

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The impacts of crises are never gender-neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception. For the single mother in Nigeria, COVID-19 lockdown measures has paused her small business that brings food to the table. This study dwells in the impact of coronavirus on women and girls both at homes and workplaces. We all know that majority of health workers are women and this pandemic impacted on them negatively. It is not only that they are impacted greatly but also the lockdowns brought with it violence against these women by their partners and girls who were in schools before the covid-19 lockdowns are violated and some became pregnant and most unlikely to go back to school after the pandemic lockdowns. The study looked at the pandemic and gender equality, effects on girls' education, and its socio-economic impacts on women and girls. The importance of this is to x-ray and evaluate the intricacies of covid-19 as it applies to women and girls in Nigeria. While everyone is facing unprecedented challenges, women are bearing the brunt of the economic and social fallout of COVID-19. With the threat by Rivers State Governor Wike of another Covid-19 second wave lockdown, women and girls are surely going to bear the brunt of this impending lockdown.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Inequality, Pandemic, Gender-based Violence, Poverty.

Introduction

The world is upside down right now because of the invasive nature of Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19). The disruption brought by the global disease outbreak on the socio-cultural and economic lives of people, is as never witnessed for a long time and could only be comparable to the destructive impacts of the slave trade era, colonial period, great depression and the two world-wars. There is no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic has endangered humanity, brought misfortune and enormous challenges to different segments of our society including: World leaders, Policy-makers, religious organisations, business owners, and civil society groups but special attention should be given to the worsening conditions of persons living with disabilities as well as other vulnerable individuals like women and girls (<https://www.thecable.ng/covid-19-lockdown-rising-cases-of-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-against-women-and-girls>).

A profound shock to our societies and economies, the COVID-19 pandemic underscores society's reliance on women both on the front line and at home, while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection. In times of crisis, when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far reaching consequences that

are only further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies. Hard-fought gains for women's rights are also under threat. Responding to the pandemic is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interest of everyone with women at the centre of recovery. Increases in gender-based violence during lockdowns, labelled the "shadow pandemic" by the UN, and threatens the lives and livelihoods of women and girls in Africa's largest economy.

The current atmosphere in Nigeria is intense as communities face the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic and country-wide protests erupt, demanding action to end soaring levels of violence against women and girls. As a social worker, I work with, and amplify the voices of, marginalised women and girls in some of the most remote communities in Nigeria.

Since the Covid-19 lockdown began in March, Action-Aid Nigeria has seen an alarming increase in reported cases of rape and killings of women and girls as a result of the pandemic. Between March and June, we've documented 299 cases of violence against women and girls across seven states; 51 of these were sexual violence cases involving minors between the ages of 3 to 16. High profile killings like that of Tina Ezekwe who was shot by a trigger-happy police officer in Lagos, have traumatised the nation and led to country-wide protests and demonstrations. Women are fierce but afraid. This awakening has seen more women speaking up and supporting each other. Women are not ready to tolerate any more fake promises from the government. Alongside the protests there are lobby groups working to make sure the rights laws are in place and protection services are implemented as essential services (Ayanda, 2020).

The year 2020, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality. Instead, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic (UN, 9 April 2020). For women who comprise 1.5 billion of the world's low-wage workforce and twice as many of its carers, it is perhaps ironical to state that are the most vulnerable to the economic and health crises that unfold in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it's an unfortunate reality.

Before the pandemic, most women worked as low-wage workers in the manufacturing, service, and informal sectors. Unfortunately, these low-wage employments lack a social safety net such as paid sick leave, parental leave, or retirement contributions to cope with the economic shocks of the on-going pandemic. As a result, girls are now vulnerable to early marriages to relieve the family of another mouth to feed; women are facing greater financial barriers and sexual violence has become rampant. According to experts, to ensure that women do not slip further into poverty and marginalisation, efforts taken by public and private stakeholders must take into consideration these seen and unseen costs. This is backed by reports by global research which suggests that women's financial inclusion and empowerment has positive benefits for the family and society at large (This Day, July 20, 2020).

The [COVID-19](#) pandemic has disrupted access to critical services and has diminished livelihood sources for households. These concerns have been echoed by the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, who, in his [appeal](#) in early April for a global ceasefire, emphasized that women and children are among the most vulnerable in times of war, and face the highest risk of suffering devastating losses from the pandemic.

Care work, which is predominantly provided by women and girls, is a central yet [typically undervalued](#) contributor to economies. It includes supporting daily activities of individuals (such as cooking, cleaning, and providing daily essentials), as well as the health and well-being of others, including children and the elderly. Emerging data indicates that among confirmed cases of COVID-19 [men are consistently dying in higher numbers than women](#). But when it comes to the economic and social fallout of the pandemic, women and girls face much greater risks. The UN recently published a [policy brief](#) recognising these risks, including impacts to sexual and reproductive health, and increases in gender-based violence (Nesbitt-Ahmed &Subrahmanian, 2020).

The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) showed evidence that the economic impact has been felt more intensely, in the lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries. Its published numbers reflect a 22 per cent and 24 per cent average loss respectively, in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) across countries. The social impact of the pandemic has also stunted positive moving curves, most especially among women. These numbers were only just beginning to gain positive momentum and now, there is an indication that a lot of progress will be undone in the post-pandemic era. Elderly and children age groups in need of higher amounts of care have been served predominantly by women and a large part of this care is met with little to no wage compensation. Lockdown measures that have spanned across the globe have necessitated a spike in this kind of labour. Many women have been forced to take up the mantle of caring for the young and elderly. This includes women who are gainfully employed and women who are not (ThisDaylive.com/index.php/2020/07/20).

Covid-19 and Gender Equality

Traditional gender roles ascribed to women often means that they are primary care-givers for sick family members, a situation which exposes them to the risk of contracting and transmitting the coronavirus. At the same time, many women and girls living in rural areas, poor urban settlements, and IDP camps often have limited access to reliable information and adequate healthcare. As primary care-givers for sick family members, women's access to accurate and reliable information and their access to adequate healthcare are critical, to enable them protect themselves and their families from the virus.

More women have lost their jobs due to the impact of the coronavirus crisis than men, new research has found. The report [COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects](#), from McKinsey Global Institute, estimates that women make up almost two-fifths of the global labour force but have suffered more than half of total job losses from the crisis.

As COVID-19 continues to affect lives and livelihoods around the world, we can already see that the pandemic and its economic fallout are having a regressive effect on gender equality. By our calculation, women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's jobs.

Women make up 39 per cent of global employment but account for 54 per cent of overall job losses. One reason for this greater effect on women is that the virus is significantly increasing the burden of unpaid care, which is disproportionately carried by women. This, among other factors, means that women's employment is dropping faster than average, even accounting for the fact that women and men work in different sectors.

Even before the coronavirus, our 15 indicators showed that tangible progress toward gender parity had been uneven and that large gender gaps remained across the world. Now, without intervention to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women, there's a risk that progress could go into reverse. This would not just set back the cause of gender equality but also hold back the global economy. Conversely, taking steps to redress the balance now could improve social and economic outcomes for millions of women globally and help boost economic growth ([Madgavkar](#), [White](#), [Krishnan](#), [Mahajan](#), & Azcue, 2020).

UNICEF is committed to ensuring that gender data and analysis are integrated into country level assessments and responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. While new data collection on the socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19 must prioritise sex-and age disaggregated data to measure the gendered impacts of the pandemic on adults and children, existing data suggests that Covid-19 will deepen existing gender inequalities.

In more than one third of countries with comparable data, at least one in four ever-partnered adolescent girls has experienced recent intimate partner violence. As the COVID-19 pandemic combines with economic and social stresses and measures to restrict contact and movement, women and girls are at a greater risk of physical, sexual, and psychological violence. Crowded homes, substance abuse and reduced access to peer support may further exacerbate these conditions. Indeed, dozens of countries have already reported an increase in violence against women since the outbreak of Covid-19 (United Nations, 2020). In addition, life-saving care and support to GBV survivors, including the clinical management of rape and mental health and psycho-social support, may be disrupted in tertiary level hospitals when health service providers are overburdened and preoccupied with handling COVID-19 cases (<https://data.unicef.org/topic/gender/covid-19/>).

Girls' Education and Covid-19 Pandemic

Girls and women face gender-based violence in schools and university, but a considerable number also find school to be a safe haven when they face abuse and poverty at home. Post-COVID education needs to rely on more sustainable and holistic measures that go beyond just accessing education, but also address the obstacles encountered by girls and young women in accessing quality education and completing the school cycle.

A profound shock to our societies and economies, the COVID-19 pandemic underscores society's reliance on women both on the front line and at home, while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection. In times of crisis, when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far reaching consequences that are only further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies. Hard-fought gains for women's rights are also under threat. Responding to the pandemic is not just about

rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interest of everyone with women at the centre of recovery.

Lockdowns and school closures implemented during the pandemic have already caused [743 million girls](#) to miss out on their educations, and [10 million](#) more secondary school-aged girls are predicted to be out of school before it is over. But what's the story behind these statistics? How are girls affected and how can we ensure that years of progress towards ending child marriage are not lost? *Girls Not Brides* member organisations – who are often the first to identify and respond to girls' needs – have some invaluable insights into the impacts of the pandemic and how it is affecting girls around the world. They also have some innovative ideas about how to put girls at the centre of the response. This is what they have to say.

Girls are missing out on education because they can't access online and distance learning. Member organisations are aware that only [12% of households](#) in the poorest countries have internet access at home, and access to mobile internet is 26% lower for women and girls than for their male peers. On top of this, girls are the first to be pulled out of school, put to work and care for younger siblings when families face economic hardship. As a result, member organisations are concerned that girls don't have time for school work and may not return once schools reopen.

Girls face a higher risk of violence and harmful practices. With schools closed, member organisations report increased sexual and gender-based violence, early pregnancies, unsafe abortions and child marriages. This comes just as support services – including sexual and reproductive health and child protection programmes – are reduced or under strain, limiting girls' ability to report what is happening to them. Girls facing these experiences are less likely to return to schools once they reopen (<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/educating-girls-during-covid-19/>). Schools typically provide safe spaces for girls. When they are in school, they are less likely to be forced into marriage and be abused sexually. During this pandemic, however, schools are not there to protect girls.

As schools close during the Covid-19 crisis, [the gains girls have made in education over the last 25 years](#), particularly in enrolment and learning outcomes, are at risk of dissipating, especially if closures are protracted. Schools also are often one of the strongest social networks for adolescent girls, providing peers and mentors, and when girls are cut off from these networks, their risk of violence increases. In contexts where gender norms may preclude girls from accessing the household infrastructure and digital platforms needed for remote learning, such as computers, smartphones and the internet, they may fall behind their male peers while schools are closed. And when schools do reopen, many girls may not return, as observed during the Ebola crisis.

COVID-19 and Gender-based Violence

With 90 countries in lockdown, four billion people are now sheltering at home from the global contagion of COVID-19. It's a protective measure, but it brings another deadly danger. [We see a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women.](#)

The coronavirus outbreak has exposed a silent pandemic of violence and inequality. The reality that women and men's needs differ, especially in a crisis as existing gender disparities

deepen, is still something that many don't understand. Current data suggests that women in the world's poorest countries are more exposed to the virus because of the roles they typically take on like serving as healthcare workers and caring for sick family members. Not only this but, as we have witnessed in Nigeria, Covid-19 has caused a significant surge in domestic violence around the world (Ayanda, 2020).

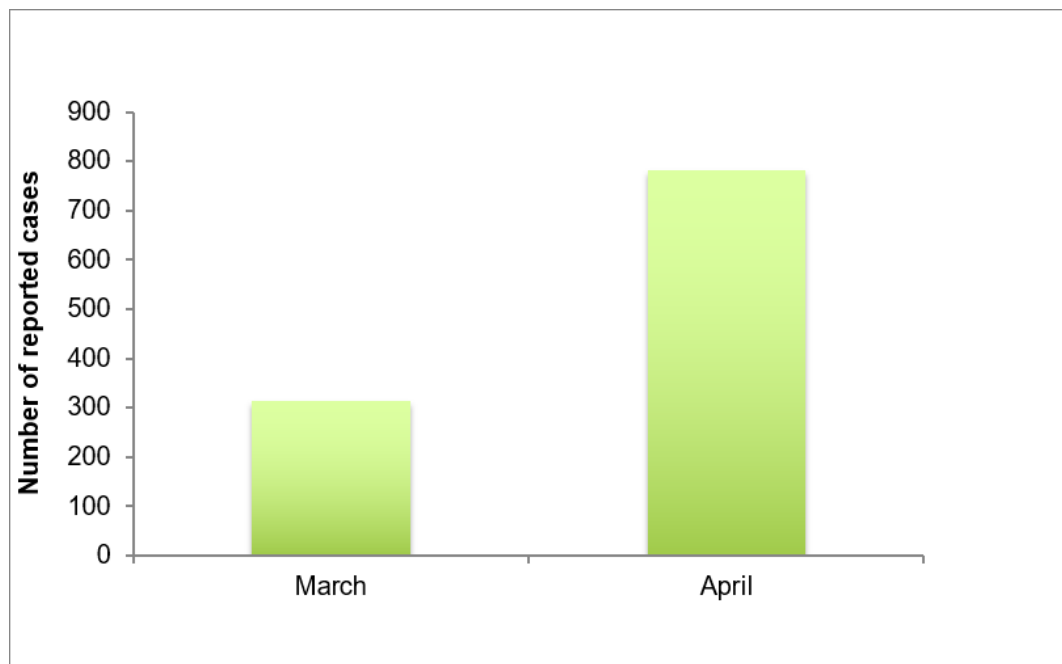
Increases in gender-based violence during lockdowns, labelled the "shadow pandemic" by the UN, threaten the lives and livelihoods of women and girls in Africa's largest economy. Nigeria has long been facing a gender-based violence crisis, with [30% of women and girls aged 15-49](#) having experienced sexual abuse. Lack of coordination amongst key stakeholders and poor implementation of legal frameworks, combined with entrenched gender discriminatory norms, and has hampered government and civil society efforts to address gender-based violence. These efforts have been further compromised by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As stay-at-home orders by government agents expand to contain the spread of the virus, women with violent partner increasingly find themselves isolated from the people and resources that can help them.

This brief highlights emerging evidence of the impact of the recent global pandemic of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls. On 5 April, the Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire and an end to all violence everywhere so that we can focus our attention and resources on stopping this pandemic. But violence is not just on the battlefield. It is also in homes. Violence against women and girls is increasing globally as the COVID-19 pandemic combines with economic and social stresses and measures to restrict contact and movement. Crowded homes, substance abuse, limited access to services and reduced peer support are exacerbating these conditions. Before the pandemic, it was estimated that one in three women will experience violence during their lifetimes. Many of these women are now trapped in their homes with their abusers.

The reports of domestic violence in Nigeria are following a similar trend to elsewhere in the world. Since various versions of lockdown were put in place across the country on 30 March, reported cases of gender-based violence have substantially risen. Figure 1 below shows the [number of reported cases](#) in March and April, respectively, for 23 out of 36 states in Nigeria in which data are available. This shows a monthly increase of 149% in reports of gender-based violence following the introduction of lockdowns at the end of March.

Figure 1: Reported cases of gender-based violence in Nigeria, March, and April 2020



Moreover, breaking down the data by state lines, the effect of lockdowns becomes even more apparent. The Federal Government only decided to place Lagos state, Ogun state, and the Federal Capital Territory under full lockdowns. This was expanded to include Kano state, the most populous city in the North of the country, in mid-April. Local state governments elsewhere in the country tended to implement some lockdown restrictions, but these were not as strict as the ones imposed by the Federal Government.

While it is too early for comprehensive data, there are already many deeply concerning reports of increased violence against women around the world, with surges being reported in many cases of upwards of 25% in countries with reporting systems in place. In some countries reported cases have doubled. These numbers are also likely to reflect only the worst cases. Without access to private spaces, many women will struggle to make a call or to seek help online. Alongside the increase in numbers, violence against women is taking on new complexity: exposure to Covid-19 is being used as a threat; abusers are exploiting the inability of women to call for help or escape; women risk being thrown out on the street with nowhere to go.

Although violence by a partner is one of the most common and widespread forms of violence against women and girls, they experience violence in a variety of contexts – in times of peace or conflict, or in the wake of conflict – and in diverse spheres: the family, the community and broader society. Rapid advances in technology provide another avenue for cyber-violence against women. Available data show that less than 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort. Among those who do, most look to family and friends. Less than 10 per cent of those women seeking help seek help from the police (United Nations Economic and Social Affairs (2015). The existing crisis of VAWG is likely to worsen in the context of COVID-19. Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, reports of violence against women, and particularly domestic violence, have increased in several countries as security, health, and money worries create tensions and strains accentuated by

the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown. More than half of the world's population was under lockdown conditions by early April.

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been a crisis in Nigeria for a long time (UN Women, 2020). The lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic seems to worsen the situation. This is because prior to the pandemic, partners who tended to be abusive were engaged in activities which took them outside their homes. However, with the restriction of movements due to the pandemic, couples are compelled to stay at home together for weeks, creating additional tensions, perhaps leading to people becoming frustrated and aggressive. Reports by different organisations show that there has been a notable increase in the number of reported cases of GBV in May 2020 across most states in Nigeria (Fig. 2). The United Nations Women described the increase in GBV due to Covid-19 as a "Shadow Pandemic" (UN Women, 2020).

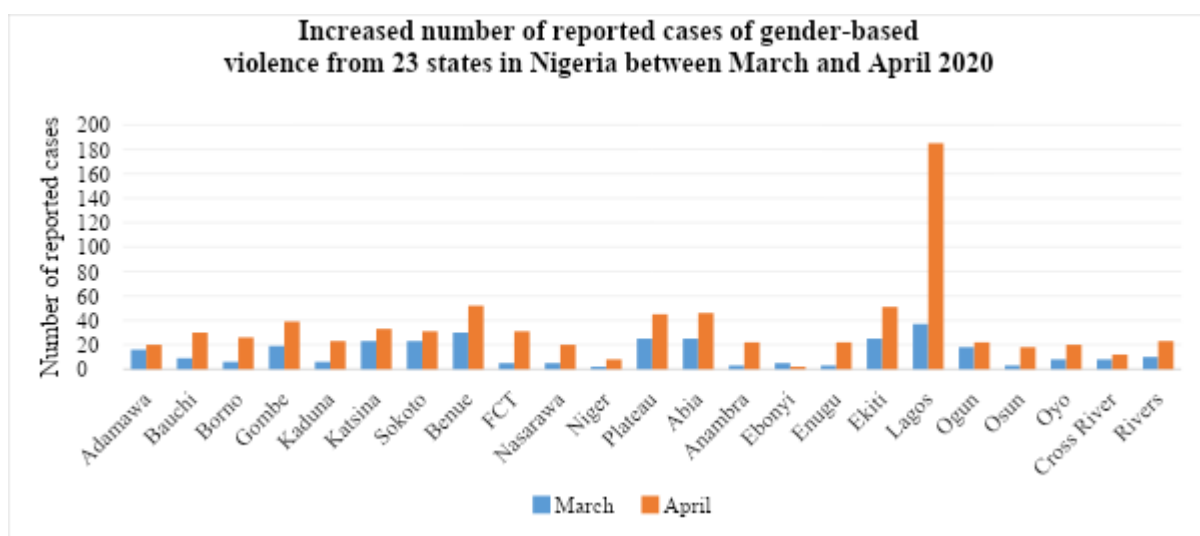


Fig 2. Source: (UN Women, 2020)

Covid-19 and Its Socio-economic impact on Women

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect countries across the world with varied impacts. Primarily a health crisis, the pandemic exposed the significant challenges to access to healthcare in Nigeria. The pandemic also amplified the gendered inequalities in society by making women more vulnerable to its residual effects. The Government instituted lockdown reveals the vulnerabilities to women's businesses exemplify by the survey's respondents; particularly micro and small enterprises, to economic shocks and specifically the absence of protective measures to support these businesses to recover from such shocks (<https://nigeria.unfpa.org/en/events/national-survey-impact-covid-19-women-owned-businesses-nigeria>).

The Covid-19 recession has led to a sharp decline in women's employment contrasting with previous recessions that saw a larger rise in unemployment for men. The large impact of Covid-19 on women's employment matters most directly for the economic opportunities of the women who are unable to work during the crisis. Some women will drop out of the labour force permanently. Women in career positions may miss out on crucial promotions and be unable to return to the same career track they were on previously. Over the next few years, these factors are likely to limit women's career opportunities and increase the gender pay gap.

Also, during the crisis the drop in women's employment reduces families' ability to self-insure against earnings losses. Many families have no choice but to reduce their consumption expenditures, for example by spending less on food, delaying major purchases, or falling behind on rent. For the economy at large such changes result in a drop in aggregate demand, which can deepen the recession and slow down the recovery. The lack of self-insurance also implies that income support payments (such as expanded unemployment insurance) are even more important compared to other recessions. Moreover, a full recovery is impossible as long as school closures continue, because childcare needs will prevent many parents from returning to work (Alon, et. al, 2020).

"The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic", stated a UN policy brief published in April 2020. "Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. They have less access to social protections and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men." A report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that mothers in the UK were 1.5 times more likely than fathers to have either quit their job or lost it during the lockdown (Burki, 2020).

An estimated 740 million women are employed in the informal economy. In developing nations, such work constitutes more than two-thirds of female employment. But as countries all over the world locked down, these jobs quickly disappeared. That can have catastrophic consequences. "In many places, if you are fired today, it means that you do not eat tonight", said Amina Abdulla, Country Director for Kenya at Concern Worldwide, a non-governmental organisation that works with impoverished communities in 23 countries (Burki, 2020).

In March, UNESCO estimated that the pandemic was preventing 1.52 billion children from attending school. Some of them will never return. Out of education, girls face a heightened risk of female genital mutilation and early marriage. "Schools are a safe environment for vulnerable girls; they can provide sanitary towels, for example, and protect them from certain abuses", said Abdulla. "Losing this protection has huge implications for health, including in terms of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections". The lockdown and school closures mean that just as their access to paid work diminishes, women face an increase in their unpaid labour. "Domestic duties, things like childcare, preparing food for the extra youngsters who would normally be at school, and looking after sick family members, these responsibilities fall disproportionately on women", said Wenham.

Women who are poor and marginalized face an even higher risk of COVID-19 transmission and fatalities, loss of livelihood, and increased violence. Globally, [70 per cent of health workers and first responders are women](#), and yet, they are not at par with their male counterparts. At 28 per cent, the gender pay gap in the health sector is higher than the [overall gender pay gap \(16 per cent\)](#). Here's how COVID-19 is rolling back on women's economic gains of past decades, unless we act now, and act deliberately.

Unless measures are taken to shield the most vulnerable, by this time next year 435 million women and girls will be living on less than \$1.90 a day worldwide – including 47 million specifically impoverished by COVID-19. Unless measures are

taken to shield the most vulnerable, by this time next year 435 million women and girls will be living on less than \$1.90 a day worldwide – including 47 million specifically impoverished by COVID-19 (Azcona, Bhatt & Kaptso, 2020).

The pandemic-induced poverty surge will also widen the gender poverty gap – meaning, [more women will be pushed into extreme poverty than men](#). This is especially the case among those aged 25 to 34, at the height of their productive and family formation period. In 2021, it is expected there will be 118 women aged 25 to 34 in extreme poverty for every 100 men aged 25 to 34 in extreme poverty globally, and this ratio could rise to 121 poor women for every 100 poor men by 2030. Women are losing their jobs. The pandemic and measures to prevent its spread are driving a disproportionate increase in women's unemployment (as compared to men) and also decreasing their overall working time.

Socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 on Women and Girls

According to Akpan (2020), Covid-19 pandemic has led to major disruptions in social and economic activities in virtually all the sectors in all countries in the world. The impact has been in terms of increased level of mortality and morbidity, as well as in terms of different types of social and economic problems such as increase in mental health, loss of jobs and income.

Women make up 70% of the global health workforce which disproportionately puts them at risk of infection and high levels of stress. Most of these women are parents and care givers to family members. They continue to carry the burden of care, which is already disproportionately high in (Alfa, 2020).

“We are already seeing that the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls is profound. Women are disproportionately affected by lockdowns and this is resulting in a reduced access to health services,” said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa.

As efforts are focused on curbing the spread of COVID-19, essential services such as access to sexual and reproductive health services have been disrupted. According to preliminary data, in Zimbabwe, the number of caesarean sections performed decreased by 42% between January and April 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. The number of live births in health facilities fell by 21%, while new clients on combined birth control pills dropped by 90%. In Burundi, initial statistics show that births with skilled attendants fell to 4749 in April 2020 from 30 826 in April 2019.

The economic hardship due to COVID-19 is also greater for women according to a World Bank report. Informal workers, most of whom are women, account for more than 90% of the labour force in sub-Saharan Africa. Informal sector jobs are particularly at risk during the pandemic.

In addition, women face a higher risk of gender-based violence in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. A recent study by UN Women found that reports of violence against women, and particularly domestic violence, have increased in several countries as security, health, and financial worries create tensions and strains accentuated by the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown.

The burden of caring for the sick is also largely borne by women. Most health workers in Africa are women. Over the past four months, with the Colleges of Nursing in Africa WHO has provided targeted virtual trainings to over 1000 nurses and midwives. In West Africa, this training has been cascaded sub-nationally using virtual platforms – thus allowing as many nurses as possible to be trained in case management for COVID-19 and infection prevention and control (<https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-concerned-over-covid-19-impact-women-girls-africa>).

World Health Organisation works to improve the health of women and girls in Africa by developing guidance on the implications of gender, gender-based violence, and access to sexual and reproductive health.

As quarantine measures keep people at home, close schools and day-care facilities, [the burden of unpaid care and domestic work](#) has exploded; both for women and men. But even before COVID-19, women spent an average of 4.1 hours per day performing unpaid work, while men spent 1.7 hours – that means women did three times more unpaid care work than men, worldwide. Both men and women report an increase in unpaid work since the start of the pandemic, but women are continuing to shoulder the bulk of that work. School and day-care closures, along with the reduced availability of outside help, have led to months of additional work for women. For working mothers, this has meant balancing full-time employment with childcare and schooling responsibilities. The responsibility of caring for sick and elderly family members often falls on women as well.

Conclusion

Globally, women and girls aged between 15– 49 have been sexually and /or physical violated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. The number is likely to increase as security, health, and money worries heighten tensions and strains are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have created a global crisis unparalleled in the history of the United Nations—and one which requires a whole-of-society response to match its sheer scale and complexity. Instead, every COVID-19 response plans, and every recovery package and budgeting of resources, needs to address the gender impacts of this pandemic. Putting women and girls at the centre of economies will fundamentally drive better and more sustainable development outcomes for all, support a more rapid recovery, and place us back on a footing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The lockdown measure in the three regions of Nigeria, South-west, South-south and South-east as well as other restrictive measures adopted by various states has had varying implications on the lives of women and girls (Alfa, 2020)

The gender effects of the COVID-19 crisis highlight the uneven progress toward gender equality. Indeed, in the aggregate, progress toward equality in work and society has stayed relatively flat in the five years between 2014 and 2019. In 2014, the global GPS score was 0.60; today, it is 0.61 (on a scale of 0 to 1, where 1 signifies full parity between women and men). Gender equality in work continues to lag behind gender equality in society, with a GPS of 0.52 versus 0.67, respectively. The world has made progress on a few aspects of gender equality,

such as maternal mortality, the share of women in professional and technical jobs, and political representation. However, the level of female participation in the labour force is about two-thirds that of men and has hardly budged in that period (Exhibit 2). Within this overall picture, countries and regions can vary significantly. India has seen a slight decrease in female labour-force participation in the past five years, for example, while Indonesia has registered a small increase.

UN Women is providing direct technical support to governments and UN partners to make sure that national response strategies meet women's and girls' needs. In **Lebanon**, UN Women works with W.H.O. to support the protection and gender-response and supports the Government's national response. Gender experts are deployed to support the **Tunisian** Government's response to COVID-19. In **Timor-Leste**, UN Women is providing technical assistance to line ministries to ensure the state of emergency declared incorporates gender and protection considerations (<https://www.unwomen.org/>). This is what I expected **Nigerian** Government to collaborate with the UN to alleviate the suffering of women in the pandemic period. The time to act to help women and girls is now because tomorrow might be too late.

Member states and development partners need to continue sharing experiences and best practices during and post the COVID-19 pandemic and reinforce the importance of girls and women's education to the development of individual nations and the continent within local communities. Ministries should be tracking the numbers of children affected by school closures and provide gender disaggregated data to ensure they can act if a significant number of girls and boys do not return to school ([Bissoonauth, 2020](#)). Women who are poor and marginalized face an even higher risk of COVID-19 transmission and fatalities, loss of livelihood, and increased violence. It is quite clear that another lockdown will bring serious hardship to these women and girls.

It is a known fact that the economic hardship due to Covid-19 is also greater for women according to a World Bank report. Informal workers, most of whom are women, account for more than 90% of the labour force in sub-Saharan Africa. Informal sector jobs are particularly at risk during the pandemic. It is also clear that as the pandemic rages on, more women will lose their jobs in the post-covid-19. Also after this Covid-19, comes "Povid-20" (Poverty Virus Disease, 2020), which will surely be with us in 2021 with the way things are going. There are more lockdowns in US and European countries and Nigeria is coming up hers soon. The federal Government on Monday 21st December (two days ago), ordered all federal civil servants on Grade Level 12 and below to stay at home for the next five weeks. The chairman of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, Boss Mustapha, made this known in a statement on Monday (21 December, 2020). Mustapha also said restrictions have been placed on social and religious gatherings for five weeks. (Punch Newspaper, December 21, 2020). This entails more suffering for the masses and for women and girls come 2021. The question now is when this will be over. I think it is high time Nigerian government realises that Covid-19 is not going away very soon and we have to find a way of living with it as we have been living with HIV/AIDS, Malaria, pneumonia and other illnesses. The economy is already in recession and another lockdown will crash the economy finally and Nigeria will become a failed state.

The global pandemic has led to a significant increase in restrictions on the freedom of movement of people worldwide and worrisome reports on the misuse of emergency measures to further erode human rights and the rule of law, as will be detailed in a forthcoming policy brief on the Human Rights Impacts of COVID19. This has led to an adverse impact on civic space and the ability of communities and individuals to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Women leaders and activists continue to bear the brunt of harassment and attacks both on and offline. The prospects of a long-term global recession raise serious concerns over how these protection gaps and human rights restrictions will be addressed. Post-pandemic recovery will hopefully lead to an expansion of rights and participation of women in public affairs so that we are more resilient to future such crises. Women are losing their jobs. The pandemic and measures to prevent its spread are driving a disproportionate increase in women's unemployment (as compared to men) and also decreasing their overall working time.

Lastly, women are overrepresented in many of the industries hardest hit by COVID-19, such as food service, retail and entertainment. For example, [40 per cent of all employed women – 510 million women globally](#) – work in hard-hit sectors, compared to 36.6 per cent of employed men.

Recommendations

“Despite the clear gendered implications of crises, response and recovery efforts tend to ignore the needs of women and girls until it's too late. We need to do better,” urges UN Women's Chief Statistician, Papa Seck. “But most countries are either not collecting or not making available data broken down by sex, age and other characteristics – such as class, race, location, disability and migrant status. These acute data gaps make it extremely difficult to predict the pandemic's full impact in countries and communities. They also raise the concern that COVID-19 policy response will ignore the priorities of the most vulnerable women and girls.”

Here are [the steps that governments and businesses can take](#) to mitigate the negative economic impacts of COVID-19 on women.

- i. **Direct income support to women**

Introduce economic support packages, including direct cash-transfers, expanded unemployment benefits, tax breaks, and expanded family and child benefits for vulnerable women and their families. Direct cash-transfers, which would mean giving cash directly to women who are poor or lack income, can be a lifeline for those struggling to afford day-to-day necessities during this pandemic. These measures provide tangible help that women and girls need right now to survive the scourge.

- ii. **Support for women-owned and -led businesses**

Businesses owned and led by women should receive specific grants and stimulus funding, as well as subsidized and state-backed loans. Tax burdens should be eased and where possible, governments should source food, personal protection equipment, and other essential supplies from women-led businesses. Economic

relief should similarly target sectors and industries where women are a large proportion of workers.

iii. **Reconciliation of paid and unpaid work**

Provide all primary caregivers with paid leave and reduced or flexible working arrangements. Provide essential workers with childcare services. Unprecedented measures to address the economic fallout have already been taken, but comparatively few measures have been directed at supporting families grappling with paid and unpaid work, including care needs. More efforts are also needed to engage citizens and workers in public campaigns that promote equitable distribution of care and domestic work between men and women.

iv. **Support for informal workers**

Provide social protection and benefits to informal workers. For informal workers left unemployed, cash transfers or unemployment benefits can help ease the financial burden of these women and girls.

v. **Support for women workers**

Implement gender-responsive social protection systems to support income security for women. For instance, expanded access to affordable and quality childcare services will enable more women to be in the labour force. Bridging the gender pay gap is urgent, and it begins by enacting laws and policies that guarantee equal pay for work of equal value and stop undervaluing the work done by women and girls in the country.

vi. The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups like women demonstrate that human rights, particularly ESCR must lie at the core of COVID-19 emergency responses. Importantly too, the state must take gender into consideration when developing their executive or legislative responses to COVID-19 (Ibezim-Ohaeri & Okon, 2020).

vii. The UN Policy Brief no. 17 on COVID-19 should be looked into and implemented. The brief advocates for measures that prevent and respond to VAWG in the current circumstances of lockdown as well as for investments that ensure the safety of women and girls in longer-term recovery plans. It makes recommendations to be considered by all sectors of society, from governments and multilateral institutions to civil society organizations, private companies, and donors, with examples of actions already taken. In addition to providing the latest research and data on VAWG in the context of the public health crisis, the brief considers the social and economic implications of this [“shadow pandemic”](#), which at present are on track to endure long after the immediate health threat posed by COVID-19 has passed (UN Policy Brief no. 17. COVID-19, 2020).

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