THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON MOTHERS AND CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

Ilevbare Amen Edith¹; Azorondu Abigail Agbon²
¹Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
²Student Development, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Abstract
The impact of Corona virus pandemics (COVID-19) worldwide has broadened adverse effect on human existence, in diverse ways. However, the places of mothers and children expose to domestic violence during this pandemic are very vital. The outbreak of Corona Virus (COVID-19) in 2020, globally increased the rate of domestic violence against mothers and children. The paper examines the impacts of COVID-19 on mothers and children regarding domestic violence and measures put in place to prevent the abuse. The population of this study consists of selected mothers and children in South-South Nigeria as well as social workers in University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State and Babcock University, Ikenne Local Government Area of Ogun State. A sample of 350 participants was selected for this study using a simple random sampling technique. The questionnaire is the instrument adopted for this study, it was content and face validated. To determine the reliability, the Cronbach alpha formula was utilized to ascertain the consistency reliability; the coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. The data collected were analyzed using the descriptive statistics measures. The findings showed that COVID-19 pandemic has increased the rate of domestic violence on mothers and children since everyone is locked down and quarantined as measures to curb the virus. The study therefore recommended that social workers, sociologist and criminal justice professionals should ensure perpetrators and victims of violence are removed from the same home and put in a separate accommodation during the lockdown.

Key Words: Corona-virus; COVID-19; Healthcare worker; Pandemic; Social worker

INTRODUCTION
The impact of pandemics on human relationship cannot be overemphasized. This is because, pandemics intensify inequalities, violence and exposes mothers, children and other vulnerable groups of people at increased risk of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. Based on this, domestic violence has become one of the most common dilemmas encountered by mothers and children at times of global panic, emergencies and other occurrences resulting in profound physical and psychological harm (Rajah & Osborn, 2020). Domestic violence has remained one of the major global social and public health threats experienced during emergencies. The World
Health Organization (WHO) emphasized that “all countries must strike a fine balance between protecting health, minimizing economic and social disruption and respecting human rights” (Wanqinq, 2020, p. 18). Furthermore, reports from countries like Australia, Brazil, China and the United States stated that cases of domestic violence and several other social threats had ensued before the outbreak of Corona-Virus (COVID-19) in mid-March 2020 (Wanqinq, 2020). However, other reports from Africa especially Nigeria noted that issues of family unrest, domestic violence, harassments, sexual exploitations and child abuses arose during the lockdown periods (Omorogiwa, 2020a). These incidents were reported to have increased as a result of the lockdown measures put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Godin, 2020; Omorogiwa & Amadasun, 2020a).

Moreover, with more than 120 million school children at home during the COVID-19, there have been numerous reports from different cities and towns of child abuse and exploitation, including domestic violence and child marriage (Morgan, 2020). As noted by Omorogiwa (2020b), school teachers are mostly the first people that abused children come in contact with and as a result report the abuse to. However, with the lockdown measures put in place, it is no longer the norm since schools are closed, thereby enabling violence against children in the home to go without someone doing anything to stop it. For too many mothers and children, home can be a place of fear and abuse. That situation worsens considerably in cases of isolation such as the lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the data on domestic violence gathered from World Health Organization (WHO) showed that Africa had the greater percentage of cases with 45.6%, South-East Asia had 40.2% cases, America had 36.1%, Eastern Mediterranean had 36.4%, Europe had 27.2%, Western Pacific had 27.9% and high income region had 32.7% (WHO, 2018). Child abuse has been a menace in Nigeria irrespective of the position of the constitution on rights of persons. Buttressing the impact of domestic violence and child abuse, Olaitan and Idowu (2016, p. 35) pointed out that “the right of life, the right to dignity of the human person, the right to a fair hearing, the right to conscience and religion, the right to peaceful assembly as well as the right of association and freedom of movement” are violated through domestic violence. Olaitan and Idowu (2016) further pointed out that children ought to be protected against maltreatment and moral and material neglect by their parents but domestic violence implies the same parents are guilty of such denial of rights.

Reports of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and domestic violence are on serious rise at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown (Omorogiwa & Amadasun, 2020a). This was particularly anxieties over health, finance, partial inactivity of several welfare organizations due to lockdown and frustration encircling forced stay-at-home are factors behind this rapid rise of domestic violence at the time of COVID-19 (Morgan, 2020; Omorogiwa, 2020a). Nevertheless, direct and passive exposure of the children to abuse, psychological aggression and physical punishment by caregivers at a very early age leave permanent wounds in the form of impaired development of brain and psyche, higher rates of psychosomatic and neuropsychiatric
disorders, multiple substance abuse and suicidal thoughts (Azuka & Vareba, 2019). Reports gathered from Human Rights activists in Nigeria recorded that domestic violence cases had risen incredibly during the lockdown because people across most parts of the country have been observing the lockdown measures imposed during the COVID-19 outbreak. According to Adedeji (2020, p. 22), “the pandemic has had a huge impact on domestic violence in Nigeria. In the statistics, 90 percent of the causes of violence are related to the COVID-19 pandemic”. This report seems realistic give the fact that during the Ebola pandemic in 2014, many cases of sexual exploitation, child abuse, domestic violence and other human rights violations were recorded (Bandiera, 2018).

The population of domestic violence victims in the world is alarming and it has been difficult for any country to halt the trend and as a result almost every society has a case of child abuse, domestic violence or sexual exploitation (Adedeji, 2020). Several perpetrators of domestic violence or child abuse assume it was the only option they had available while majority claim it was as a result of accidents. Recent reports from the Nigerian Police, Human Rights Commission, Child Protection Agency and even Social Workers have confirmed that domestic violence and child abuse is on the increase (Omorogiuwa, 2020b; Omorogiuwa & Amadasun, 2020b). It has been observed that many concerned bodies had tried and failed in curbing domestic violence, child abuse and sexual exploitation and the incidents still persist (Omorogiuwa & Amadasun, 2020a&b). Thus, there is need to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on mothers and children.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts the integrated ecological framework. The theory was postulated in 1970 to help study the dynamics and interrelations among various people with environmental factors. In 2005, Bronfenbrenner modified the theory using different process labeled the process- person-context-time- It is a framework from different authors on measures designed to study the factors that affects violence in women and children in communities. Ecological model is classified into 4(four) levels to help analyze individuals as they engage in certain behaviour either to earn reward or to escape punishment, under this theory men’s violence against women could be as a result to maintain their position in the social structure (Babatunde, Babatunde & Ake, 2015).

Bronfenbrenner modified it as to suit the changes in the environment (Process-person-context-time). The process according to Bronfenbrenner is the stage of growth for the individual which will led to the growth process in the primary stage of development affects the learning process of the individual and its adaptation process (Olaitan & Oyeniyi, 2016). The person of the individual is the biological and personal factor which includes age, sex, education and the level of income of the individual. The context and time includes the closer relations, couples, partners, friends, and family members while the community contexts are schools, workplaces and the neighborhood (Olaitan & Amos, 2016). This theory is applied to the study in the sense...
that victims of domestic violence and abuse might have been affected by the process factor, person factor, the context factors and the time factor. These might have affected the victims by exposing them.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Before the pandemic, domestic violence was already about 40% on the increase (UN WOMEN, 2020). According to the report on domestic violence in 2019, over “243 million mothers between ages 15-49 years and children” across the globe have experience sexual violence from abusive partners. This implies that domestic violence is a global issue that seeks to be addressed (Adedeji, 2020, p. 23). In 2014, UNICEF recorded that 1(one) out of every 3(three) Nigeria children experience abuse before age eighteen, more than 70% of these children experience sexual violence repeatedly. As the pandemic continues the impact on mothers and children have demanded high level of concern. Nigeria so far has recorded the number of violence against mothers and children to about 784 cases (JUNE, 2020 news-radio). The circumstances even made it harder for the victims to report to help lines, disrupted public services, social welfare centers and Justice System like the police. It also fueled impunity for the perpetrators (UN WOMEN, 2020).

According to Kemi Da-Silver Ibru reports on gender violence in Nigeria during the pandemic experience a rise in the reported cases on violence against mothers and children which was about 10,000 reported cases daily across the country. The Coordinator on domestic and sexual violence team Titilola Vivour-Adeniji added that the center has received increase of about 10% daily from at least 13 reports using 3 hotlines. These abuses comprise of emotional abuse, psychological abuse, physical abuse which might include sexual abuse, and mental abuse. These abuses expose the victims to sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy (Guardian newspaper, 2020).

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on mothers and children regarding domestic violence, sexual exploitation and child abuse.

To find out measures to prevent rise in abuse on mothers and children during emergencies and lockdown periods.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do personality attributes encourage domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children?
2. Does boredom encourage domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children?
3. What are the social work practice measures for addressing domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children?
METHODOLOGY
This study employed the descriptive survey method of research. The population of this study consists of randomly selected mothers and children in South-South, Nigeria as well as selected social workers in University of Benin, Benin City in Edo State and Babock University, Ikenne Local Government Area of Ogun State. A sample of three hundred and fifty (350) mothers and children and social workers in University of Benin, Benin City and Babock University, Ikenne LGA were randomly selected for this study. 300 questionnaires were administered to the mothers and children, while 50 questionnaires were administered to the social workers at the two institutions. The four point likert scale was adopted for this study. The instrument was content validated by experts involved with human rights abuse issues in the field of social work. The Cronbach alpha formula was used to determine the internal consistency reliability; the reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. The data collected were analyzed using the appropriate descriptive statistics measures; mean and standard deviation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: Do personality attribute encourage domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children?

Table 1: Mean responses of respondents on the personality attributes that encourage domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrators of abuse often take out the frustrations of the victims</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence or child abuse often take place out of disregard for the other person’s attribute</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence and child abuse emanate from lack of self-control</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 challenges increased the incidents of abuse and domestic violence on mothers and children</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Mean</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s Field survey, 2020

Table 1 indicates that participants on the influence of personal factor on domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children has a grand mean of 3.10 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, implying that participants agreed that personal factor has influence on domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children. It was further found in this study that personal factor is a major reason perpetrators carry out
domestic violence and certain forms of abuse and exploitations. This study correlates with the work of Popoola, Popoola, Awolola and Shoyombo (2019) who buttressed that when individuals are exposed to certain personal shortcomings and frustrations, they are more liable to get involved in violent incidents and abusive interpersonal relationships. This is also supported by Adedeji (2020, p. 18) that domestic violence and child abuse are often as a result of “too many disappointments and failures in a person’s life that is sometimes translated into bitterness and hatred”.

**Research Question Two:** Does boredom encourage domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children?

**Table 2: Mean responses of respondents of boredom which encourage domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse is easily meted out when there is boredom</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence and abuse increased during COVID-19 because of the lockdown</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack and shortage of income due to lockdown and boredom increased the cases of domestic violence and abuse</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idleness caused frustrations which affected the psychology of mothers and children</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Mean</strong></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author’s Field survey, 2020  
Mean Score: 2.50*

Table 2 reveals that participants on the influence of boredom and idleness factor on domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children has a grand mean of 3.12 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, implying that participants agreed that boredom and idleness factor has influence on domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children. From the analysis of this study, it was found that boredom and idleness play an important role in influencing perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse.

The study agrees with Nwaomah and Nwaomah (2019) that periods of excess leisure and sometimes idleness without control and containment could be an experimental period for perpetrators of domestic violence and abusive persons who usually seek every opportunity to try out new methods of inflicting pains and sorrow on other people. As such, domestic violence and abuse antics are tried and tested in such moments of leisure and boredom which oftentimes lead to regrets or in some cases cause homicide and destruction of families. In addition, Anderson and Elisa...
(2018) also confirmed that too much time for personal privacy and idle moments are the reasons for many who nurse their frustration and grudges before unleashing it on those close to them.

**Research Question three:** What are the social work practice measures for addressing domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children?

**Table 3: Mean responses of respondents on the social work practice measures in addressing domestic violence and abuse against mothers and children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate information about resisting peer pressure will prevent substance abuse</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching parents the best way to help their children avoid drugs in an effective practice of social worker</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposing adolescents to their parents during substance use counseling will help keep them away from using drugs</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggesting methods to parents on how best to reach out to their children will help reduce substance abuse</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Mean</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Author’s Field survey, 2020

*Mean Score:* 2.50

Table 3 reveals that participants on efforts of social workers in the reduction of domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children has a grand mean of 3.35 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, implying that participants agreed that social workers’ efforts reduce domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children. It was found from this study that efforts of social workers reduce domestic violence and abuse on mothers and children.

This study correlates with Omorogiuwa and Ukponahiusi (2017) that efforts of social workers are designed to minimize the risk factors for early abuse and signs of domestic violence at the individual level, school, family, and community. This is also supported by National Association of Social Workers, NASW (2013) that social workers’ intervention carries out important tasks by supporting parents, adolescents, family, school, workplace and community to handle the cases of domestic violence and child abuse or sexual exploitations. Furthermore, in other studies, it was buttressed that conducive environments and compassionate professionals (social workers) contribute heavily to the psychological assistance offered to the victims of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse (Omorogiuwa, 2020a; Amadasun & Omorogiuwa, 2020; Omorogiuwa & Amadasun, 2020a&b). As a matter of fact, social
workers are expected to “be at the vanguard of promoting policy change in the context of the challenges faced” (Omorogiuwa, 2020a, p. 647) by mothers and children who are victims of domestic violence and abuse.

CONCLUSION
This paper thus far has analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on mothers and children with specific reference to domestic violence, child abuse, sexual exploitations and social workers’ experiences in the society during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The paper therefore concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the rate of domestic violence on mothers and children because of the lockdown measures enforced to contain the virus. The perpetrators used the opportunity to assault the victims which generally caused a significant increase in the cases of domestic violence and child abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the conclusions of the paper, it is therefore suggested that social workers cooperate with criminal justice to ensure that perpetrators of domestic violence are removed from the home with plans and measures to keep them in separate accommodation during the lockdown. Also, medical health workers, social workers and other professionals should support and publicly promote online reporting/advice mechanisms for mothers and children through websites and other measures. The government should recognize the risks of children in instances where interrupted shared care arrangements may result in a child being forced to reside with an abusive parent.

REFERENCES


Contact:
Ilevbare Abigail; Azorondu Abigail Agbon
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
Student Development, Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria.
amen.ilevbare@uniben.edu, azorondua@babcock.edu.ng