

COVID 19: Political, Security and Religious Impacts on Nigerian Children

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Abstract

It is unfortunate that corruption and insecurity have affected all spheres of human endeavours in Nigeria. The recent outbreak of Covid-19 otherwise known as coronavirus has created a vacuum regarding its effects on the lives of the citizens in general and children in particular. The prime focus of this paper is to explore the political, security and religious impacts of Covid-19 specifically on the children. This paper analyzes the aforementioned factors of Covid-19 in connection with children as to address injustice against children in the country. This is necessary because children used to be given less attention in political decisions and many of them have been affected as a result of insecurity in different parts of the country. Hence, addressing various factors relating to Covid-19 explored in this paper may be instrumental in helping the children as minors as many international agencies have been trying to solve it. It is therefore suggested that various issues are addressed so that safety can be provided to the children by alienating the multifarious impacts of Covid-19 in the country.

Keywords: Covid 19: The Political, Security and Religious Impacts on Nigerian Children.

Introduction

Nigeria is considered as the most populous nation in the entire African continent and ranked 7th in the world with population of approximately 210 million inhabitants. Indeed, children are being considered as any person under age of 18. Hence, half of the entire population of the country is under 18 years of age. The large population of children has made some concerned citizens to advocate for the rights of the children in the country. According to UNICEF (2021) data, it provides that, young citizens are almost half of the entire population of Nigeria whereby 46% are considered to be under age 15 and more importantly, the total number of 31 million children are under age of 5. Roughly, 75% of children lives below poverty line. In addition, there is poor birth registration of children, however, in some parts of the country where there is data, about 62% of children have health issues. It is reiterated that, in a year, 7 million babies are born while an approximate of 262, 000 babies die at birth which is considered as second highest figure in the world (UNICEF, 2021).

The forgoing background or assertion indicates that, children in the country are among the vulnerable. It is as a result of vulnerability of children that the country has ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which aims at addressing the several factors that serve as limitations to the full potential of the children. It is in this regard that the country enacted Child Right Act (CRA) in 2003 in order to address the challenges facing children in the country.

With the outbreak of Covid-19, more vulnerability of children in the country can be worsen if there is no proactive measure in curtailing the situation. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in China in late 2019 affected all spheres of human endeavours socio-economic, business transaction, production, manufacturing and education aspects. Most of the advanced countries like US, UK, Canada and many others have used holistic approach in address both short-term and long-term effect of Covid-19. Literature emphatically stressed that there is long term effect of Covid-19 on women, migrant workers and employees in various nations (World Health Organization, 2019). It is not disagreeable to posit since the emergence of Covid-19, a number of studies have examined it from different perspectives such as health, educational and socio-economic aspects. This inferably means that, several efforts have been made in addressing the challenges of Covid-19 in the country. In spite of an overwhelming studies on Covid-19 at global level in general and

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Nigeria in particular, there is less attention in exploring Covid-19 in connection with political, security and religious impacts on the Nigerian children. This paper primarily aims at bridging this gap by specifically looking at the long-term effect of Covid-19 from triadic spheres of political, security and religion specifically in addressing the challenges facing children in the country.

An Overview COVID 19 in Nigeria

The severity of the outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan in China remains a global health stigma and raises a serious health challenge to the international community (Nishiura et al., 2020). In different parts of the world the severity of the cases, mortality rate and recovered cases are varied. World Health Organization (2019) posits that, the victims of confirmed cases of Covid-19 were between 30 and 70 years which is approximately 87%. At the international level, there had been measures in combating the spread of Covid-19 such as: suspension of travelling, business transaction among others (Falokun, 2020; Guy-Ryder, 2020).

The first case of coronavirus in Nigeria scared many citizens with the outbreak of the pandemic in the country especially after the case of Chinese was confirmed in Lagos (Gesinde, 2020; Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020). As a result of this, the Federal Government set-up Coronavirus Preparedness Group in order to curtail its spread (Ifijeh, 2020) despite the fact literature posits that WHO puts Nigeria on the list of country with high risk of Covid-19 (Ezigbo & Ifijeh, 2020).

It should be reiterated that, there was composition of Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 in the country in order to prevent and control the spread of Covid-19 (Nigeria's Coronavirus, 2020; Omaka-Amari et al., 2020).

It is reiterated that, as a result of the consequences of Covid-19, it has drastically affected the standard of living of children in the country. According to UNICEF (2020), children are faced with plight of living and experiencing poverty and more recently, the impact of Covid-19 has widened the experience of children's poverty. For instance, literature contends that, since an inception of Covid-19, there is an approximate of 150 million children faced with the difficulty of accessibility to education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and housing services. More importantly, it is noted that data were collected from more than 70 countries, it was found out that, 45% of children were severely deprived any of the aforementioned basic needs prior to Covid-19.

However, the percentage has risen to 56% since the emergence of Covid-19 (UNICEF, 2020). Reiteratively, data by UNICEF (2020) further confirmed that, the Covid-19 pandemic has hindered the development of human capital and more importantly, there is closure of schools for more than 168 million children across the world. Nonetheless, the UNICEF (2020) advocated for the use of digital and technology for remote learning. It is however unfortunate to assert that, 463 million children across the world were not able to access remote learning during Covid-19.

More so, literature contends that, the current challenge of the pandemic has affected children in Nigeria especially those from poor backgrounds or households as they were forced to quit schools in order to give support to their parent because Covid-19 has created a vacuum and make most parents to be jobless. The scenario or challenges of Covid-19 have affected the labour market (Guy-Ryder, 2020) and many other studies have explored the impacts of Covid-19 on other spheres of human endeavours such as: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Falokun, 2020; Odinaka & Josephine, 2020); impact on multidimensional child poverty (UNICEF, 2020); nutrition and food shortage (Olofunmilayo, 2020).

In fact, poverty and lack of attention on children's right are predominant factors affecting the safety of street children in Nigeria (Jamaluddin, 2017). Nigeria's children begging on the streets in various parts of the country are one of social problems the literature advocates for survival strategies in addressing this ugly scenario (Aderinto, 2018). Literature contends that, the children have rights to be fulfilled under Nigeria law (Changani, 2001). As a result of Covid-19, literature posits that there is need to devise strategies for combating children who are forced to be begging on the streets (Anti-Slavery International, 2020).

Analysis of Triadic Impacts of Covid-19 on Children

This part presents the analysis of different themes or key words generated in connection with the impact of Covid-19 on the Nigerian children. The analysis is sub-divided into political impact, security impact and religious impact. Each of these will be elaborately analyzed in the subsequent sub-headings.

Political Impact

There are multifarious resources in the country, unfortunately, the country is still attributed with an extreme poverty than country like India that has larger population compared to Nigeria (Campbell, 2021). This unfortunate scenario is due to the fact that, Politics is regarded as a vehicle for politicians to access oil-revenue in the country. Thus, little is left for improving the social, economic, health and educational development in the country (Campbell, 2021). Hence, it is not disagreeable that there is connection between politics and all other aspects of human endeavours. Nonetheless, Covid-19 which has affected the oil prices immensely contribute to the current socio-economic problem in the country. The frightening of Covid-19 and its consequences require that efforts should be intensified in addressing the challenge among the citizens in general and children in particular.

It should be further reiterated that, the scenario of Covid-19 should provide efficiency of policy making that would provide betterment to the lives of children with specific attention in addressing post-Covid-19 Nigeria. Thus, the political decisions by the authority are expected to have positive impact on the lives of the citizens. It is noteworthy to posit that the government of different parts of the world have been taking proactive step in combating the effect of Covid-19. It is not disagreeable to posit that, during the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria, there was shutdown of all activities and decision making relating to socio-economic spheres in the country (Guy-Ryder, 2020).

It is not doubtful that parents are affected economically and indirectly, it also affects the wellbeing of the children in terms of the nutritional provision. It is on this basis that the government has been making proactive action in providing policy that will improve the conditions of the citizens. Literature posits that, the Nigerian government has tried to safeguard the loose of job which can also indirectly affect the children. In spite the fact the existing literature acknowledges the impact of Covid-19 on old age, the cases of children having cases of Covid-19 cannot be underestimated because it also has effect on multidimensional child poverty (UNICEF, 2020); child malnutrition (Olufunmilayo, 2020; Heady et al., 2020) and child mortality as literature contends (Robertson, Carter & Chou, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). Nonetheless, there is need for provision of policy that can adequately address direct or indirect impact of Covid.

The federal government of Nigeria has provided monetary and fiscal policy through which supports has been given to different households across the country because the changes in labour market has undeniably affected households including children's welfares. It is on this note to say that, the government is expected to make a provision for health insurance in order to provide more equitable healthcare facilities that will cater for children in the country (Aborede, Fajemisin & Awoniyi, 2021).

There is need for emergence action in addressing the challenge of Covid-19 in the country. The impact of Covid-19 has elaborately explained by UNICEF (2021) that, there is an increase maternal and child death. This has been confirmed that, there is negative impact of Covid-19 in 118 low- and middle-income countries including Nigeria. Apart from the challenge of Covid-19, there is need for political will in addressing many other challenges that are deadly than Covid-19. For instance, Campbell (2020) contends that, there are diseases such as: Lassa fever, malaria, meningitis that kill many citizens including children every year.

Thus, there is need for political will in providing preventive measures to children against the severity of Covid-19 and other deadly diseases. Nonetheless, the health sector in the country does not receive necessary attention for health care provision due to the fact that the sector is not adequately funded. As a result of inadequate attention to the health sector in the country, there is massive drain of medical doctors and other healthcare personnel from the country to other developed countries. It is therefore important to improve

the country's weak healthcare facilities in order to solve the problem of Covid-19 among children. Furthermore, the impact of Covid-19 on children is not only restricted to health or economic issues but basic human rights in general and children's rights in particular are expected to be considered. Thereby, restriction of human rights and children rights is more dangerous at the time of pandemic (Shakeel, Habib, Boulila, 2023).

Security and Safety of Children

It is essential to note that, Nigeria has been facing the challenge of insecurity specifically the problem of Boko Haram and more pathetically the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) which led to misplacement of adults and children in the country (Saba & Modoji, 2019). Apart from the aforementioned, the problem of kidnapping and banditry are serious security issues in the country. These conflicts and insecurity in the country also affect children in various parts of the country. Nonetheless, Child's Right Act (CRA) was enacted in 2003 as a legal document in helping towards addressing multifarious challenges facing children. More importantly, National Human Rights Commission contends that Child's Right Act (CRA) is being considered as: "Law that guarantees the rights of all children in Nigeria". Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has showed concern about addressing the challenges of the children in the country.

Nonetheless, the laws on Children's right are not instantly become enforceable in the 36 states of the country. More specifically, just only 24 states try to implement CRA and remaining 12 states predominantly in the northern Nigeria were not serious in solving children-related issues. However, the foregoing explicitly shows that, there are many efforts being made to ensure that the children are secured and saved. For instance, human security including safety of life and property have been extensively discussed in the existing literature (Di Liddo, 2021)

The emergence of Covid-19 raises another concern about health security of children that requires to be addressed. In other words, provision of health services has been extensively elaborated in the existing literature (Adebowale, 2019). More importantly, ensuring that children are living in a safe environment has been central concern of UNICEF (2020) and many other international agencies. Nonetheless, the outbreak of Covid-19 has brought about challenge to global public health. It should be reiterated that over 2.6 million people around the world had died as a result of contagious nature of novel coronavirus (UNICEF, 2021).

Thus, in the context of Nigeria, Covid-19 cannot guarantee the security of life of children as a result of the fact that, the existing health system in the country is weak as literature contends (Campbell, 2020). Hence, there is disruption in medical supply. As a result of lockdowns and curfews, there is drastic decline in healthcare facilities for both adults and the children. UNICEF (2021) has listed Nigeria as one of the countries with potential excess child deaths and mortality rates. During this critical period, it should be admitted that, there is need to continuously provide life-saving services for the children. Furthermore, it should be reiterated that provision of vaccinations and nutrition for their survival are essentially important.

However, as a result of Covid-19, malnutrition of children has been further widened despite the fact that, World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed the proliferation of malnutrition in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Studies have acknowledged the increase in hunger, food insecurity and the outbreak of Covid-19 increase the severity of malnutrition which undeniably increase the impact of the diseases of everybody including the children. In addition, the government at early stage of the pandemic has strategized in using preventive measures such as physical distancing, school closure, lockdowns, restrictions of movement (Ezigbo & Ifijeh, 2020; Falokun, 2020).

Moreover, food security is another important security specifically pertaining provision of basic nutrition and food supply which is directly or indirectly related economic security. The loose of job by adults or parents as a result of Covid-19 might affect food security of the children from poor background, Nigeria is an example. It is noted by World Bank (2020) that roughly 100 million across the world might be pushed to poverty as a result of pandemic of coronavirus which will definitely affect the children as well. The aforementioned measures have been undoubtedly increased for addressing the insecurity and safety against the negative impact of Covid-19 on the children. Hence, community security as an integral part of human

security needs to be strengthened in order to safeguard the values and relationship within the community. there is need for community security in order to safeguard the children against violence or physical threat. This is significant as a result of the fact that, there is an increase in violence as part of a consequence of Covid-19 as literature contends (Di Liddo, 2021).

The study by Adebowale (2019) contends that, there is need for domestication and implementation of Child's Right Act in Nigeria. In spite of this advocacy, many states in the country have not taken it seriously. It can therefore be posited that, with the challenges of Covid-19, there is need to adequately implement the child's right in the country as response to the assertion of UNICEF in reducing children's mortality rate in the country as a result of consequences of Covid-19 and as part of challenges faced by children in the country (UNICEF, 2021).

Literature contends that, in the context of Nigeria, Covid-19 has negatively affected children's nutrition (Aborede, Fajemisin, Awoniyi & Akinremi, 2021). More recently, there is negative impact of Covid-19 on childhood malnutrition which consequently increase their mortality rate as literature posits (Heady et al., 2020). According to World Food Programme (2020), it is posited that, as a result of Covid-19, there would be an increase in number of people facing crisis except there is proactive action. Literature further buttresses this position as the effects of Covid-19 pandemic have been linked with maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income families (Robertson, Carter & Chou, 2020). Hence, there is need for the action in the context of Nigeria specifically by addressing the challenge of children in this regard.

UNICEF has been trying to address the problem of hunger in Africa including Nigeria specifically among the children prior to the emergence of Covid-19. It is unfortunate to say that, the emergence of Covid-19 further widens the hunger among children as literature contends (Akorede, Ogunsola & Adeyemo, 2020). Similarly, others studies have advocated that, as long as Covid-19 continues to spread, there would be continuity in poverty (World Bank, 2020), food shortage and food insecurity (Laborde, Martin & Vos, 2020; Olufunmilayo, 2020). It is on this note that, the study by Di Liddo (2021) contends that, human security in general should be address during Covid-19. With this advocacy, the government needs to do the needful especially by addressing the challenge of poverty and food insecurity that might affect the children.

Religious Impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Children

This sub-section explores religious Covid-19 and its impact of the lives of Nigerian children. The explanation of a particular phenomenon such as religion may assist in proffering solution to the current phenomenon of Covid-19 on the children in the Nigerian context. It is essential to note that in Western culture, literature posits that religion is being considered as a folk category (Atran, 2002; Boyer, 2001). However, in Eastern culture, religion is considered as a metaphysical realm.

More importantly, religion is being clarified based on its conception in the context of Nigeria. It is important to underscore that, there is no singular definition of the term religion. It is on this basis that literature contends that; it is difficult to define religion due to the fact that it has different facets. In other words, it is noteworthy to say that the concept of religion is similar to many concepts such as culture which are not easy to give precise definition. In an attempt to analyze religion, hence, definition can be changed depending on understanding of who is exploring the definition (Diab, 2023).

It is on this basis the literature contends that, in the late 19 and early 20th Centuries, empirical anthropology concluded that, it is difficult to define the concept of religion. Nonetheless, religion is conceptually defined as a spiritual belief. Based on this definition, it can be said that, cultivation of religious belief can be instrumental in addressing the negative consequences of Covid-19 such as depression among the Nigerian children. Additionally, religion can be seen as a psychological attachment and emotional relationship religion is dealing with reality that is not observable in spite the fact that sociologists such as Stark & Fink (2000) posit that religious behaviour is actually rational and it considers human nature.

Thus, Covid-19 has caused psychological disturbance not only to the adult as the United Nations (2020) posits but it can also cause psychological disturbance to the children. This is why psychological explanation

and function of religion also has sociological implications. For instance, religion tries to provide explanation for complex scenario and denial of mortality. It is undoubted to say that, Covid-19 causes depression on the victims, hence, religion can significantly and conveniently provide a spiritual therapy in fighting depression emanating from the scenario of Covid-19 especially among the children in the context of Nigeria.

Religion cannot be practiced without social environment; hence it also involves social interaction. In other words, people practice religion with the presence of others. For instance, Muslims gather in the mosques, Christians gather in the churches and traditional worshippers gather in the shrines in order to demonstrate religiousness or religiosity. This gathering in the places of worship also comprise children. As a result of social gathering in the places of worship in the country, literature posits that there was suspension of activities in places of worship in the country in order to curtail the challenges of Covid-19 (Omaka-Amari et al., 2020).

It is not deniable to say that religion operates or functions within a frame of spirituality which intuitively can provide solution to a particular problem of survival. This is assertion is importantly relevant because religious internationalization of spirituality that can solve the problem of Covid-19 because it is the current problem of survival not only in Nigeria but in the entire world. This position can be further elaborated in the sense that, religion discusses the significance of scaredness which controls the interaction of human being in an environment (Ahmed, 2024). It should be further reiterated that sacred signals try to coordinate the responses of group to environmental change. It should be clarified that, religious denotes symbolic communication because it has to do with sacrifice as a demonstration of commitment a particular ideology which activates cooperation among adherents of the same faith or religion. This assertion is essential because the current challenge of Covid-19 requires symbolic communication that will sensitize the children regarding the danger of Covid-19 using religious mechanism in addressing the negative consequence of the pandemic. Indeed, better cooperation and sensitization provides benefit against the depression arising from the impact of Covid-19 either in adults or children (Saleem F, AlNasrallah, Malik , Rehman, 2022)

Overwhelming studies advocate for religion as an important institution in addressing social problems in the society (Atran, 2002; Boyer, 2001). Thus, personal commitment and collective dedication is an important trait cultivated by religion which might be difficult to be taken as pretense (Irons, 2001). Based on this assertion, it can be inferred that, the challenge of Covid-19 can be addressed among the children by cultivating spiritual consciousness in the minds of youngsters. Hence, the study by Kirkpatrick (2005) contends that, the personal attachment to religion is an integral part of its psychology among the adherents of a particular religion. Nonetheless, as a result of restriction of movement and other measures against Covid-19 (Ifijeh, 2020), it might affect the attachment ascribed to religion as identified in literature (Kirkpatrick (2005).

Suggestions

Covid-19 in connection with political, security and religious impacts have been explicitly elaborated. It is essential to reiterate different suggestions in addressing these impacts which are as follows:

- Covid-19 should be seen as a way of providing policy for effective and efficient policy for implementing child's right Act in the country in order to cater for the needs of the children especially those from low-income families in order to address long term effect of coronavirus.
- Political power or authority should be judiciously utilized in fostering healthcare services for the betterment of the lives of children in order to address the concern of UNICEF regarding the tendency of excess child mortality rate as a result of Covid-19 in the country.
- Human security and more importantly children security in the aspect of addressing their malnutrition, hunger and food insecurity should be given prime concern as part of effort to address the problem of Covid-19 in the country.

- The government should provide efficient and adequate healthcare facilities and services as part of security needed by the children in the country as part of effort to curtail the negative impact of Covid-19 in the country.
- Indeed, the government should involve religious professional counsellors by utilizing cognitive therapy technique or remedy for solving the negative effect of Covid-19 on the Nigerian children.
- There is need for the government's initiative in giving financial support to the low-income families in order to strengthen different aspects of security such as health, food, community among others as part of multidimensional child poverty which directly or indirectly affect children in the country as a result of Covid-19.
- There is need to strengthen religious institutions in the country by utilizing symbolic communication as an integral part of religion in addressing the challenges of Covid-19 among the children in the country.
- The government for initiate social support programme for children especially in order ascertain that the children are not having trauma or psychological disturbance emanating from the scenario of Covid-19 in the society.

Conclusion

The paper has painstakingly explored and analyzed the political, security and religious impacts of Covid-19 specifically on the children. It is not arguable to posit that, the overview of Covid-19 has been explicated in the context of Nigeria. The triadic components of political, security and religious impacts have been elaborated. More specifically, the paper advocates for adequate utilization of political power to initiate policy that will guarantee protection of children as a result of Covid-19. Also, the paper explicitly elucidated the various aspects of security and safety for the children as a result of Covid-19. For instance, health security, food security, children's rights among others have been elaborated. It is thereby necessary to posit that, there is need for the government to address the condition of children experiencing multidimensional poverty as a result of Covid-19. Thereby, this can be better addressed by looking at influx of triadic factors explored in this paper.

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