

Covid 19 and Gender-Based Violence in Ekiti State

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Abstract: The topic of discussion for this research was the controversy around claims that the Covid-19 had detrimental impacts on families. The stringent lockdowns that were implemented in response to the Covid-19 outbreak had a significant effect on the lives of African families. Harmful repercussions include physical and sexual abuse, violence against partners, especially women, violence against children, and different types of domestic violence. In light of this, the lockdown, which was supposed to protect individuals from a potentially lethal circumstance, instead ended up posing a greater risk to their safety. The research and conclusions presented in this article have shown that GBV has been an issue in Nigeria and elsewhere in the globe for a very long time. On the other hand, the Covid-19 epidemic has made the problem far worse, since there is compelling evidence to suggest that GBV has significantly increased since the outbreak first started. The scenario in the Ekiti states is a further reflection of a growing trend toward an increase in gender-based violence. As a direct consequence of this, the choice was taken to carry out this research study in the state of Ekiti. This is a focus group discussion. 38 respondents were in this discussion but only 9 were used to represent the population. This was because; only the selected 9 understood the information well.

Keywords: Gender Based Violence, Covid19, Ekiti State, feminism

1. INTRODUCTION

Current works of literature on gender-based violence (GBV) contend that the advent of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic lead to an increase in violence against women in Africa. (Olofinbiyi, 2021) This was primarily due to the lockdown which meant everyone was expected to stay inside their homes. It had been projected by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFP) that for every three months that the lockdown persists, an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence are anticipated. (Iheanacho, 2021) Likewise, nearly half of the women questioned in a rapid assessment undertaken by UN Women in Libya at the start of the outbreak feared an increase of violence at home. (Oladele, 2020) Moreover, the accounts of violence against women (VAW) around the world as a result of covid-19 proved this fear to be correct, with many countries reporting increases of up to 25% in countries with reporting systems in place. (Eteng & Eyisi, 2022) The pandemic has an in-depth impact on harmful practices against women and girls, such as the abolition of child marriage and female genital mutilation. (Jenyo, 2020) As a result, this literature review reveals that gender data from across Africa are beginning to show that COVID19 has magnified gender inequalities, putting women and girls at greater risk of gender-based violence (GBV). (Turquet et al, 2020) This literature review examines existing data on the increase of gender-based violence during the Covid-19 in Africa. Secondly, this literature review seeks to determine whether there are any existing works of literature to justify the existence of gender-based violence in Ekiti state during the pandemic.

2. INCREASE IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) DURING COVID 19

Before the pandemic, the emerging global data indicated that 243 million women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 had been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021) In other words, substantial levels of violence against women existed before the COVID-19 epidemic. According to the United Nations women, nearly two-thirds of

women (65%) in the following countries Bangladesh, Kenya, Morocco, Jordan and Nigeria have been exposed to at least one type of violence against women at some point in their lives. (Jenyo, 2020) However, the COVID-19 pandemic's social and economic burden intensified the pre-existing harmful social norms and gender inequalities. (Uzobo & Ayinmor, 2021) The pandemic further exacerbated gender-based violence against women during the lockdown. (Ojatorotu & Olajide, 2021) Women who had already been subjected to violence before the pandemic appeared more vulnerable to violence during the lockdown than those who do not have a history of domestic violence. (Aborisade, 2022) According to the World Health Organization, prior tolerance of violence is a factor that promotes gender-based violence. (Enrique, 2004) However, in some instances 78 per cent of the cases of violence recorded during the lockdown were de novo, meaning that the women were assaulted for the first time during the lockdown. (Sediri et al, 2020)

According to Dlamini, many countries from both developing and developed economies reported an increase in GBV during the lockdown. (Dlamini, 2021) In 2021, the United Nations Women conducted a Rapid Gender Assessment survey on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women (VAW RGAs) in 13 countries. Nigeria is included in the 13 countries studied. (Dlamini, 2021) The survey revealed that COVID-19 has resulted in a significant increase in violence against women, negatively affecting a woman's emotional stability and mental health. (Jenyo, 2020) Since the beginning of the epidemic, 45 per cent of women have been directly or indirectly exposed to at least one kind of violence against women (i.e., they or other women they know have experienced one or more forms of violence). Kenyan women were the most exposed (80%), followed by Moroccan women (69%), Jordanians (49%), and Nigerian women (48%). (Folami & Barake, 2022) In the case of Nigeria, after the lockdown restrictions were introduced on March 31, 2019, the number of recorded cases of domestic violence increased by 56 per cent in the first two weeks of April compared to the same period in March, according to data from 24 states throughout the country. Domestic abuse cases increased by almost 100 per cent in Lagos State during the lockdown period (as of 14 April 2019) when compared to the number of instances reported for the full month of March. (Aborisade, 2022)

Furthermore, in a study conducted in six Sahelian countries, physical or verbal domestic violence increased by 12% from 40.6 per cent before the COVID-19 crisis to 52.2 per cent during the pandemic crisis. Chad, Senegal, and Mali all had an increase of 30%, 14%, and 10%, respectively.

On the other hand, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger have seen a decline of less than 10%. (Eche, 2020) According to the Ministry of Women, Family, and Childhood in Tunisia, domestic violence spiked sevenfold during the lockdown. (Sediri, 2020) In Cameroon, a study on the gender impact of the Covid-19 conducted in May 2020 indicated that nearly 4 out of 10 (35.8%) respondents have witnessed an increase in violence in their families. Men (35.2 per cent) and women (35.2 per cent) both see the increase (36 per cent). The increase could be due to movement constraints, a decline in financial resources, or population fear.

Further research in South Africa by the United Nations Women indicate that the South African Police Services (SAPS) received 2,320 accusations of gender-based violence during the first week of the level 5 lockdown, but only 148 related charges were filed. These figures reflect a 37% increase over the weekly average of gender-based violence (GBV) infections reported in South Africa in 2019. (Amanaghawon & Salawu, 2020) Additionally, the GBV Command Centre in South Africa documented an increase in gender-based violence instances reported during the lockdown, with a total of 10,660 phone calls, 1503 unstructured supplementary services data (USSD), and 616 SMSs reported between March 27 and April 16. The Centre received 674 instances on April 16th alone. (Smith, 2020) Also, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases in the East African Community (EAC) Partner States reported to the police or through GBV Toll-Free lines increased by 48 per cent across the area, according to ministries responsible for gender. (Oladele, 2020) Similarly, in Tunisia, the Ministry of Women Affairs' helpline was said to have received a total of 11,361 calls during the lockdown period (March to June 2020). Physical violence against women and girls was recorded in 87 per cent of the cases. (Okunola et al, 2022) Accordingly, the Kenya National Council on Administration of Justice also claimed that sexual offences increased significantly in several sections of the country. Sexual offences such as rape and defilement have accounted for more than 35% of all cases reported. (Njung'e, 2020) In the first half of 2020, Liberia had a 50 per cent surge in gender-based violence. More than 600 rape cases were reported between January and June. (Ojatorotu & Olajide, 2021)

Psychological abuse was the most common type of violence. (Sediri, 2020) Both men and women claimed that there was an increase in psychological violence. (Aborisade, 2022) Psychological abuses range from different degrees which may include verbal abuse, rejection and denial of necessities. Thus, the UN women documented verbal abuse and denial of essential resources as the most common types of violence against women. (Jenyo, 2020) Another set of women said they were denied communication. Some other women claimed they had been sexually harassed, and physically abused. (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021) The lockdown which is a procedure for curbing the pandemic came with its psychological effects. Mittal and Singh, contend that although quarantine is vital to minimize the spread of the Coronavirus disease in the community, it has major psychological and social implications. This is referred to as the quarantine paradox, and it has increased occurrences of gender-based violence. (Mittal et al, 2020) In their work, Amber, Alina, Megina et al. identified quarantines and social isolations as a direct and indirect pathway relating pandemics and violence against women. (Amber et al, 2021) The COVID-19 response tactics are believed to have worsened risk factors for vulnerable populations such as women, young people, and people with disabilities (PWDs), who may be trapped in houses with their abusers. (EAC, 2021)

Data by the United Nations women also reveals that certain groups are particularly vulnerable. Younger women between the ages of 18 and 49 are the most vulnerable, with nearly one in every two of them affected. (Eche, 2020) According to the UN women, it is common to believe that violence against women only affects women of a certain age. They argued noted that most surveys fail to measure violence against older women. The data from the Rapid Gender Assessment shows that more than 3 in 10 women aged 60 and over (34%) and more than 4 in 10 women aged 50–59 years (42%) reported experiencing or knowing someone who has experienced violence since the pandemic began. The United Nations Women, therefore, argued that Policies aimed at reducing violence against women must take into account the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, such as elderly women. Furthermore, women who live with children have been more likely to report experiencing violence or knowing someone who has, regardless of whether they are married. In contrast, nearly four out of every ten women without children, whether married or not experienced similar experiences. Unemployed women were particularly affected during the pandemic, with an estimated 52 per cent reporting such encounters compared to 43 per cent of working women. (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021)

3. EVIDENCE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN EKITI STATE

The ministry of justice stated in its social media account that restrictions on movement imposed to prevent the spread of Covid-19 may have resulted in an increase in the number of cases of violence against women in the state. (Olofinbiyi, 2021) In 2020 the Ekiti State government established the Ekiti State Sexual Assault Referral Centre also known as Moremi clinic. It is a clinic aimed at assisting victims of GBV. The clinic has recorded 139 incidents of GBV in Ekiti states since its creation in 2020. (Okunola et al, 2022) Okunola, Temitope O., et al believe that the clinic was developed in response to a global increase in the prevalence and severity of sexual assaults caused by the resurgence of COVID-19 due to lockdown restrictions. (Okunola et al, 2022) Similarly, in a preliminary report of sexual assaults at the clinic, 74 girls and women reported for medical assessment and treatment within the period of June 2020 to May 2021. (Okunola et al, 2022) Further research into the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 lockout on married women found that over 70% of married women experienced a substantial (mild/moderate/severe) psychosocial effect as a result of the lockdown. Married women were likewise found to have received no psychosocial support throughout the Covid-19 lockdown. The COVID-19 lockout had a substantial psychosocial impact on married women, according to the study. (Joseph and Adeyemi, 2021) As a result of all these data, this paper seeks to examine the impact of Covid 19 on gender-based violence in Ekiti State.

4. ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1. Item 1: Level of Awareness to COVID 19 Messages

In response to this, most of the interviewees expressed an approved high level of awareness of Covid-19 messages. D1 and D3 opinionated that the virus has a history of affecting the respiratory system, affirming that the virus has an adverse effect and a high mortality rate. D5 replied with neither here nor there comment, while others agree to have heard about Covid-19. These responses are displayed with the use of three symbols. All the responses are symbolically represented as they occurred by the respondents.

Table1. Awareness of Covid-19 Messages

Respondents	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9
Responses	+	+	+	+	±	+	+	+	+

4.2. Item 2: Are you Aware of any Case of Violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

In response to this item, D1 expressed that there were no cases of violence recorded during the covid lockdown. D2 opinionated that there is violence against women every day in society and attributed violence against underage girls as spiritual. D3, D4, D5, and D6 affirmatively confirmed that the rate of gender violence during the Covid Period was high and expressed that most of the violence was due to lockdown and people not having means of income while D7, D8 expressed the high rate of rape and pedophiles, D9 expressed that gender violence wasn't as much recorded during that time.

Table2. Awareness of cases of Gender violence

Respondents	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9
Responses	-	±	+	+	+	+	+	+	±
	-	R	R	R	TM	R	HC	R	MG

In table 2, the awareness of cases of violence during the pandemic, respondents such as D2, D3, D4, D6, and D8 acknowledged that most of the time they get to know about cases of gender violence through news dissemination, listening to the radio. While D5 expressed that in many cases the town affected calls for a town meeting, which has in attendance, dignitaries. Respondent D7 expressed that information about gender violence is circulated when cases of gender violence are brought to the hospital for treatment while D9 gets information on gender violence through market gists.

In addition to denoting, R symbolizes Radio, TM means Town Meeting, HC represents, Hospital Cases and MG connotes Market gist.

In response to this item, D1 ascribed the causes of gender-based violence during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown to lack of money/resources and the man being an alcoholic. D2 and D4 said that a great disposing factor is a lack of resources and these women are out there to siphon money from men, therefore in many cases, a man will not violate a woman without her consent. Thus, many women hide under the disguise of women's violations. D3 and D9 said that some cases of gender-based violence are due to extramarital affairs which is common in Ado Ekiti and also lack of money. D5 and D6 ascribe some of these causes to intoxication through alcohol. While D7 and D8 weren't sure of the causes of gender-based violence during this period.

Table3. Causes of Gender-based Violence in Ado Ekiti

Respondents	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9
Responses	+	±	+	±	+	+	-	-	+
			\$		#	#			\$

4.3. Item 3: “Causes of Gender-based Violence in Ado Ekiti”

In table 3, in addition to understanding the causes of gender-based violence in Ado Ekiti, with the appropriate symbols, other symbol is used to denote where the opinions expressed are similar or the same. For instance, the dollar sign found under D3 and D9 as well as the Hash sign under D5 and D6 column, means that opinions expressed are the same in these four columns.

The fourth time is written in full as follows “Effect of Gender-Based Violence on Female Child”. In their response, D1 stated that Gender-Based violence has a negative effect on the female child and causes high blood pressure, depression and sometimes leads to some committing suicide. D3 seconding this submission, explained that the effect of Gender-Based violence on the female child is grade as it leaves a scar on the mind of the child and in many cases lead to low self-esteem for the female while in most cases also lead to death in cases where the female child or women was beaten. Unlike D1 and D2 was indifferent about the effect, saying that male gender should be considered vis a vis the female child. D3 believes that the male also experiences gender violence but their cases don't often get to media space.

Table4. *Effect of Gender-Based Violence on Female Child*

Respondents	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9
Responses	-	±	±	-	±	-	-	-	-

4.4. Item 4: “Effect of Gender-Based Violence on the Female Child”

From a different angle, D4, D8 and D9 espoused that in Nigeria there is high level of gender violence and the effect of these violence in many cases have led to divorce in cases of married couples, damaged organs from beating and eventually death. While in the opinion of D6 and D7 the effect of gender-based violence is negative and has a bad effect on psychological and emotional structure of victim where in developed countries, the victims are advised to visit a therapist.

Table 4 in line with Table 2, also showcases the level of awareness and effect of gender-based violence in Ado Ekiti. Most of the respondents totally agree that the gender violence has a negative effect on health, emotional and psychological structure of victims and thus might translate to the fact that gender-violence laws are not so strong in the country or state.

Table5. *Level of Awareness of laws guiding against Gender-Based Violence acts*

Respondents	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9
Responses	>	**	>	**	-	**	**	>	**

4.5. Item 5 “level of Awareness of Laws Guiding against Gender-Based Violence Acts

From the table above, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents have no knowledge about laws guiding against gender-based violence acts in the society. In response to the question, D1 said that she is aware of laws and rules to mitigate against gender violence in the society and read this online from books or articles. Corroborating this submission, D3, opined that there are laws in place to check for gender violence, however, these laws have not been put into use to protect the female child. D2, while D8 response supports the former, he further added that these laws are not well pronounced but are just written in words. D4, D6, D7 and D9 don’t share this view as they believe that there are no laws enacted to protect woman especially in Nigeria thereby making Nigerian and Ekiti state by extension the worst place for a woman or girl child to live. On the contrary, D5 said that there are no laws in place and if there were laws, she has never heard of one to protect the female child.

In table 5, the greater symbol, explains that the respondents have a good knowledge of gender-based violence laws, although they also submitted that these laws might not have been effectively practiced in the state. While the asterisk sign signifies that the respondents are not so sure that there are laws to help mitigate or reduce the cases of gender violence in the society. The semicolon signifies that the respondent has no idea of any law against gender violence.

5. DISCUSSION

Symbolic representation in focus group research enables reliable prima facie estimations or determinations.

It is self-evident that in the discussion of gender-based violence, the violence against women generated more interest than that of men. A total of 38 opinion were examined in respect to the level of awareness to Gender based violence, 31 were positive which signifies that majority of the respondents are aware of violent cases while the others are not aware. In the cases 38 opinion expressed on effect of gender-based violence on the female child, 32 respondents expressed negative opinions about the effect while others were indifferent, explaining that both genders are affected. This shows that majority of the audience are aware of gender-based violence in the society, the increase of report on the violent acts during the Covid-19 pandemic and having a bad effect on the female child.

It is also possible to determine without doing any sophisticated analysis the area od similarities and differences in the opinions expressed as response to the four items of research. Under the fifth item for instance, D1, D2 and D8 are similar in their awareness of laws to fight against gender violence in the society without leaving out the fact that these laws are not properly operated in the state. In fact, the initial response of D2, D3, D4 in the first three tables are similar about gender violence. All these prima facie assessments of opinions are not easy to decode in the conventional analytical style in focus group discussion.

6. CONCLUSION

The debates around the negative effects of the Covid-19 on families were the subject of this study. The Covid-19 pandemic was accompanied by strict lockdowns, which had a tremendous impact on African families. Damaging effects include violence towards partners, particularly women, and sexual abuse, violence against children, and various forms of domestic violence. Hence, the lockdown, which was intended to preserve people's lives from a potentially deadly situation, ended up causing more harm. The works of findings in this paper have revealed that GBV has long been a problem in Nigeria and around the world. The Covid-19 pandemic, on the other hand, has exacerbated the issue, with overwhelming evidence that GBV has expanded dramatically since the outbreak began. The situation in the Ekiti states further mirrors a rising trend of increasing gender-based violence. As a result, the decision to conduct this research study in Ekiti state was made.

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