



Gender Issues and Challenges in Post Covid-19 Pandemic: A Home Economist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Gender issues and challenges in COVID -19 pandemic are presently all over the world including Nigeria. Strategies promoted to reduce gender issues and challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic have improved the situation but not resolved it. The sudden lockdown that resulted from the COVID-19 outbreak posed a great threat to the livelihoods of the entire population, leaving women more vulnerable to its resulting effects. The effects felt on the labor market were more immediate, both on demand and on labour supply. This cost many people to lose their jobs, some became unemployed, and others had to quickly adapt to new changes (telework, reduced wages, changes in work). Women employees were the hardest hit by the rules and regulations on social distancing; this is because female-dominated occupations such as education, hotel and restaurant services, care, and beauty services were the sectors hardest hit by this lockdown. The pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing gender issues and challenges exposing the vulnerabilities in economic, political, and social systems, which led to an increase in the unemployment rate. Home Economics being multidimensional and multidisciplinary area can identify and utilize innovative solutions to support people through the phase of transition to the normal time. It was concluded that skills impartation in Home Economics education, equip students with business ideas to run their own enterprises to close the gap. Recommendations were made for training and extension services to combat challenges evolve resulting from/after the pandemic era.

KEYWORDS:

Gender, COVID-19 pandemic, Challenges, Home Economics, Coping strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues and outbreak of diseases, infection and viruses among beings have always been of great challenge and concern to the society large. The world has been thrown upside down right now because of the invasive nature of the Corona virus Pandemic (COVID-19) (Gao et al, 2020). The disruption brought by the global disease outbreak on the socio-cultural and economic lives of people has never been witnessed a very long time and could only be comparable to the destructive impacts of the slave trade era, the colonial period, the great depression, and the Second world wars. There is no doubt that the corona virus pandemic has endangered humanity, brought misfortune and enormous challenges to different segments of our society including

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World leaders, Policy-makers, religious organizations, business owners, and civil society groups (Atson, et al 2022). However, special attention should be given to the worsening conditions of persons living with disabilities as well as other vulnerable individuals like women and girls (ECDC, 2020).

In addition to being a severe economic and social shock, the COVID-19 epidemic highlights the importance of women in every aspect of society, from the front lines to the kitchen and from security to social safety nets (Zoumpourli, 2020). Women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises, with far-reaching implications that are exacerbated in fragile, war, and emergency settings due to strained resources and inadequate institutional ability. Women's rights, which have been battled for and won, are also in jeopardy. Resolving the epidemic requires more than simply addressing historical injustices; it also necessitates constructing a resilient world with women at its core, which is in everyone's best interests. Putting women's and children's lives and livelihoods at risk in Africa's largest economy, the rise in gender-based violence during lockdowns has been dubbed the "shadow epidemic" (Anner, 2020).

Home economics is a field that focuses on how people as individuals, as members of families, and as members of communities' function and relate to one another (Azonuche, 2020), and all areas of family life or living. Since its inception at the Lake Placid Conference in 1902 and continuing to the present day, the organization's overarching goal has been to help individuals and families thrive despite dynamic societal, political, economic, and physical environments. "the study of ideas, laws, principles and conditions, which are concerned with man's nature as a social being, his physical environment, his and the rapport between these factors" is the method by which this goal is reached. Broadly speaking, it's concerned with ensuring that families have the resources they need to thrive in all aspects-physical, mental, and financial-so that everyone in the household can thrive. (Azonuche, 2021).

Home Economics according to Mohamedbhai (2020), is an entrepreneurial-based and skill-oriented field of study that is expected to equip learners with saleable skills that make for self-reliance and paid employment (Azonuche & Umeri, 2012; Azonuche, 2015). By implication, if Home Economics is to achieve the national goals as stipulated in the policy document on Education (2004), the program should be properly funded.

Verikios (2020) argues that in 2020, on the occasion of the Beijing Platform for Action's silver anniversary, should be a watershed moment for advancing gender parity. Instead, the development of COVID-19 threatens to reverse even the modest improvements shown in the last couple of decades. Preexisting disparities are being exacerbated as the pandemic reveals weaknesses in economic, political, and social systems (United Nations (UN),2020). For those women who comprise 1.5 billion of the world's low-wage workforce and twice as many of its careers, it is perhaps ironic to state that are the ones who are most affected by the economic and health crises that unfold in the wake of the pandemic, but it's an unfortunate reality (Pickford, 2020).

Before the pandemic, most women worked as low-wage workers employees in the manufacturing, service, and informal sectors. Unfortunately, these low-wage jobs don't have a social safety net like parental leave, paid sick leave, or retirement contributions to help people deal with the economic shocks of the ongoing pandemic. As a result, girls are more likely to get married young so that their families do not have to feed another mouth. Women also face more financial problems, and sexual violence has become more common. According to experts, to ensure that women do not slip further into poverty and marginalization, efforts taken by public and private stakeholders must take into consideration these seen and unseen costs (United Nation Women, 2021). This is backed by reports by global research which suggest that women's financial inclusion and empowerment have positive benefits for the family and society at large Williams-Baron (2018).

The peculiarity with Nigeria is that over 70% of the workforce are mainly women, who are in the informal sector and rely majorly on daily earnings (Lagarde & Ostry, 2018). This is a significant number to influence and realize socio-economic development in other climes (UNW, 2016). But the situation is farfetched in Nigeria as many in this range live in poorer conditions, therefore are unable to make any appreciable inputs in areas of socio-economic development (Lagarde, 2016). The lockdown and interstate border closure during the post-COVID period impeded easy access to goods and services from sellers to their buyers, who were usually women, and the challenges in logistics, the difficulty to transport or move the farm produce from point of production to point of sale and consumption, had revealed that the lockdown and border closure had greatly caused hardship for women, thereby bringing to a sudden stop the socio-economic activities in Nigeria (Pickford, 2020). The urban poor women of Abuja, Lagos, and Rivers, Nigeria, earn their daily earnings working as hairdressers, tailors, street sellers, food vendors, and construction site laborers, among other jobs. With no means of earning a living 'remotely' or savings such as their counterparts who worked in the formal sector, these women were at a high risk of facing penury as socio-economic activities grind to a halt in Nigeria (Lagarde, 2016). For many, the Presidential Task Force's (PTF) recommendations to stock up, lock down, isolate themselves socially (distancing) and stay at home, are meaningless platitudes that won't help them put food on the table. Hence to examine a way forward, this study seeks to examine Gender Issues and Challenges in Post Covid-19 from a Home Economist perspective. The paper was discussed under these sub-headings:

II. CONCEPT OF COVID-19

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that can cause anything from the common cold to life-threatening conditions including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), as reported by WHO (2020). originally, these viruses spread from animals to humans. For example, civet cats were the vector for the spread of SARS, while a certain breed of camel spread MERS to humans. There are multiple coronaviruses that have been identified in animals but have not yet been detected in humans (WHO, 2021). The Latin term corona, meaning crown or halo, is where we get the name coronavirus. When viewed using an electron microscope, the phenomenon resembles the solar corona. In January, Chinese health officials discovered a new type of coronavirus that they have since dubbed SARS-CoV-2. Despite the documented case of human-to-human transmission, very few details are known about it (Ostry, 2018).

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic is a typical example of times when conventional teaching paradigms could not work in schools. During this period, as a measure

of social distancing, students and teachers are not allowed to interact physically (UN, 2020). Schools were closed down for many weeks thus teaching and learning are disrupted (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021). Teaching and learning in science required interactions between students and teachers which may not only be physical (Akht Akhtar, et al, 2019). Therefore, students staying away from schools for a long period may adversely impact their academic performance. It is, therefore, essential the Nigerian government is more committed to the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) through e-learning and other forms of media in our tertiary institutions (Anerua & Azonuche, 2010). Although E-learning/online education is not novel in Nigeria's educational and public/government school system, its quality and efficacy are of paramount importance. Google Classroom is one of the learning frameworks that allows students to communicate with the teacher even when class is not in session.

Home Economics Conceptualised

Home Economics is one of the vocational subjects taught at both secondary and higher institutions in Nigeria and is a compulsory part of the curriculum in secondary schools (Danovich, 2018). Food and nutrition, textiles, and home economics are all included in the curriculum as essential subjects. Many people agree that learning about home economics is important for personal and social growth, and research has shown that the knowledge and skills learned in home economics make a big difference in young people's personal and social growth and prepare them for the world of work across a variety of fields (Anner, 2020, Azonuche, 2020). It gives students the chance to get knowledge about both theoretical and practical sides of a living (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012.) In today's increasingly technology culture, a good background in home economics curricula is essential for numerous occupations and work prospects (Noddings, 2017).

The Home Economics program is made up of vocations related to child development, foods and nutrition, home management, clothing and textiles, and family relationships and. The program is constantly being subjected to change to meet up with the dynamic society. As it were, the world is constantly changing and communities, families and individuals are daily confronted with scientific challenges capable of affecting what should be the content of Home Economics education for societal advancement. Prior to this, the goal of the home economics education program was to give students the skills they needed to maintain their families. The program is currently struggling to survive because it cannot maintain its relevance in the global economy. Graduates in home economics don't seem to have the managerial skills needed to run a firm (Noddings, 2017). The entrepreneurship curriculum was implemented into Nigerian institutions as a harmonization program to fill some of these gaps. If executed successfully, it will result in better graduates

with the ability to run both small and large firms and work for themselves.

Gender Issues in Home Economics in PostCovid-19 Era

The impact/effect of COVID--19 on everyday life has forced change onto the whole human population (Etheridge, 2020). As the pandemic unfolds, people are experiencing grief and loss, not only for loved ones who have succumbed to the disease but grief and loss of "normal" everyday life (UN, 2016). Close interpersonal contact with other humans is a fundamental requirement for positive health and well-being outcomes. Isolation is known to cause, perpetuate and exacerbate mental health issues. Rates of anxiety, trauma stress, and depression have increased because of the pandemic where every aspect of our lives has been impacted and we are still figuring out what the priority consequences will be. For example, it is becoming apparent that the prevalence of burnout, hyper vigilance, and dissociation have had serious mental health consequences for frontline health workers (Anner, 2020). All of the abrupt changes and upsetting incidents have complicated ramifications for individuals and families. We may not fully comprehend the implications for many years. Home Economists are frontline workers and because we work closely with individuals and families, we will bear witness to the impacts of the pandemic.

The multidimensional and multidisciplinary lenses that we utilize in Home Economics, may enable us to identify innovative solutions to support people through this transition phase to the new normal. There have been many moments during the pandemic when people felt the need to contribute in positive ways. For example, social media posts with altruistic messages that wearing face masks are a part of being in a civil society; where it is everyone's responsibility to look after those who are elderly or immunocompromised. Face masks were in high demand. In response, sewing of face-masks and Home Economics skills became a news feature (Noddings, 2017). People who were confined to their homes and who had more free time turned to hobbies like sewing and sourdough baking, renewing conversations about the values and principles that underlie home economics (Ostry, 2018, Azonuche, 2020).

According to Anykoha (2017), one of the ways in which education contributes to development is through the teaching of home economics as a vocational subject that equips students with information, skills, and attitudes. No longer is it assumed that a man's lack of interest in domestic arts and cookery is the primary barrier to his pursuing a degree in such fields at a university. Home Economics has expanded its purview beyond the traditional domestic sphere to provide individuals, families, and nations with the requisite grounding in practical skills and knowledge to ensure their continued well-being. It takes into account all aspects of life, including but not limited to: food and nutrition, house management, clothes and textiles, child and family living, consumer education, and so on.

On the other side, gender refers to being either masculine or feminine. The fact that males and females are created differently is what differentiates the mental and emotional traits, as well as the behaviors associated with their roles, between the sexes (Keller 2011). It can be seen in many different spheres of human endeavor, and the degree to which it is demonstrated varies with the era, the location, and the society. It pertains to the circumstances of discrimination against a person, politics, religion, as well as economic and social services, and it establishes the amount of political and economic empowerment that maintains a given group of people in an advantageous position. In offering Home Economics in Tertiary institutions, the male gender has been a problem and the females mostly undertake the course.

When examining gender bias, it is vital to define and understand the terms. Since gender is defined as “Sex” and bias is has to do attitude that inhabits impartiality as well as prejudice of gender. Therefore, the categorization of gender in such a way that favors one sex over the other is an example of gender bias. When referring to the field/discipline of home economics, the term "gender bias" refers to a predilection for or favoring of one sex over the other in the scholarly study of home economics. As can be seen, discrimination against women in the field/discipline of home economics is a multi-faceted and intricate problem. Nevertheless, the problem of gender inequality in subject/discipline is not only a national concern but that of the whole world at large. Thus, the misconception of discipline as a woman’s subject/course.

Challenges Posed by COVID-19 to Home Economics

Home Economics is a field or area of study and a profession situated in the human sciences. It also connotes Family & Human Ecology or Consumer Science. It takes an integrated approach and draws from a broad area of disciplinary perspectives, some of which may include the following: clothing, food, health, nutrition, and textiles; consumer science and housing; household management; technology; shelter design and human development; food science and family studies; hospitality; education; and community services. The study of home economics places an emphasis on households as the fundamental units of sustainable communities. Addressing interrelated, complex human and environmental problems.

Home The study of economics strives to improve people's living conditions so that they are both optimal and sustainable, while also taking into account the interdependence of communities, families and individuals around the world. Home Economics as a course is primarily concerned with maintaining and enhancing the lives of individuals households, organization and the larger society (Azonuche, 2020). The family is currently facing a lot of challenges such as economic lockdown due to the pandemic, loss of jobs, economic hardship, poverty, hyperinflation, and

religious clashes (e.g., Boko Haram, and farmer herdsmen clashes). It is, therefore, important that household members be educated on what to expect and how to live life after COVID-19 in the new normal.

Challenges of rural households in Nigeria in the face/era of the Pandemic

1. Global health problems due to the pandemic posed a huge challenge for households whose members are affected; it has also deprived households of socio-economic resources and impeded development (WHO, 2020).
2. There has been a decrease in life expectancy and an increase in some of the common diseases or problems associated with child and maternal mortality.
3. Vulnerable groups, such as rural elderly and women, face multi-faceted health issues. They often lack sanitation, health education and hygiene facilities and are exposed to the pandemic.

Strategies for educating rural households in Nigeria on life after COVID-19: A Home Economics perspective

1. By fostering sustainable production and consumption habits for more sustainable diets—the main component of Sustainable Development Goal 12- Home Economics tackles the interconnections between food production and consumption. This involves addressing the dual impact of malnutrition, which is shown in the alarmingly high rates of overweight and obesity in both children and adults and its associated high expenditures to the public health system.
2. There is a burning need to teach preschool, school children, adolescents, their parents and other caregivers about food preparation and healthy eating patterns. This knowledge and guidance must be based on people's actual realities because lifestyles are evolving.
3. Home Economists are working on initiatives and doing research all across the world to stop malnutrition and end hunger.
4. Home Economics Professionals are educating people, particularly women, about how to produce food sustainably and find alternate sources of income, which will improve household food and nutrition security.
5. Training is provided on healthy nutrition, efficient cooking, and the need to send children to school.
6. Home Economist professionals are further working on research and education programs for financial literacy to avoid that family becoming indebted. They also provide counseling for families to find ways out of poverty and actively support those families that face social exclusion.
7. At policy level, Home Economics advocates integrating the subject into curriculum, opening up this education to both sexes, respecting unpaid labor, and sourcing food that is sustainably produced and locally sourced for both private and institutional households.
8. Home Economics as a profession, strives to dispel gender stereotypes about family chores by encouraging everyone

to participate equally in food shopping and food preparation and by presenting these as contemporary, constructive, and beneficial duties that improve everyone's wellbeing.

9. The study of home economics seeks to improve the well-being of individuals living in both private and institutional households and to raise the level of quality life that individuals enjoy.
10. Health-related Home Economics research helps in many different ways toward the goal of achieving excellent health.
11. Health-related research on Food Security and Nutrition sets the focus on the relationship between health and malnutrition, food allergies, and the influence of healthy nutrition on longevity or healthy diets.

Research in the field of household technology helps create safe home appliances and healthy cook stoves, thereby lowering the risk of illness and fatalities from toxic smoke. Research on hygiene helps private and institutional houses (such as hospitals and nursing homes) prevent infections, enhance cleaning procedures, and process food with a focus on vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The development of particular textiles and washing procedures, as well as the use of textiles in toilets, bathrooms, and kitchens for medical treatments, are all part of the research in textiles and household technology that aims to reduce the spread of infections through contaminated textiles.

Finally, research in home economics education advances strategies for improving household members' capacity and enhancing the dissemination of knowledge about good hygiene practices. Education in practical home economics is crucial for enhancing health and preventing infectious diseases. Household leaders who have received training in fundamental Home Economics can protect their families' health by adhering to fundamental hygienic practices (such as washing their hands, processing their food, and cleaning), as well as by gaining knowledge about less harmful alternatives to potentially harmful cooking stoves and pesticides. Home Economics experts are responsible for the well-being and health of people residing in institutional households. These individuals are unable to care for themselves and require assistance in all facets of their daily lives. Home economists take a holistic approach to enhancing or improving the health and happiness of all members of a home, taking into account not only factors relating to physical health but also psychological and social factors as well.

The advancement of women's rights and the empowerment of all girls and women: A world where women and men are treated equally is more probable to be one where peace, prosperity, and sustainability thrive. Gender advancement of women's rights and the empowerment of all girls and women start at home. Gender equality in education or employment can only be achieved if behavior and values

are nurtured and shared among household members and then confidently pursued beyond. From the perspective or standpoint of home economics, the relationships between household members, the division of labor, the distribution of resources, the ability to make decisions, and the roles given to women are crucial elements to achieving gender equality. This entails including men and their evolving identities into research and initiatives. Home economists, who make up the vast majority of our field's addressees, support gender equality in a variety of contexts. Domestic work that is unpaid can lighten the pressure on women. According to home economics study on family management, women around the world perform the majority of unpaid labour at home, including caring for other household members. If women participate in paid work, they are overrepresented in low-paid work and receive less than men.

III. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have created a global crisis unparalleled in the history of the United Nations- and one which requires a whole-of-society response to match its sheer scale and complexity. Instead, the effects/impacts of this pandemic on the female gender (girls and women) should be taken into account in all COVID-19 response plans, recovery packages, and allocations of resources. Unemployment in Nigeria is at an all-time high, and a pressing need to close or bridge the skills gap and provide students with viable business ideas through Home Economics.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

1. Home Economics training programmes in Nigeria should be problem-oriented and not be constrained by conventional disciplinary boundaries.
2. A more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economy requires action to promote gender equality by the government. It is very important that during and after the COVID-19 crisis, concrete measures be put in place for male and female workers at the heart of response plans and subsequently recovery.
3. Workshops, training and seminars should be organized for lecturers and students from time to time to reduce gender inequality.
4. Parents should encourage their children in the learning of Home Economics, regardless of their gender.
5. This study can be useful to other countries on how to address gender-based threats in girl child education during the pandemic and post-pandemic.

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