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Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Nigerian Girl-Child and Suggested Remedies



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Abstract

This paper assessed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian girl-child and suggested remedies to the problem. The objectives of the paper were to assess the impact of COVID-19 on educational development of the girl-child, the relationship between COVID-19 and gender-based violence, as well as COVID-19 and protection rights of the child. The scope of the study covers the Nigerian society particularly northern Nigeria where girl-child education is predominantly low. The methodology of the study was based on quantitative approach and data were collected from secondary sources mainly journals articles, bulletins and magazine publications on COVID-19. From the assessment, it was discovered that the major impact of COVID-19 on the Nigerian girl-child are basically in the areas of education, child protection, gender-based violence, health services and economic well-being. It was discovered that COVID-19 has led to the drop-out of the girl-child from school as well as a learning gap due to the lockdown and other strategies put in place curtail the spread of the disease. Schools were temporarily closed after which many students did not resume after the schools were re-opened. From the findings of the study, it was therefore concluded that COVID-19 has negative consequences on girl-child education in Nigeria. The suggested remedies to the impact of COVID-19 on the girl-child include government looked into investing in alternate pathways to education. No one should be left behind. Structures should be put in place by all levels of government using tools like print, radio to ensure students are learning. There should be more community engagement in these areas since an online solution might not work for them because of poor internet connection and electricity. A support system should be created for them with the structures on ground already. Teachers and volunteers can have a well-organized way of engaging the children and the private sector helping to sponsor relevant infrastructure in order to bridge the gap. Corporate Social Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have to be engaged, to create a pool of volunteers that can engage students in an informal setting following the government's social distancing guidelines to bridge the gap for these children.

Keywords: Impact; COVID-19; Pandemic Girl-child; Remedies.

1. Introduction

The importance of girl-child education cannot be over-emphasized. This is because the girl-child is a major factor socialization in the society therefore, her level of education directly impacts on the socio-economic development of a nation. However, in recent times, girl-child education has been hampered by COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020). The COVID-19 is a new virus, which has caused huge havoc across the globe and its resulted in it being studied by scientists, researchers, and medical practitioners. Some of the best ways of flattening the curve of the spread of the virus as advised by medical personnel are to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, its impact on the health of individuals and how it spreads (Adamu, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the near-total closures of schools, universities and colleges. Most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19. As of 7 June 2020, approximately 1.725 billion learners are currently affected due to school closures in response to the pandemic. According to UNICEF (2020), 134 countries are currently implementing nationwide closures and 38 are implementing local closures, impacting about 98.5 percent of the world's student population (Femi *et al.*, 2020).

School closures due to COVID-19 impact not only on students, teachers, and families but have far-reaching economic and societal consequences. School closures in response to the pandemic have shed light on various social and economic issues, including student debt, digital learning, and homelessness, as well as access to childcare, healthcare, housing and internet. The coronavirus pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the near-total global closure of institutions of learning. Countries across the world are returning to the drawing board to develop strategies to rescue their education sector which is being damaged by the deadly virus. Virtually all institutions of learning have been ordered to be temporarily shut as part of plans to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lagos State Domestic Sexual and Violence Response Team DSVRT, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences on education systems all over the world, with Nigeria not being an exception. This has resulted in a nationwide lockdown by Governments, which is greatly impacting not only school closures but also physical/social distancing and change from normal routines of people. In Nigeria, the Federal government announced the indefinite postponement of the 2020 West African Examination Council and the National Examinations Council (NECO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation is depressing. The statistics are scary and the consequences are severe. The numbers are unprecedented and the implications are enormous. Never before have so many children and youths been out of school at the same time. Some students especially the female gender might not go back to school by the end of lockdown period. This may be due to early marriage, pre-marital pregnancy, rape or other forms of sexual or gender based violence (Majama'a *et al.*, 2020). Another factor that creates an impediment to the girl-child getting back to school will be the deteriorating economic situation of families. Due to the decline in family income, some families may choose to prioritise male education over female education as this has always been the case in northern Nigeria. The COVID19 pandemic is bound to impact on several facets of human life especially for women, children and other vulnerable populations. This paper will assess the impact of COVID-19 on various facets of life especially as it relates to the girl-child in Nigeria.

2. Impact of Covid-19 on Girl-Child Education and Suggested Remedies

2.1. COVID-19 Pandemic and Girl-Child Education

Girl child education has been an area of long-term advocacy by nongovernmental organisations, development partners, etc in Nigeria. There have been different reasons that have been pushed to justify no or limited education for the girl child in Nigeria. There have been attempts at improving the registration rates of girls in schools so that they can get good education (Femi *et al.*, 2020). However, with the advent of COVID-19, the effort of the Nigerian government was frustrated as schools were forced to remain closed for a long period of time. According to Rolake (2020), the closure of schools over a long period has negative consequence on girl-child education among which are; disruption of learning, dropout of the girl-child from school and poor economic conditions of families thereby resulting in some families giving out the girl-child into early marriage to relieve themselves of the economic burden of catering for the girl-child.

In order to address the problem of girl-child education in COVID-19 era, it is necessary the government through its education agencies to embark on a search for innovative ways of ensuring continuity and retention of the girl-child in school. This could be through public enlightenment campaigns and socio-economic support for the education of the girl-child such as scholarships and making education tuition-free in Nigeria.

3. COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender-Based Violence

According to the World Health Organization (2020), 1 in 3 women/girls worldwide experience physical and/or sexual gender-based violence by their partner or perpetrators in their lifetime. Violence against women/girls tends to increase during every type of emergency, including epidemic. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been a decline in the accessibility of services of various external caregivers in homes such as nannies, cooks, gardeners, among others and this effect is likely to fall directly on women who are the primary caregivers as this could bring about unease and make them more stressed and more vulnerable to all forms of violence such as sexual gender-based violence, domestic violence, and exploitation.

According to a report by the Lagos State Domestic Sexual and Violence Response Team DSVRT (2020), report on domestic violence has tripled since March 2020 (during the lockdown period) compared to the reports they had pre the lockdown period. The DVSRT stated that they now receive an average of 8 calls and 7 cases on their social media platforms daily. This is as a result of the fact that survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence are basically stuck with their abusers due to the COVID-19's lockdown as some use their jobs, schools or other activities as a means of escape before the pandemic. The police being the primary law enforcement agency with the responsibility of protecting lives and properties of all citizens are presently tasked with the ensuring that citizens comply with the lockdown directives the Federal and State governments which is one of the national strategies to contain the spread of the COVID19 virus in the country. As it relates to response to sexual gender-based violence, it means that perpetrators may not be arrested and/or charged to court. However, survivors might still be able to access other support services such as medical, psychosocial, shelter, etc during this period. NGOs are coming up with

innovative methods of providing support to survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence during this period using technology-driven tools as the primary tool for engagement and access (Max and Esteban, 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

From the assessment in this paper, the following findings were made:

1. COVID-19 has negative consequences on girl-child education in Nigeria. It has led to disruption of learning, dropout from school, teenage pregnancy and early marriage
2. COVID-19 has increased the level sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria. This is evident in the increased rate of gender-based violence and rape during the lockdown period.
3. The results of the study has revealed that COVID-19 has affected the policies put in place to improve girl-child education in Nigeria. As a result the pandemic, resources meant for upgrading girl-child education were diverted into ameliorating the effects of COVID-19 on the society.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the assessment in this paper, it can be concluded that COVID-19 has negative consequences on girl-child education in Nigeria. It has led to learning gap, dropout of school, unwanted pregnancy and early marriage. Therefore, in order to remedy the impact of COVID-19 on girl-child education, the following solutions were proffered:

1. Government and non-governmental organizations should embark on an enlightenment campaign to ensure girl-child enrollment and retention in school
2. Early marriage should be outlawed and discouraged in Nigeria
3. Basic ICT facilities such as computers and other electronic media should be provided in schools in Nigeria to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on learning. Virtual Learning Interface (VIL) should be adopted by instructors in schools to ensure continuity in learning amidst COVID.

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