

GENDER INEQUALITY, VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA

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*violence during covid-19 pandemic in
Nigeria and ends with conclusion.*

Keywords: Gender; Gender inequality;
Violence; COVID-19; Nigeria.

Abstract.

Gender expresses the basic differences between men and women in terms of their sexes. While sex is physical and biological determined, gender is socially determined. Gender refers more to expectations placed on someone because of the sex of the person. This is so because gender attitudes and behaviours are learned and the concept could change over time. Thus, gender inequality is the idea that men and women are not equal and that gender affects an individual's living experiences. From birth males and females are raised differently and experienced different environment throughout their lives. Males and females are led on different paths due to the influences of gender role expectations and gender role stereotypes before they are able to choose their own. In effect, throughout life, males and females are seen as two very different species who have very different personalities and should stay on separate paths. Indeed, gender inequality is a social problem in Nigeria. Gender inequality is an ultimate outcome of any patriarchal society. The root cause of gender inequality is the role and place which society assigns to women and men base more on a question of culture. Gender inequality affects everyone in Nigeria, including men and women. Thus, the issue of violence during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This paper attempts a theoretical discussion of gender inequality, violence during covid – 19 pandemics in Nigeria. It covers introduction, deduction from sociological theory | theoretical framework, forms of gender inequalities, causes of gender inequality, effects of gender inequality,

Introduction

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. According to Ridgeway (2011) gender inequality is legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/ or gender determines different rights and dignity for men and women, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles. Gender inequality arises from differences in socially constructed gender role as well as biologic differences. Gender inequality originated from distinction, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed based on the differences between the sexes.

Gender inequality is a characteristic of most societies like Nigeria with males on average better positioned in social, economic and political hierarchies. Gender inequality is the ultimate outcome of any patriarchal society. From time immemorial, according to Aina (1998), patriarchy structure has been a major feature of the traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enable men to dominate women. Patriarchy structure is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the bases of sex, which provides advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females. There are clearly defined sex roles while various taboos ensure conformity with specified gender roles. Traditionally, men do not participate in domestic works including

child rearing – such tasks are considered to be the exclusive domain of women. Males are classed as having the following qualities: strength, vigour, powerful courage, self-confidence and the ability to meet the outside world challenges. These qualities were reflected in the kinds of work that men are engaged in. Men were responsible for much of what was thought as heavy labour. According to Stock (1995) men in short provided for their families while women oversee the domestic work. They kept houses, processed and cooked all foods. These divisions and activities have however continued to the present time. One's work defines one's gender. Most of what we become in life according to Kabler (1990) stem from our childhood orientation. In the traditional setting, children are trained by parents occupationally and along the gender lines. As such, fathers take their sons and teach them male roles while mother do the same to their daughters. Based on this, people grow and are moulded occupationally.

In Nigeria, a critical look at the various aspects of our lives will portray the presence of gender inequality in virtually major aspects of lives, both social and economic areas. The thinking that is dominant in Nigeria is that, the male folk is more important than the female. Men are ranked higher than the women. The practice has its root in the tradition of the various people that make up Nigeria. In Igbo society for instance, the society places the males far and above females in all spheres of human endeavours. The males are seen to be superior to females. According to Uwaka and Egbute (2006), it is commonly believed that the office of the women is in the kitchen. Inheritance is passed on through the male. No woman is expected to inherit her father's or mother's property. It is the man no matter how young that is allowed by tradition to inherit the property of the parents. A woman has no right over

her father's property. In our modern days, these traditional practices are still observed. Gender inequality are still everywhere in Nigeria. Parent especially of Northern origin, are reluctant in sending their female child to school.

According to Idu (2005), some careers are deemed to be preserved for men. Politics is still one of the area where women still suffer lots of limitation. Political parties are still being controlled by men. This is still a clear indication of discrimination against women showing that women are not fully represented in crucial political areas and public offices. Despite all the campaign for women participation in Nigeria politics over all the years, women are still grossly under-represented in government and political process. For more than decades, the goal of reducing gender inequality has held prominent place in international organizations and in national strategy statements. According to Kvande (1998) the issue of gender inequality is one of a global concern in recent years.

Gender Inequality, Violence and Deduction from Sociological Theory / Theoretical Framework.

Following symbolic interactionism, a social relationship exists when there is a pattern of repeated interaction between two or more persons or groups. The pattern of interaction may be cooperative, competitive, conflicting or accommodative. In other words, interaction may hold people together or tear them apart and this is where violence starts. Hence two main patterns of social relationships are discernible, namely, consensus and conflict. The effect of consensus and conflict on gender inequality and violence are informed by two sociological viewpoints of society, namely, (1) the functionalist viewpoint which incorporates elements of the system theory and (2) The conflict theory.

According to functionalism, society like Nigeria is made up of subparts which include social institutions and they function interdependently to achieve group goals. The more ideologically united by the Nigerians during COVID- 19 Pandemic the more common their interests and the more they strive jointly to achieve the objectives of the lockdown and restrictions.

Conversely, mainstream conflict theory views social systems, Nigeria as fundamentally made-up of dominant and subordinate groups both of which are in constant antagonistic relationships over scarce resources (Giddens: 1979 and Dahrendorf: 1969). This is the case in Nigeria during the COVID- 19 pandemics where causes of violence were diverse and based on dominant and subordinate groups struggle for material resources for survival. Thus, the conflict theory form the theoretical framework for this paper. Violence during COVID- 19 pandemic in Nigeria occurred in different parts of the country base on struggle for survival and distribution of scarce resources as a result of lockdown.

Forms of gender inequality.

Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures. There are different forms of gender inequality. In Nigeria, gender inequality also occurs in different forms. According to Shruti (2019) the important forms of gender inequality include:

(1) Women work longer than men: in Nigeria like some other countries, women have comparative advantage in household non market production like cooking and cleaning for the family and offices that can be called emotional and personal caring work. Thus, women are more valued in home while men are specialized in market-based production and industries. Thus, being the bread

earners, males enjoy both power and status. Women's activities serve primarily as inputs into the family's well-being. Thus, Nigeria as a capitalist society, labour market is such that it creates one set of jobs with poor salary and long working hours for women and a better one for male counterparts. This amounts to saying that women belong to the minority group. This kind of boundary triggers discrimination between sexes.

(2) Gender inequality in employment and earning: historically men have greater participation in work outside home than women. Women tend to work mostly in a narrow range of occupations, called female industries, such as textile, clothing, food and beverages etc. Where wages are usually lower than in other industries. Since these jobs are regarded as inferior in status to male jobs, women are differently paid leading to a gender wage gap. Conclusively, in Nigeria women are under-represented in better paying formal sector jobs and over-represented in the unpaid or low paid informal sectors. As far as earnings are concerned, women are discriminated against male workers not only in informal sector but also in administrative or business and commerce as well as professional jobs.

(3) Ownership inequality: In most of the societies like Nigeria ownership over property and means of production rests mainly on male members. The law of inheritance provides such ownership rights on the male child. Such denial coming out of hierarchical dualism within the family not only reduces the voice of women but also prevent them from participating in commercial, economic and social activities. This kind of social deprivation means

absence or lack of capability and because of capability deprivation, women are subject to various kinds of exploitation.

(4) Survival inequality: Another crudest form of gender inequality is the unusually high-mortality rates of women, though biologically, women live longer than men. Thus, more boys than girls are born everywhere leading to a deficit of women and surplus of men. In Nigeria women receive less care and support than men. There is a strong son preference. Because of this attitude towards women, mortality rates of women are higher than men in Nigeria and other developing countries. This son preference in male dominated societies is not only strong among poor-illiterate parents but also among urban educated rich parents.

(5) Gender bias in the distribution of education and health: Health and education, the two major forms of human capital, are related to economic development. Human capital gets accumulated as a society advance in education. Improvement in health capital also improves the return to investments in education and vice versa. In Nigeria, male children education is preferred to that of female children education. Firstly, being the breadwinner, male child is considered insurance bond of the family. Secondly, male child provides security during old age. All these speak about anti - female bias. Above all, investment in women's education is not worth-while as ultimately a girl child after marriage considers welfare of her husband's family. Anti-female bias in education gets reflected in male-female literacy rate. Parents prefer their male children to be in schools to the female children. The poor state of affairs in women's

education indicates poor state of health. Because of early marriage of female children due to educational denial by parents, women's child bearing age starts earlier. It results not only in frequent pregnancies but also creates problems in caring for new born child. Ultimately, all these lead to high infant mortality rate. Women suffer from illness more than men.

(6) Gender inequality in freedom expression: Women in Nigeria like other developing countries, are not only subject to income or asset inequality but also in terms of freedom and power deprivation of women goes beyond one's imagination. They lack not only economic freedom at home because of absence of autonomy in household decisions, limited or complete absence of property ownership rights and the poor wages earned but also lack any freedom in airing opinions like over education of children. Even in some rural area in Nigeria, the right of women giving opinion is completely denied due to culture and norms that are being practiced there. In addition, one finds tremendous apathy in awarding political power and authority, that is, participation in administrative decision making and political decision making to women. In fact, women are under privileged and are politically marginalized in Nigeria. In government offices, administrative decision rests solely on the male members. In Nigeria, where women are marginalized, the goal of empowerment of women is jeopardized.

(7) Gender inequality in respect of violence and victimization: Anti-female bias starts before the girl child is born and this attitude of the society a female member carries throughout her life. It is because of the unequal sharing

of income, property, household benefits, women are subject to both physical and sexual violence, the opposite of freedom and an extreme form of coercion. This is common in Nigeria, especially during the covid-19 pandemic. One in three women in the world is beaten or raped during her lifetime. Sexual violence is an obnoxious form of human right violation. In addition, with the increase in poverty level during the covid-19 in Nigeria following restriction and lockdown, trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation has become high profit low risk trade for those who organize it.

Causes of gender inequality

There are varied causes of gender inequality ranging from cultural factors to other social causes. Our cultural belief and heritage has not in any way favoured the growth and development of women especially in Nigeria. Gender inequality according to Adamu (2004) is not only a question of social classes but of culture. According to Robert (2015) there are ten causes of gender inequality and these are

- (1) **Uneven-access to education:** In different countries of the world including Nigeria, women still have less access to education than men. One fourth of young women between 15 – 24 years will not finish primary school. That group makes up 58% of the people not completing that basic education. Of all the illiterate people in the world, two third are women.
- (2) **Lack of employment equality:** only 6 countries in the world according to Robert (2015) gives women the legal work rights as men. In fact most countries including Nigeria give women only $\frac{3}{4}$ the rights of men.

(3) **Job segregation:** One of the causes of gender inequality within employment is the division of jobs. In most societies like Nigeria, there is an inherent belief that men are simply better equipped to handle certain jobs. Most of the time, those are the jobs that pay the best. This discrimination results in low income for women. Women also take on the primary responsibility for unpaid workforce, they have extra work that never gets recognized financially.

(4) **Lack of legal protections:** According to research from the world-Bank (2013), over one billion women do not have legal protection against domestic sexual violence or domestic economic violence. Both has significant impact on women's ability to thrive and live in freedom. In many countries of the world like in Nigeria, there is also a lack of legal protection against sexual harassment and sexual assault in the work place, at school and in public. These places become unsafe and without protection women frequently have to make decision that compromise and limit their goals.

(5) **Lack of bodily autonomy:** Many women around the world, especially in Nigeria as a developing country, do not have authority over their own bodies or when they become parents. Accessing birth control is frequently very difficult for the women. According to World Health Organization (2020) over 200 million women who do not want to get pregnant are not using contraception. There are various reasons for this, such as a lack of options, limited access and cultural/religious opposition. On a global scale, about 40% of pregnancies are not planned and while 50% of them do end in abortion, 38% result in births.

These mothers often become financially dependent on another person or the state, losing their freedom.

- (6) **Poor medical care:** In addition to limited access to contraception, women overall in Nigeria receive lower quality medical care. This is linked to other gender inequality reasons such as lack of education and job opportunities which result to more women being in poverty. They are less likely to afford good healthcare. There are also less researches into diseases that affect women more than men, such as autoimmune disorder and chronic pain conditions. Many women also experience discrimination and dismissal from their doctors, broadening the gender gap in healthcare quality.

- (7) **Lack of religious freedom:** When religious freedom is attacked, women suffer the most. When extremist ideologies like Boko Haram come into a community and restrict religious freedom, women suffer more.

- (8) **Lack of political representation:** Women are still grossly underrepresented in government and the political process. This means that certain issues that female politicians tend to bring up such as parental leaves and childcare, gender equality laws and gender-based violence are often neglected.

- (9) **Racism:** It would be impossible to talk about gender inequality without talking about racism. Racism affects what jobs women of colour are able to get and how much they are paid as well as how they are viewed by legal and healthcare systems. Gender inequality and racism have been closely linked for a long time just as the same thing goes for gender inequality and ethnicity in Nigeria.

Women are denied work on the ground of ethnic groups from where they come from in Nigeria. Also, more men are given work than women based on ethnic group.

- (10) **Societal mindsets:** It is less tangible than some of the other causes of gender inequality but the overall mindset of a society has a significant impact on gender inequality. How society determines the differences and value of men and women plays a starring role in every arena whether it is employment, or legal system or healthcare. Beliefs about gender run deep in the society like Nigeria and is common among Nigerians.

Effects of gender inequality

The effects of gender inequality can be felt in different sectors in Nigeria. Gender inequality manifests in all dimensions of human endeavours, social, economic, political and religious sectors to mention but just a few. According to Amartya and Anand (1996) the issue of gender bias has led to different agonizing situation in Nigeria. It has resulted to resources lying idle because of sex. Most women did not acquire basic education because their parents saw them as objects of reproduction and as such money should not be spent on them. Thus, it left many untrained and permanently immobilized economically to contribute in the area of economic development. Gender disparity not only hinders economic progress but also exacerbate social inequality. Women are still disadvantaged compared with men where access to economic and social opportunities is concerned. Some of these gaps, such as dearth of women in government, stem from societal attitudes about gender and leadership.

According to Cook and Razavi (2020), gender inequality puts women in particular at risk of poverty and social exclusion which create barriers to well-being of women. Gender inequality increases the risk of sexual harassment for women. Also, women experience physical violence than men. Women do nearly twice as unpaid work as men. More-older women are at risk of homelessness than men. Women with disabilities experience family violence and sexual harassment than men. There are more unemployed or underemployed women than men as a result of gender inequality.

Also, gender inequality affects children, young people, and other groups in Nigeria. Gender stereotypes affect children's sense of self from a young age. Boys receive more attention even in the families, schools than girls. Also, girls receive less pocket money than boys. Children classify jobs and activities as specific to boys and girls. Young people gender stereotypes affect behavior, ambitions, study choices, attitudes about relationships. Girls take part less in organized sports than boys. Also, a smaller number of girls do mathematics and other mathematics related subjects in the school.

Violence during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria

According to Nnam (2013), violence is an imbalance. It signifies that a given system is not functioning as expected and as a result, needs to be over hauled. Violence during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria manifested in various forms. Some violence was based on struggle for wealth, power and material resources, especially in the distribution of palliatives. Violence was common especially where people and groups suspected fraud, mismanagement and domination in the distribution of palliatives and other resources. Moreover,

women were spending more time queuing for palliatives and there at the centres faced verbal abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assault in the form of violence.

During covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, the very measures taken by the government to protect Nigerians according to Samuels (2020) left women and girls vulnerable to violence. Violence against women took mostly the form of rape, defilement and force sex. Married men and women were forced by the restrictions to stay at home. Many of the wives were sexually harassed and even raped by their husbands whether they like it or not. Women experienced not only sexual exploitation and abuse but also gendered denial of access to basic services. These evidences of sexual exploitation according Samuels (2020) are shown by number of many pregnant women moving in the streets at post-covid-19 pandemic period.

According to Seema (2020) gender-based violence were common during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Although there are no reliable data on the incidences of gender-based violence in Nigeria, during covid-19, wives battering was common. There was increase in the number of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, child abuses, especially the female ones and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. According to Monica (2020) quarantine and school closures put in place to contain the spread of covid-19 in Nigeria left women and adolescent- girls vulnerable to coercion, exploitation and sexual abuse. Women and girls were isolated from the people and resources that helped them and they had few opportunities to distance themselves from their abusers. This resulted to increase in cases of rapes and teenage pregnancies.

According to Singh and Mittal (2020), several researches indicated a rise in family

violence and sexual violence during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. For instance, Kelly and Morgan (2020) reported an increase in wife battering in the face of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria due to suspicion of extra-marital affairs. During the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, women and girls were especially vulnerable to violence because of the inability to escape their abusers. Furthermore, the lockdown according to Kagi (2020) exposed women to harassment and sexual violence when they try to procure necessities such as water, food and firewood. Also, according to Shah (2020) often women do not have right over their sexual choices during the lockdown and consequently, they experience cases of rape, sexual violence and encountered the risk of exposure to the virus through the male-carriers.

Arthur and Clark (2020) reported that increases in male unemployment as a result of covid-19 pandemic was associated with increase in interpersonal violence. There were many cases of kidnapping in Nigeria during covid-19 pandemic associated with male. Thus, Violence is an expression of gender inequality during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper attempted a theoretical discussion of gender inequality, violence during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. It is based on inferences from casual observations, and analysis of relevant literatures and situations during covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Gender inequality in Nigeria is explained by violence during covid-19 pandemic. Gender inequality manifests in different ways in Nigeria. Violence between men and women plays a major role in sustaining gender inequality. Gender base violence did not begin in Nigeria with covid-19 pandemic but the confusion and instability

it caused left women and girls more vulnerable.

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