiving any supply. United Nation World Food Program(UNWFP) states that the number of people facing acute food insecurity would nearly double this year due to economic fallout of COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic has left the world facing unprecedented hunger crisis. National lockdown as a preventive measure prevented Ogoja women from going to farm, work and running their businesses as all the markets were shutdown. The preventive measure violates the human rights to food thereby leading to hunger. It is generally acknowledged that hunger is both violation of human dignity and an obstacle to social, political and economic progress. The right to food does not mean that the state has a duty to distribute food to all its citizens. It does however, has an obligation to respect the right to food by not interfering with individual's effort to provide for himself. It is this right to provide for themselves that the preventive measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19 has violated. These women do not have the freedom to run their businesses and go to farm and work which left millions of them hungry.

Centre for Women Studies and intervention's Response to Ogoja Women during COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to mitigating some of these effects, CWSI with support from the United Nations Trust Fund (UNTF) to eliminate violence against women and girls project in Cross River state distributed palliatives to women and girls including those with disabilities in four local governments in Cross River state. This was due to the fact that the pandemic which resulted in lockdown orders and movement restrictions had exacerbated poverty and low financial status of most of the women and girls in the project locations. According to Ewomatome (personal communication, 2021), the palliatives were distributed to over 1000 women and girls across eight communities in *Boki, Yala, Bekwara* and Ogoja local government areas. Amongst women were young orphans, the disabled, struggling single mothers, vulnerable young and old women. The items distributed were: cartoons of noodles, packs of soap for hygiene purpose, bags of rice, cash support of N6000 (six thousand naira) to each of the beneficiaries, face masks to help them prevent the spread of the virus. According to Usi- Omoregbee (personal communication, 2021), some of the women and girls were ecstatic and expressed their appreciation for the support and aid given them. Some of the women actually shed tears not of self-pity but of joy as they had thought of themselves as people forgotten and neglected in the face of hardships. Even though the cash support was not much, some of the women had long list of what it would do for them.

Furthermore, in response CWSI established a psycho-social counselling desk using a consultant located in Ogoja. In addition, a yearly workshop on trauma counselling and Emotional intelligence was organized for members of the Cross River Women Empowerment Network (CWEN) in the four local government areas during the third quarter of 2021. This was done to train front-liners in the various grass-root communities of the project location in Cross River state to be able to respond to traumatic incident encountered during and after government-imposed lockdown.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 took the world by surprise and put economies on hold at the peak of devastation resulting from measures put in place to curb its spread. The quarantine measures imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria placed Ogoja women at heightened risk of violence in the home and restricted them from essential protection services. The lockdown enhanced the poverty status of women; as many of them who depend on daily sale of farm produce for sustenance could not go to market for

normal daily sales. The support of CWSI helped to cushion the financial that effects of COVID-19 laid on women

References

- Anietie, E. *Between hunger and the virus*. Human Right Watch, 28 July 2021.
- Nwoke,E.A. *The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers access to essential medicines in Nigeria*. The American journal of tropical medicine and hygiene vol.103,4 (2020):1630-1634.
- Sushama, A. (1998). *Women and empowerment: Approach and strategies*. Delli: Discovery
- United Nation (1995).*Beijing declaration and platform for world conference on women*. New York: UN
Reproduction.
- Warth, L.& Koparanova, M. (2012). *Empowering women for sustainable Development, Discussion Paper series*. New York:Holt