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Gender Discrimination in Igbo Society under the Covid-19: Its Effect on the Economy of Igbo Women of the Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract:

This paper is targeted at analyzing how the current coronavirus affected the business of women in the south east of Nigeria. The current Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) outbreak has affected over 200 countries in the world including Nigeria. The Covid-19 pandemic has devastated the global economy which Nigeria is inclusive. It has rendered many of the world's population impoverished. This article focuses on the economic impact of Covid-19 on the Igbo women of the south east. The article also reviews the recent trends and updates on the impact of Covid-19 aimed at further understanding of the problem of coronaviruses on the economy of the south east women in particular. The article is divided into different points; each points deals with the most important aspects of the Covid-19 on how it affected Igbo women's economy in the south east of Nigeria. The first section describes the genesis of Covid-19 and methods of infection. The second sections described the economic impact of Covid-19 on Nigeria and how it affected the development of the state in the south east of Nigeria. It also focuses on the impact on the buying and selling of food stuffs. The other section reflected on the reactions of people and impact of Covid-19 on the economy of the south east women of Nigeria. The study recommends that governments should invest in health and education improvement and stimulate the economies of people to create employment that could propagate the growth and improve on the poverty alleviation and economic growth of the south east women of Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, discrimination, Coronavirus, economy

1. Background to the Study

Gender discussion is as old as man. Gender discussion is seen and observed in every area of human endeavor in every society. By nature, gender is created and through people's desires, beliefs and actions represent gender, and its existence in society. There is gender in every part of the world, Africa, and in Nigeria. Gender refers to different socio-cultural constructed roles, attributes, privileges, responsibilities and expectations of the individuals in society, Ezebube (2016). The idea of gender presents the male and female species as different from each other. In the human society, individuals are assigned to an acceptable role within the particular gender framework. The assigning of gender role to the individual members of society makes it impossible for man to move through life in non-gendered way. Also, it is impossible for man not to behave in a way that elicits gendered behaviors and attribute of a woman. Gender is indispensable, thus, something we cannot run away from because it is a way through which societies are ordered, with each society having its own system of ordering different from the other. Gender is a key component of human identity and it is geographical and is seen differently by people in different societies in every part of the world. Human identities which include voice pitch; females tend to have soft voices than the males, body image and structure; males tend to have a broad-shouldered, muscular and physically vigorous than the females among others. These attributes make the males to look and communicate differently from the females. Males are often portrayed as brave, reserve, confident, bold, dauntless and strong-hearted unlike the females that are seen as weak, shy, straightforward, submissive and emotional. The males are observed to be more dominant than the females who are deviant and recessive. It is also worthy of note to state that the need of one gender differs from place to place, time to time, depending on how the particular society defines the need.

Ikeokwu (2008) observes that from infancy, male and female children are interpreted differently and interacted differently by the members of society. It is not only that male adults seem to enforce gender more than female; experimental evidence suggest that adults' perception of babies is affected by their beliefs about the babies' sex. Gender

discrimination is deeply engrained in our social practices in our understanding of ourselves and of others, that we almost cannot do anything without some consideration for gender implications. The Igbo see women as lower-class citizens, who require just minimal attention by comparison with their male counterparts. Attendant to this belief is the gross neglect, ill-treatment, and discrimination against the women folk that manifest in several ways as will be discussed below. In the Igbo society, some professions are for men and some are for women. Discrimination is highly observed and women are marginalized. In Africa, Nigeria and in Igbo society, some women have not been able to break through, from this type of subjugation and marginalization. In most parts of Igbo society, some women are still under this cage because of the patriarchal system created by men in those areas of the society in Igbo society, Ugwoke (2019). The nature and superiority of men in a patriarchal African, Nigeria and Igbo society inclusive differs from one society to the other as revealed in the works of some literary writers like, Tony Uchenna Ubesie, Goddy Onyekagwu and Nwaozuzu G. I. Therefore, religion and some cultural practices can be seen as aspects of cultural oppression against women in Africa, Nigeria and in Igbo society which hindered the progress and the rights of women. In some places, in Africa, Nigeria and in Igbo society, there are some restrictions from certain cultural aspect, which does not allow women to participate in it because of patriarchal system that is in the hands of men. In some areas women are restricted from having certain things in the society like having share in their father's property especially in the landed property. The women's rights are few as compared to their man counterparts Ikeokwu (2008). Most of these aspects of culture that marginalizes the women folk in Igbo society helped in creating problems to the Igbo women during the period of lockdown because their movement was more restricted than men due to culture. In Igbo society, women are not allowed to carry out certain business that involves far distances or night businesses. During the period of lockdown in Nigeria, it effected women's businesses since cultures and religion does not permit women to move about in the night when most of the activities were going during lockdown.

2. Statement of the Problem

There is poor awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic consequences on the people in Nigeria especially on the life of rural women of the south east of Nigeria. Many women lost huge amount of money during the lockdown as a result of lockdown placed by government to curb the transmission of the dreaded covid-19 virus ravaging the world. Most of the women's businesses are on food stuff and there was shortage on the supply as farmers could not go out as a result of lockdown placed by the government. Most of the south east women who are mostly affected are those living in rural areas of the south east. Due to some restrictions on the women folk, they are not allowed to go to some places to carry out their businesses because of custom associated with religion and tradition. There are cultures that restrict women from going out in the night when businesses were going on because of lockdown placed by the government. Women, especially in the south east Nigeria are not permitted by culture to carry out some trades that men do, especially night trades. We have few qualified medical workers in the south east who could handle the health issues of novel Coronavirus.

3. The Purpose of Study

The value of this research is for a specific audience which is the women folk of the south east of Nigeria. The study is to showcase how the Covid-19 affected the general life of the ordinary Igbo women in the south east of Nigeria. This will also be of great importance every member of the society. The purpose of this work, also is to make clearer the mode and transmission of the dreaded coronavirus, in particular on Covid-19 and how it affected the life of rural Igbo women of the south east in Nigeria.

4. Scope of the Study

Coronavirus is very broad and may not be fully exhausted in this study, considering the various means of transmission and the economic consequences on the women of south east of Nigeria. The scope of this study is on gender discrimination in Igbo society under covid-19 in general and contemporary Igbo women in particular at the background in economic loss during and after the lockdown placed by the state government. The study is restricted to showing how the Igbo rural women fared during the period of lockdown in five states of the south east Nigeria.

5. The Emergence and Spread of Covid-19 in South East of Nigeria

Nigeria was gripped by the news of Covid-19 pandemic by the first half of 2020. The Covid-19 was identified as a new coronavirus and later named as Covid-19, (NCDC., 2020). The Covid-19 originated in the city of Wuhan China, and spread rapidly across the whole world, resulting in a human tragedy and tremendous loss of human lives and economic damages in the whole world. By mid-June, 2020 to 13th April, 2021 Nigeria recorded 163, 911 confirmed cases of people infected with covid-19, 154,223 people discharged and 2,061 death cases NCDC, (13th April, 2020). Also from mid-June, 2020, to 13th April, 2021, the south east has confirmed cases as follows: Enugu- 229, Ebonyi- 2,019, Anambra- 1,909, Abia- 1,655 and Imo state- 1,655 cases (NCDC). Following the rapid spread of Covid-19, many states across the south east of Nigeria adopted several public health measures aimed at preventing its spread, including social distancing NCDC (2020)). As part of the measures to prevent the virus from spreading, social distancing, businesses, schools, and non-governmental organization (NGOs) were closed down. Mass gatherings of people were prohibited, and lockdown measures were imposed in all the states in the south east of Nigeria, allowing only movement of essential needs like food and drugs. The goal of social distancing introduced by the states in the south east of Nigeria is to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus from those infected to uninfected ones. The other measures introduced by government to stop the spread of Covid-19 include closure of schools, markets and churches in the south east of Nigeria. All the measures were aimed to curb the

spread and reduce the number of new cases related to Covid-19 among the people in the south east. There was spread of Covid-19 despite the lockdown by different states that resulted in a considerable slowdown of economic activities across the five states in the south east of Nigeria.

The emergence and the fast spread of the Covid-19 brought a change on the economic shutdown of many women who deals on food stuff in south east of Nigerians. The people of south east especially the women living in rural areas, who depends solely on buying and selling of food stuff were greatly affected economically because of short supply of food stuffs from farmers. The infection which is spread by air-drop, through fecal, oral and contact routes with infected people made people stay indoors. Therefore, more of the existing information is not confirmed by 100%, which caused many rumors to many south east women of Nigerians. Owing to the wide spread of coronavirus infection, major markets were locked down and many south east women lost their capitals. During this pandemic period, there was shortage of food supply from the northern parts of the country to the south east due to lockdown placed by state and federal government of Nigeria. This ugly situation affected women more in the south east as their business are limited to few businesses because of gender issues in Igbo society. In Igbo society, some business is for men alone and some are regarded as women's business. The businesses that were mainly affected were food-stuff that is the women's trade.

6. Economic Impact of Covid-19 on the Women of the South East of Nigerian

This study analyses the Covid-19 situation in the south east of Nigeria in the year 2020 and, the economic crisis it brought to many south east women as a result of gender discrimination against women. The Covid-19 pandemic has so many effects on the economy of south east women www.punchonline.com (2020). Covid-19 Pandemic affected the women's businesses, and the general health care systems of the people, the food industry, education, in the south east of Nigeria. The impact of Covid-19 on the south east women's economy especially on the Igbo women has been explored to be high. The economic crises brought by Covid-19 hit every aspect of people's business especially on the women folk of south east of Nigeria. What made the 2020 economic crisis different from other economic crises or recessions in Nigeria was that most economic agents, who could have helped to revive the economy were unable to engage in economic activities due to fear of contracting the Covid-19 disease. Also, economic agents did not engage in economic activities when the government imposed and enforced social distancing rules and movement of people from one place to the other were prohibited in Nigeria. Abuja, all economic activities of the south east states were shut down on the 30th March of 2020 by the government. Although the coronavirus outbreak which started in the Wuhan province of China had spillover problems in Nigeria, the reason why the outbreak was severe in Nigeria and caused suffering to poor citizens was because of weak institutions that were ineffective in responding to the pandemic. Also, the lack of adequate social welfare programs that would have catered for majority of the poor women and vulnerable children were affected by the crisis. The fear of financial and economic collapse led to panic, buying, hoarding of foreign currency by individuals and businesses mostly for speculative reasons also affected the life of women. Most women's business in south east of Nigeria that are majorly on food stuffs crumbled. Their businesses got stocked because people were no longer allowed to move freely.

7. The Covid-19 Impact on Production of Goods and Services in South East of Nigeria

The coronavirus pandemic had a very negative impact on women's businesses in south east of Nigeria. Their short production and supply of goods and services due to lockdown placed by the federal and state governments in the country ushered in economic crises in every part of the states. There was also short supply of drugs and other health equipment that are being supplied by foreign countries to Nigeria. This caused a shortage of even basic wants of women in the south east. In a few days, the Covid-19 has significantly changed the economies of women in south east of Nigeria. It forced everyone to 'social distancing which leads to recession and threatens to destroy millions of workers. Unfortunately, there is no alternative to such treatment, and we need to think about how to mitigate on its economic consequences. The strategy and tactics of getting out of mass self-isolation now require detailed reflection on the future of economy of the women of the south east of Nigeria. Although we will be able to fully assess the impact only after the quarantine is completed, many problems are already clear today, and appropriate actions need to be taken. The crisis brought by Covid-19 is spreading unevenly across every state and business activities are getting down very fast. It also crippled all food vendors' business due to the lockdown placed by the federal and state governments. All types of commercial services (non-food trade, hotels and restaurants, passenger-transport are at an obvious risk of temporary stoppage due to self-isolation of consumers.

Studies have shown that the coronavirus pandemic has reached the absolute majority of every people especially women folk in the south east as a case study. Currently, according to NCDC, more than 265, 000 people were infected, 175 thousand of whom have died and about 700 thousand were cured in Nigeria. The largest number of infected and victims were recorded in Lagos and Kano state in Nigeria. In Nigeria, to date, more than two hundred people have noted; to have died. The coronavirus was discovered a long time ago, but it has mutated, and this led to the outbreak at the present time. It has put heavy pressure on the economies of many countries, and import and export rates have declined, but scientists continue to study Covid-19. Research has also shown that the epidemic has affected the production of many goods; even the largest companies suspended the production of their products. A lot of people in Nigeria were left unemployed, and people received cut wages, and only a small percentage was left unchanged.

8. Conclusion

Summing up the above, it should be emphasized that this study is relevant to a specific audience, such as founders of small and medium-sized businesses, as well as people in charge of each state. The study is aimed to assess the pandemic

effects on the women's economy in the south east, explicitly emphasizing on the economic growth and poverty alleviation efforts placed by the state government. A number of articles examining the problem described the spread of coronavirus in the states, as well as forecasts of the impact of the pandemic on the population and economy of women of south east of Nigeria. It also discussed the impact of economic crisis, Covid-19 brought on the economies of women in south east of Nigeria. It also went further to provide a suggestion of the potential women's economic costs of Covid-19 under different scenarios. The pandemic caused by Covid-19 affected many women in the south east of Nigeria. It will have a lasting impact on the women's economy and trade in the south east. The severity of the economic impact will depend on 'how long the constraints in the major economies will persist, and on the scale and effectiveness of fiscal measures. The pandemic has put heavy pressure on the economy of many women in the south east. The government should support women, farmers and producers of food crops at different levels in the states because of the effects of lockdown occasioned by Covid-19. This paper also discussed the recent economic crisis in the five eastern states of Nigeria caused by the covid-19 pandemic which showed that the spillover of Covid-19 pandemic in south east coupled with high increase in price of food stuff and transportation, which were external shocks, caused economic crisis in south east in 2020 should be handled by the government in the south east.

9. Recommendations

- (A) The policy makers should pay attention to three areas of the economy for economic and structural reform as it affects women in south east of Nigeria.
- (B) South east's policy makers should also introduce economic reforms to diversify the economy and reduce women's dependence only food stuff business.
- (C) The policymakers should invest in health care infrastructure to improve the ability of the different state's health care system to withstand the outbreak of any contagious diseases in future. (D) There is also the need to build appropriate digital infrastructure to facilitate the transition from 'face-to face' business which can help to grow the digital economy among the women folk in the south east.
- (E) Also, policy makers should use legislation to create a robust social welfare safety net for all women particularly for unemployed and poor households.
- (F) Finally, the state government needs to focus on rebuilding institutions, and pay more attention to institutions like National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

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