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## NIGERIJSKÉ ŽENY A PANDÉMIA COVID-19

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### NIGERIAN WOMEN AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Výskyt koronavírusového infekčného ochorenia (COVID-19) koncom roka 2019, jeho rýchle šírenie a celkové účinky na celom svete významne ovplyvnili svet. Pandémia má zásadné dôsledky na národnú a zahraničnú politiku, hospodárstvo a sociálny pokrok. V Nigérii je živobytie výrazne ovplyvnené ekonomickým lockdownom, obmedzeniami pohybu, potrebou izolovať sa a zatváraním škôl. Okrem iného nechávanie školopovinných detí doma znamenalo, že ženy zostali s nimi, čo tiež zvýšilo počet domácich prác, vytváralo sa ďalšie napätie a frustrácia, čo vedlo k nárastu domáceho násillia. Pretrvávanie tohto javu znásobuje rodovú nerovnosť a vytvára všeobecné výzvy, ktorým nigérijské ženy čelia v každodennom živote. Článok sa zameriava na vplyv COVID-19 na rodové otázky prostredníctvom skúmania skúseností žien počas pandémie v Nigérii. Objasňuje vplyv pandémie na sociálne postavenie žien a ich schopnosť a vynaliezavosť toto náročné obdobie zvládnuť.

Kľúčové slová: Nigérijské ženy, COVID-19, rodové násillie, starostlivosť o deti

The emergence of the dreaded Coronavirus infectious disease (CoVid-19) in late 2019, its rapid spread and overall effects across the globe are crucial to contemporary world history. The pandemic has substantial implications on overall nations' politics and foreign policy, economy and social progression. In Nigeria, livelihood is greatly affected by economic lockdown, restrictions to movement, the needs to self-isolate and closure of schools. Among other things, the 'stay at home' of school age children meant that women stay back at home to care for the children which also increased the chores to be done. As lockdown continues to force families to remain together at home, additional tension and frustration are created, leading to increase in domestic abuses. The experiences compound the spate of gender inequality and the generic challenges Nigerian women face in their daily living. This paper

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looks at the gender impacts of CoVid-19 by investigating the internal logic of feminine experiences of the pandemic in Nigeria. It unpacks how women are affected economically, their strategies to survive the pandemic and the implications of these for effecting social change in the post-pandemic era. This is with a view to understanding the dynamics of women's survival ingenuity in challenging situations.

Key words: Nigerian women, CoVid-19, gender violence, childcare

JEL: I18, I15, I38

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus disease (CoVid-19) is the newest of the respiratory infections amongst the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV). The term, CoVid-19, was coined by the World Health Organisation's Global Committee on Taxonomy and Viruses. As if released from the wild, CoVid-19 was first discovered in the Huanan food market in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019. Spreading from there, the deadly infectious disease successfully shattered enduring norms and assumptions about the world. One of the pillars of modern civilization – ability to assure, promote and sustain good health – experienced a seismic shock under momentous pressure in ways that had not occurred in a hundred years. The outbreak of the disease has since led to an ever-increasing global demand and supply of vaccines, lateral testing, use of personal protective equipment (PPEs), mechanical ventilators, medical oxygen, infection control supplies including disinfectants, sanitizers, and other essential medical equipment meant for restricting the spread of CoVid-19. Yet, the continued mutation of the virus leading to the emergence of new strains portend that it has come to stay and would continue to be around the world for a long time to come.

The spread, damage and the consequences of the disease did not only stress and overwhelm enduring and trusted national health systems but also exposed the multilevel fragility hitherto ignored in these systems. CoVid-19 hindered productivity and economic activities, destabilised institutions and eroded human capital. It accentuated and worsened pre-existing inequities, exclusion and poverty, increased risks and vulnerabilities, and enhanced other variants of marginalisation. In acknowledgement of the apocalyptic impacts of the virus the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the infectious disease a global pandemic by March 11, 2020. In response, executive orders temporarily suspending certain segments of human rights including restrictions on movement and public gatherings were signed in many countries as the world locked down. And as telephoning and social media became the only 'safe' havens of human interactions the topical item on the news stream are stories and statistics of survival and of deaths from CoVid-19. For a moment, particularly around the middle of 2020, the world literally stood still.

Meanwhile, the index case of CoVid-19 was reported to have started in Nigeria when an Italian national working in Lagos flew into the commercial city of

Lagos from Milan, Italy, on February 25, 2020 (NCDC 2020). The federal government responded with ban on social gatherings with mechanisms in place to arrest and punish those in defiance. There were shutdown of economic activities and restrictions on movement for people in Abuja, Lagos and Ogun states. Other parts of the federation soon followed. And other preventive measures include increase in screening at border entry points, self-isolation, social distancing of not less than 2 meters, use of hand sanitizer, and washing of hands frequently, all of which were emphasised and publicised through formal and informal media outlets (Adnan 2020, Obiezu 2020, Olurounbi and Bala-Gbogbo 2020).

No doubt, the pandemic changed a lot of things around the world and people responded differently across cultures, religious beliefs and locations. While some take the position that the pandemic was an agenda of politicians to dictate what people should do like staying at home, some are of the belief that the pandemic had occurred due to the impacts of 5G network activation and some maintained that it is a centenary epidemic outbreak. Even though opinion is still diverse with regards to the cause of CoVid-19 and the vaccination that was developed to boost immunity to being infected, there is no disputing that CoVid-19 has left an indelible mark in the sand of time and it is going to take some time for people to revert to the way things used to be. This paper looks at the impacts of CoVid-19 on Nigerian women, how the changes brought about by the pandemic were managed and explore how women are coping with the “new normal” in Nigeria.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW: PROBLEMATIZING THE EXPERIENCE OF NIGERIAN WOMEN AT THE HEIGHT OF COVID-19**

There is a sizeable body of literature on the global impact of CoVid-19. There is a consensus in the literature that livelihood in Nigeria was affected by economic lockdown, fear of the unknown, enforcement of the pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical prevention protocols of CoVid-19. However, the understanding of the impact of the disease on Nigerians through the instrumental rationality does not address the emerging scenarios related to Nigerian women’s responses towards CoVid-19 prevention protocols, for example, issues of wearing of face-masks, regular washing of hands, needs for self-isolation, and emergence of quarantine centres. However, the understanding of the impact of the disease on Nigerians through the instrumental rationality and national security logic is misleading. It is because the national security lens is incapable of grasping the comprehensive picture of women’s puzzling responses. Therefore, Nigerian women’s responses to CoVid-19 need appropriations from the perspective of human security rather than a perspective of national security. This is because existing literature on the impact of the disease in Nigeria tends to be state-centric. The state-centric approach is bedevilled with status quo bias. In this frame of reference, the emphasis has been given to explaining the existing security

situation rather than engaging the changing realities. Thus, state-centric approaches do not address the emerging scenarios related to Nigerian women's responses towards the challenges, for example, issues of wearing of face-masks, regular washing of hands, needs for self-isolation, and emergence of quarantine centres.

Overall, limited attention has been paid to how Nigerian women respond to the situation. The few scholarly articles which attempt to examine the responses of Nigerians to the challenges posed by the disease are not only superficial in nature but completely ignored the responses of women vis-à-vis their peculiar situations. Even though disempowerment is a shared misfortune of many Nigerians during the pandemic irrespective of gender, one may still discern differentiated experiences across gender divisions. Thus, since the literature had inadvertently omitted the responses of women (who form a significant proportion of those affected by the pandemic) it is impossible to have a holistic picture of the dimensions of and responses to the CoVid-19 in Nigeria.

In discerning the intersections of Nigerian women's lived experiences, the strategic struggles for survival and the need for a leap from the cultural subjugation of women, this section explores extant literature on the difficulties faced by Nigerian women at the peak of the pandemic. Since Nigeria got its index case of CoVid-19 on February 27, 2020, the virus has posed immense challenges, multifarious and multifaceted secondary impacts to all and sundry in Nigeria. Kuforiji, Fajana and Agboola (2020) posit that the CoVid-19 pandemic had significant effect on the contract of employment, manpower ratio and employees' mental health and concluded that the disease has brought new managerial insight into employment relations in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. Thus, CoVid-19 brought about restrictions on global and local mobility including closure of businesses with implications on employers' ability to honour contract of employment. Yet, Prem, Liu, Russell, Kucharski, Eggo and Davies (2020) believe the introduction of physical and social distancing measures are inevitable in the bid to slow down the spread of the disease. In response, Hamouche (2020) focused on the mental health implications of the need for social distancing measures noting that cognitive distress, anxiety and depression are the results.

However, these impacts are gendered and variegated (Sili 2020, Lewis 2020). As suggested in some literature, women are the hardest hit by epidemics because they bear the brunt of caring for children orphaned by widespread diseases resulting into rapid deaths (Human Rights Watch 2017, Bandiera et al. 2018). However, like other women around the world, Nigerian women suffer more socioeconomic costs of CoVid-19 than the pandemic itself. This is made more evident by Polglase et al. (2020) who opine that 70% of those dying from the CoVid-19 infection are men. Although women are disproportionately affected in relation to the toll that the pandemic have or had on

them (CARE 2020, UN 2020), there are more longer-term and secondary repercussions in terms of the political, economic, social and psychological implications on them.

As part of its response to stem transmission and infection through non-pharmaceutical response, the Nigerian government on 29th March 2020 imposed a lockdown in some parts of the country including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Lagos State and Ogun State. These cities were regarded as the epicenter for the virus. All schools and businesses in these States closed, except for businesses selling essential items such as groceries and medicines. Several states across the country including Adamawa, Bauchi and Kaduna states also imposed similar lockdowns. Although social distancing is a privilege many Nigerian can ill afford, there were restrictions on domestic movements and international travels; shut down of public and private offices, institutions and establishments including markets and worship centers; and restriction of gathering in all places.

Even though the closure of public spaces, restriction of movement, domestic isolation and forced quarantine may have resulted in positive drift-on effects for the spread of CoVid-19, such hardline measures complicated an already precarious vicious cycle of patriarchal and hetero-normative regimes which have been preserving the control of men over the bodies, mobility, dress codes, personal relations and sexuality of women (Pateman 2018) and thereby shrunk women's life-spaces. Subsequent sub-headings discuss some of the changes brought about by the pandemic and the implications for women.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The paper is conceptual and qualitative in nature. It draws insights from secondary sources such as scholarly exegesis and empirical historical evidence. The outcome of this forms the substance of the descriptive analysis to fit a conceptual scheme of the paper using world system theory as postulated by Wallerstein (1976). The basic assumption of world system theory according to Wallerstein is that the global social system had to be analysed within the context of a world system. A system has two main characteristics, the first – all the galaxies of power (Political, Economic and Social) within the system are interlinked, and they exist in dynamic relationships with each other. Secondly, life existence within the system is more or less self-contained i.e. happenings within the society can be explained by internal factors alone. In other words though the outbreak of CoVid-19 is systemic in scope, it is local in terms of underlying impacts. And, for convenience of systematic arrangement of thought, the thrust of analysis is schematically presented under a number of themes and sub-themes carefully formulated to prosecute the paper's derived assumption to wit: Nigerian women are negatively impacted by global epidemics as exemplified in the CoVid-19 pandemic.

#### **4 RESULTS: ECONOMIC CHANGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN WOMEN DURING COVID-19**

It is no news that Africa bears a disproportionate burden of poverty and disease, which have now been more exacerbated by the CoVid-19 pandemic (Ataguga 2020). A few studies have argued that the pandemic has strengthened and increased the level of poverty due to loss of productivity and reduced financial empowerment for Nigerian people (Laouan 2020, Mahler et al. 2020, Plan International 2020). However, compared to “regular” recessions, which affect men’s employment more severely than women’s, the employment drop related to social distancing measures has a large impact on sectors with high female employment shares (Alon et al. 2020).

For instance, during the 2008 recession, men experienced loss of employment much more than women and as Alon et al. (2020) describe, this was because relatively more men work in industries including the manufacturing and construction which were heavily affected. On the contrary, CoVid-19 has a big impact on service occupations with high female employment shares such as restaurants, hospitality and those in other informal sectors. The informal sector inclusive of hairdressing, road-side trading, home making, tailors and recharge card selling has provided opportunities for Nigerians who are unable to secure employment in the formal sector and this sector has come to stay as a panacea for the social and livelihood survival of vulnerable Nigerians (Omobowale 2019). Even though, this is not always the case for some who lack the initial capital and support to start up informal businesses.

The simplicity with which the informal sector provides access to work and livelihood is not unconnected to the ease of entry and exit, avoidance of tax payment and the informality which characterised it. However, working in this sector is insecure in terms of job security including the conditions and environment. According to Omobowale et al. (2020), the insecurity with the informal sector was made more predominant by the pandemic. This is because livelihood in the informal sector is characterised by daily earning and the interpretive economy among informal actors is “no daily work, no income” which means no income translates to poverty. The pandemic promoted easy progression into abject poverty for informal sector workers who are already at the fringe of poverty as they lost their daily income due to restrictions in movement and lockdown of economic activities.

Local governments, politicians and charity organisations provided palliatives to people, but these were grossly inadequate. As Omobowale et al. (2020) discussed, informal sector actors resorted to viewing that being denied of their daily income and livelihood was deadlier than the coronavirus itself given their precarious statuses in pre-pandemic period. There were protests in cities especially in Lagos where people were chanting “hunger virus is worse than coronavirus”. The situation for the informal sector actors was made more complicated in informal worker female-headed households where the women are the breadwinner of the families.

This is more of the case for single-mothers or widows who shoulder the responsibilities to meet all the needs of their children. There is no gainsaying in the fact that in such home situations where the pandemic has made poverty more precarious than meeting basic needs such as food difficult, girls and women are made vulnerable to sexual abuse and assault in their attempts to survive. By limiting incomes

and individuals' liberties, economic lockdowns cut off avenues of support and escape while social distancing reinforces the isolation that abusers impose. Coupled with the decrease in access to health institutions stretched by CoVid-19, more cases of unwanted pregnancies and maternal mortality rates were recorded (Population Council 2020, Refugees International 2020, Women for Women International 2020).

On the other hand of the sector are the health sector workers and professionals including the nurses, health care assistants, community health workers, caregivers and teachers, most of who are women and exposed to CoVid-19. At the same time, these women are the main caregivers in the family (Horn 2020). As women continue to carry the burden of care, which is already disproportionately high in normal times, they are further exposed to contracting and spreading coronavirus to their loved ones.

Overall, in the economic sphere, Nigerian women were vulnerable to the economic changes occasioned by the pandemic as they were over-represented in insecure lower paid jobs in the informal sector and mainly operate small and micro enterprises to ensure their day-to-day survival. While government-imposed restrictions on physical movement are necessary, they tend to create multiple economic disadvantages for women, which heightened their overall vulnerability to the pandemic, particularly from the occupational epidemiology and mental health perspectives.

#### **4.1 Hike in violence against women and girls during CoVid-19**

Staying at home and other pandemic related restrictions for vulnerable women and girls saw a spike in reports and several high-profile cases. In just the first two weeks of restrictions, reports of violence rose by 56% around the country especially in households where there is poverty, food insecurity and mental health issues. In fact, it was reported that intimate partners in married or unmarried relationships and in same or opposite sex couples perpetrated violence for the first time during the lockdown. The strict movement restrictions further subjected women and girls to be trapped in abusive homes which then increased the frequency of violence with no respite.

The situations were more complicated for women and girls with disabilities as they experienced greater control and abuse from their partners and or caregivers. There is concern that the rate of early and forced marriage and genital mutilation may have grown twice as girls were not seen by professionals in schools or outside of their homes. This could have also been exacerbated by poverty and incapacity of parents to who could not afford to feed their girls and marrying them off to ensure their basic needs are being met.

The statistics from the Nigerian Police Force show that 717 rape cases were reported across Nigeria between January and June 2020 (Awodipe 2020). However, this research is unable to connect utterances of potential male violence against women to actual sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against any specific woman. This is partly because reportage of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Nigeria succumbed to the cultural norm of silence.<sup>1</sup> That informs the non-availability of official statistics, and

where available the victim-perpetrator relationship is often omitted. Notwithstanding, it is fair to assume that the forced proximity to intimate but abusive male partners in the private sphere leads to more patriarchal violence and other forms of toxic masculinity (Adetayo 2020). The lack of an appropriate sample of cases is less apt to mean that our arguments are incorrect than that they are constrained by the fact that women are the hidden faces in Nigeria.

Generally, women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing increased gender-based violence including domestic abuse, because of prolonged periods of confinement within homes and increased tensions within households due to economic hardships. The closure of schools for an extended period is also likely to lead to increased drop-out rates among girls, which can increase the prevalence of child marriage in communities where early marriage is already widely practiced. Furthermore, with health and law enforcement services burdened with responding to the CoVid-19 outbreak, access to GBV and sexual and reproductive health services is limited.

#### **4.2 Childcare and other social implications of CoVid-19 for Nigerian women**

The CoVid-19 pandemic discourages informal care provided by grandparents due to the higher mortality rate for the elderly and worst still; the need for social distancing measures discourages sharing childcare with neighbours and friends. Since the CoVid-19 pandemic involves large-scale closures of daycare centres and schools, children were made to stay at home, where they must be cared for and (if possible) educated. The closures of schools are a large shock (EiEWG 2020) and it ultimately has impacts on education – on which one of the 2030 targeted United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) centered.

Given the existential gender norms, role model distribution including social expectations around caring responsibilities amongst most Nigerian families, women have fewer choices but to watch their kids themselves. As the resident source of social identity, Nigerian women provide a disproportionate share of housework including cooking, cleaning and childcare. Apparently, the persisting gender discrimination birthed by expected and actual childbirth as well as inequality in the Nigerian labour market is related to the unequal division of labour in most Nigerian household.

CoVid-19 has big impacts on such service occupations like healthcare, education, restaurants and hospitality with high female employment shares. Many frontline workers such as medical doctors, nurses and community health workers including health facility service-staff (such as cleaners, laundry and catering staff) who cannot work from home during the pandemic are women (Knox-Peebles 2020). Other critical businesses that continue operating during the crisis include grocery stores and pharmacies, both of which feature high female employment shares. And since women are disproportionately at the forefront of fighting the disease, they bear the largest



chunk of the anxiety, anger, depression and reduced mental health consequences of the anticipation or expectation of contracting the virus.

Yet, the sudden spike in childcare duties compounds, for women, the challenge of combing parental responsibilities with working as frontline or essential (health, food/consumables, security, banking/finance, transport, etc.) workers during the pandemic. Consequently, with the erosion of the remaining psychosocial networks of support from friends and extended families which are crucial for women's survival in times of crises, many Nigerian women felt lonely, overburdened, stressed and broken by the lifestyle changes. In all, while the world turns its attention to one plague, its gender-blind response to the pandemic sows the seeds of more suffering.

At this juncture, the contributions of women to society through their roles as major childcare providers can no longer be considered an indulgence grudgingly accepted by a patriarchal society. Rather, they are an imperative for societal success. To promote that success, childcare needs to be constitutionally democratised with women's participation placed within the broader context of social challenges. Given the marginalisation incurred by Nigerian women due to pre-existing socioeconomic inequities, the opportunity cost of childcare in crisis situations like the CoVid-19 pandemic must be brought to the realm of social and public debate with the specific aim to distribute such cost if not a proper compensation for all forms and kinds of work.

On a positive note, studies have suggested that the lockdown has fostered parent-child relationship, which is significant to nurturing physical, emotional and social development of a child (Bartlett et al. 2020, Akinsanya et al. 2020). This relationship lays the foundation for a child's personality, life choice and overall behaviour. The reason for the high social needs of children being met by their parents could be because of the lockdown/restrictions in the individual's movement during the CoVid-19 pandemic which made parents to be forced to remain at home. Children enjoyed the relationships with their parents better than before when parents concentrated mainly on their jobs to the detriment of their children; leaving home early to work and return home late, where children hardly enjoy parent-child cohesion. This implies that, the pandemic has obliged the parents to express better love, affection, relationship and positive interactions.

#### **4.3 The Provision of Support Palliatives**

Without doubt, the history of almost six decades of crises in Nigeria has benefited only a tiny fraction of the predominantly male elites to the neglect (and often detriment) of many Nigerians. This is not surprising, bearing in mind that the history (and politics) of crisis has also been aptly described as the history, and politics, of imperialism, par excellence (World Bank 2019, Adhiambo 2020). However, support palliatives – conditional cash transfers, food supplies, tax relief, interest rates

reduction, distribution of alcohol-based sanitizer and face masks – were provided to Nigerians by various government and non-government organizations (NGOs) during the pandemic.

If the Nigerian government has paid little attention to ameliorating people's concern during previous pandemics, the same cannot be said for CoVid-19. But while government's support palliative is extremely valuable identifying with the people's challenges it is marred by four major faults. First, zero attention was paid to the interests of sectorial groups like women. The distributional criteria were theoretically designed with neutrality which achieved the non-random objective of ensuring that existing inequality continue to fester. In practice however, the zeal behind the distribution is novel but the logic is not: The criteria are neither broad-based, unconditional nor amount to gender representation. Almost all the relief programmes rely on the requirements (often unstated) that female beneficiaries represent non-gendered interests of male-dominated capital, class, ethnicity, locality, political party, religion.

These requirements, which of course politely eschewed gender, are no doubt informed by an inaccurate presumptive supposition that Nigerian women neither hold the decisive end of the social stick nor do they often represent potent potentially explosive forces. In the light of that and to the extent that women's claim to comfort derives from their social navigation of the structures of power through relationships with men, the benefits can only reinforce the very basis of women's subordinate status.

Second, Nigeria scaled up its cash transfer programme by increasing the National Social Register of poor and vulnerable households from 1.1 million households to 3.7 million households (15.5 million individuals). This is even though the 2019 Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS) shows that about 83 million Nigerians live in poverty (NBS 2020). That of course means that 81% of the Nigerian poor are excluded from the National Social Register.

Interestingly, while the price of crude oil plummeted at the global market the Nigerian government hikes the pump price of premium petrol variously from NGN 121 to NGN 162. Electricity tariff was likewise jerked up from NGN 30.32 to NGN 60.32 per kWh. All these while the socioeconomic effects of the tumultuous pandemic bite hard on Nigerians. That means that in terms of coverage, size and target, government policies are not just flawed but plugged more and more Nigerian women into destitute situations.

Third, and related to the above, despite high public interests in mitigating the effects of the CoVid-19 pandemic on the disempowered sections of society through the provision of support resources, just as it were under previous neo-liberal macroeconomic policies, Nigerian women did not experience sufficient support and aid to meet their basic needs from family, community or the Nigerian government. For instance, the amount disbursed to those on the National Social Register, NGN 5000

(equivalent of US\$ 13) per month, cannot cover the cost of a basic nutritious diet for a household of four. Thus, weigh against the enduring needs of Nigerians the interventions are necessarily limited but grossly inadequate, ineffectual and deplorable. The arrogant deadness of the palliatives compounded the mistrust, frustration and alienation which sustain the social fragilities of Nigeria.

Lastly, by failing to take cognisance of pre-existing inequality, the distribution of CoVid-19 support resources in Nigeria runs the risk of, in the best case, halfheartedly engaging their challenges or, in the worst case, out-rightly ignoring it. Both present tremendous risk to the sustainability of the entire CoVid-19 response in Nigeria. In any case, if the experiential worldview of Nigerian women (a large part of the population) forms the prism through which CoVid-19 socio-economic responses in Nigeria is understood the provision of emergency social palliatives might be technically viable but they are ill-suited while economic and social essence are of questionable value. In the meantime, the absence of necessary contextual analysis prior to the design and implementation of the mitigating measures is symptomatic of the shortage of gender-based lens in CoVid-19 response. These defects underline a distraction from the potential of the palliatives to effectively mitigate the questions of post pandemic vibrancy.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

No matter how one looks at it the nature and impact of the CoVid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is gendered. Nigerian women suffered more of the secondary effects of the disease by having to cope with the unending demands of patriarchy which were cemented by the processes for flattening the curve of the disease. Coincidentally, the pandemic happens at a time of economic recessions and period of great crisis for Nigeria. Compounded by limited economic stimulus actions CoVid-19 threatened to create long-term gaps in terms of girls' education as well as women's participation in formal paid labour, which in turn risks strengthening traditional patriarchal gender norms and the division of labour within the household and the economy. Women who still had jobs during the pandemic for working on the frontline tend to do even more housework than before. Feeling overburdened, stressed, less independent and, at the same time, lonely and missing support networks of friends and extended families, were common thread for Nigerian women during the pandemic.

As Lewis (2020) puts it, the world is witnessing an unprecedented increase in domestic violence. This is so as stress, alcohol consumption and financial difficulties brought about by the pandemic trigger violence in the home, and the quarantine measures being imposed around the world increase these. Her assessment resonates with feminist campaigners and activists who report significant increases in domestic violence. Therefore, to enhance the transformation from the "new normal" to the way things were and even better in pre-pandemic period, the government at local and

national level can prioritise economic stimulus packages to support socio-economic recovery for the most vulnerable women. This can include developing targeted women's economic empowerment interventions and facilitating cash transfer programmes to mitigate the impact of the outbreak and supporting them to recover and build resilience to future shocks. The government, private sectors and development partners can adopt affirmative procurement measures through the procurement of goods and services from women-owned businesses and cooperatives. Whether the Nigerian state will summon the political will to do this needful is yet to be seen.

However, beyond the pandemic, there are opposing forces which may ultimately promote gender equality in economic spheres and in the Nigerian society. First, businesses are rapidly adopting flexible work arrangements, which are likely to persist. Second, there are also many fathers who now must take primary responsibility for childcare, which may erode social norms that currently lead to a lopsided distribution of the division of labour in housework and childcare. Civil society is going ahead to push more of the agenda that takes women's rights as human rights which must be safeguarded by all means irrespective of the outbreak of global pandemic. Above all, Nigerian women are themselves coming to realise that not much can be achieved within the social fabric of Nigeria unless both sexes engage themselves in fruitful discussion on their roles and place within the Nigerian society.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Self-reflexivity is a central thesis in African geographies of social humanism and critical discourse. In particular, Nigerian women's preoccupation with productive (and reproductive) responsibilities of maintaining family ties and protecting children manifests an insight into their capacity to accommodate a vagary of peculiar structural inequalities as can be attested to in the pre- and post-pandemic activism. This is less a testimony to Nigerian women's intellectual weakness, complacency or quiescent patterns of thought. It is a testimony to the centuries of discriminations sustained by a hostile patrimonial system which entrench and perpetuate traditional and institutional taboos, myths and stereotypes to blunt out consciousness, and frustrate and prevent women's contribution to the public sphere. However, the need to reconfigure the social conception of Nigerian women's engagement with the CoVid-19 crisis in ways that take due cognisance of the broad context of societal progress has become pertinent. In an era when the forces of neoliberal triumphalism privilege the needs of international mercantile capitalism by perpetrating the free enterprise paradigm in varying degrees, social activism, and specifically, gender actions, remain a potent avenue of ventilating the ravaging effects and making definite statements. This research focuses on the psychology of survivals that help solidify Nigerian women's positions along with the undercurrent of class and resources accumulation that ultimately frame it. It is in recognition of this fact that the study considers the women groups, information

volunteering and the quest for social justice as critical tools in the search for stable peace in Nigeria. The issue in existing critical scholarship that this study confronts is that Nigerian women are denied agency as they are framed as unwilling or choice-less victims of a brutal apparatus of violence.

Theoretically, the legal and constitutional positions of Nigerians are the same but the position of womanhood is empirically inferior to those of their male counterpart in the country. Nigerian women's experience at the margins of sociopolitical life has given them a perspective on social issues that provides insights into Nigerian affairs. The views constitute valid insights into Africa. The subordination of women Nigerian women is sustained by turning them into homemakers, housewives and mothers (who are dependent on male breadwinners) in a confinement to the private sphere within the division of society into distinct public and private spheres of life. The women are further made to depend on the patriarch state as clients of state services (childcare institutions, nurseries, schools and social services) and employees in the so-called 'caring professions (such as nursing, social work and education). While the private sphere embodies family and domestic life the public sphere encapsulate education, politics and work. The theoretical foundation of human nature as basically androgynous is useful in this instance. Since all human beings, regardless of their sexes, possess the genetic inheritance of a mother and a father, and therefore embody a blend of both female and male attributes and traits women should not be judged by their sex, but as individuals, as 'persons'. Whatever differences women are said to have to men are artificial and typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

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**Note:**

1. The case of Vera Uwaila Omozuwa, raped and killed while studying in a church in Benin, Edo State; Tina Ezekwe who was 16 at the time of her death was shot by a police officer; and the rape of a 12-year-old in Jigawa State who had been kept as a sex slave for two months by twelve adult men Nigeria are three notable exceptions of reported sexual assault.