

Perceived Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Social Health of Single Mothers in Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

Globally, COVID-19 had serious social, economic and health impacts on the lives of individuals, especially single mothers; the situation was worse in developing countries like Nigeria. The study aimed to ascertain the perceived impact of COVID-19 on the social health of single mothers in River State Nigeria. A cross-sectional research design was employed in the study. Taro Yamane's technique was used to determine a sample size of 285 out of the 1000 single mothers that made up the study's population. A multi-stage sampling strategy was employed. A questionnaire was the instrument for data collection and was self-developed, validated, and pretested. Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage were employed, and the hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square test statistic. It was found that Covid -19 pandemic had a high perceived impact on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State, Nigeria (63.7%). Single mothers less than 25 years had average perceived impact (47.4%); 25 to 44 years had an average perceived impact (50.7%); those above 44 years had a high perceived impact (64.6%). Based on the level of education, the perceived impacts are as follows: no formal education (33.3%), primary education (38.7%), secondary education (38.2%) and tertiary education (43.5%). Furthermore, occupation as a variable showed the perceived impacts as found below: unemployed (44.3%), self-employed (40.6%) and employed (42.5%). More so, the perceived impacts across the demographic variables were significant ($p < 0.05$). In conclusion, therefore, there was a high perceived impact of covid-19 pandemic on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State; the impact was more on single mothers who were beyond 44 years old. Based on the level of education and occupation, the impact was more on those with tertiary education and employed respectively. It was recommended that social health support services should be considered globally by policymakers when making certain legislation and policies. Mental health services and financial aid necessary to address the effects of COVID-19 on the social health of single mothers should be provided.

Keywords: Perceived Impacts, Social Health, Covid-19 Pandemic, Single Mothers, Rivers State Nigeria

1. Introduction

Globally, millions of people suffered grave repercussions as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic (Kontoangelos et al., 2020); but some people have been impacted more than others. Those who live in single-parent households are a vulnerable group that is particularly and much more likely to experience financial difficulties, emotional discomfort, and social isolation due to their lack of social network. These were evident in the United Kingdom, Germany and other European countries (Liedlet et al., 2023; Blundell et al., 2022; Dromey, 2020; Branowska-Rataj et al., 2014; Calvano et al., 2022; Carotta et al., 2022; Cook & Grimshaw, 2021). Single mothers experienced a rise in social isolation as a result of social distancing policies and gathering prohibitions (Hiekel & Kühn, 2022; Kuhn et al., 2021; Huebener et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; O'Reilly, 2020; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018, 2019, Tisdell, 2020). Their lack of access to friends, family (Racine et al., 2021), and support systems meant they had fewer opportunities for emotional support and connection - two

things that are essential to preserving social health. Stress from unstable finances, more caregiving duties, and social isolation hurt single mothers' mental health all around the world. During the pandemic, many people had elevated levels of anxiety, despair, and loneliness (Romero-Gonzalez et al., 2022; Wanberg et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, Covid -19 pandemic exposed everyone especially single mothers to a gamut of issues, which includes social isolation, greater caregiving responsibilities, and the stress of uncertain finances impact on the social health of single mothers (Boye, 2023). As single mothers deal with the difficulties caused by the epidemic, they may develop anxiety, sadness, and other mental health conditions (Attah et al., 2020). Restrictions on movement and social distancing measures made it harder for single mothers in Nigeria to connect with social support systems (Iheanacho-Shahid, 2021). Without the emotional support and social connections they were accustomed to before the pandemic, they might have felt alone and isolated.

Generally, the pandemic resulting from Coronavirus 19 had lots of impacts on various aspects of life. In this study, the interest is not on studying coronavirus as a disease but on the impact the pandemic had on the social health of single mothers. How some activities of the pandemic like quarantine, lockdown and social distancing impacted the social health of this group of women. Wang et al. (2020) opined that crisis periods are usually periods of impacts on all aspects of health and well-being with the attendant social, emotional, and psychological distress and the associated symptoms, including stress, worry, and panic among the general public. Understanding the extent to which such pandemics affect social and mental health as well as other facets of life is therefore vital (Al-Rabiaah et al., 2020; Davico et al., 2020; Torales et al., 2020). Hertz et al (2021) posited that the most challenging aspect of the shutdown was the lack of personal time or space that both jobs and social networks supplied, which negatively impacted women's wellbeing overwhelmingly

Restrictions on movement, being apart from friends and family, having little independence, and being afraid of the future are all things that could make the negative psychological and social effects worse (Brooks et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2007; Paris, 2020). Serafini et al. (2020) emphasised that several stresses, such as extended quarantine periods, anxiety about contracting an infection, discomfort, loneliness, boredom, confinement, insufficient knowledge, and financial loss, might exacerbate poor mental and social health. Several studies have examined the gender dimension of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (Alon et al., 2020; Wenham et al. 2020; Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2019).

The phrase "social health" describes how individuals build wholesome and constructive interpersonal connections with one another. People who are in good social health are better able to manage their emotions and feel supported in day-to-day activities. Getting out and socializing, participating in community events, and avoiding isolation are just a few strategies to attain this kind of health. Good social health is demonstrated by a robust support network, strong social networks, and strong interpersonal interactions. Better mental and physical health are supported by good social health. We run the risk of experiencing social isolation, physical health issues, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other mental health illnesses,

as well as a lower quality of life, when we have poor social health (East Tennessee State University, 2022). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the perceived impacts of COVID-19 on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State, Nigeria.

This paper examined the perceived impact of COVID-19 on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study would achieve the objective of determining the perceived impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State based on the socio-demographics of age, level of education, and occupation.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Obio/Akpor L.G.A of Rivers State Nigeria (study area) using a cross-sectional research design. The population size of the study was 1000 single mothers and a sample size of 285 was calculated using Taro Yamane's formula. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to recruit the respondents. The LGA was clustered into communities, wards, village and family heads. The different family heads listed the number of single mothers in their families that the self-developed, validated and pretested questionnaire was administered to. To address research issues, descriptive statistics of percentage and frequency were employed, and the Chi-square test statistic was employed to evaluate the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results and Discussion

Results in Table 1 show that the COVID-19 pandemic had a high perceived impact (63.7%) on the social health of single mothers in the studied population.

Table 1: The frequency of perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State Nigeria

S/N	Items	Perceived impacts of Covid-19 (n=285)			
		Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1	Did you experience loneliness during the lockdown as a single mother?	251	88.1	34	11.9
2	Did you experience anxiety during the pandemic?	223	78.2	62	21.8
3	Did your mental stress level increase during the pandemic?	247	86.7	38	13.3
4	Were you afraid of the pandemic as a single mother?	262	91.9	23	8.1
5	Did you receive good social support during the pandemic?	261	91.6	24	8.4
6	Did you feel connected with the television religious worship?	161	56.5	124	43.5
7	Did you gain excessive weight during the lockdown due to lack of exercise as a single parent?	136	47.7	149	52.3
8	Did you engage in heavy alcohol intake to reduce stress during the pandemic?	52	18.2	233	81.8
9	Did you use smoking to make yourself happy during the lockdown?	28	9.8	257	90.2
10	Did the social distancing hinder the care you get from others?	231	81.1	54	19.9

11	Did the pandemic make you feel pained being a single mother?	146	51.2	139	48.8
	Average	182	63.7	103	36.3

The key for interpretations of Tables 1 and 2: Less than 39% implies low perceived impact; 40 – 59% implies average perceived impact; 60 -79% implies high perceived impact; 80% and above for very high perceived impact. ‘Yes’ is the indication of perceived impact.

Table 2 shows that single mothers aged below 25 years (50.7%) and those aged 25 -44 years (47.4 %) both had an average perceived impact while those above 44 years had a high perceived impact (64.6%) on their social health ($P < 0.05$). Table 2 further showed that single mothers with no formal education (33.3%), primary education (38.7 %) and secondary education (38.2%) all had low perceived impact while those with tertiary education (43.5%) had an average perceived impact of the pandemic on their social health ($P < 0.05$). It was also revealed in Table 2 that single mothers across occupations had average perceived impacts of the pandemic on their social health; those with no jobs (44.3%), those who were self-employed (40.6%) and those employed (42.5%).

Table 2: The frequency of perceived impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social health of single mothers in, Rivers State Nigeria based on age, level of education and occupation

Yes F/%	No F/%	Yes F/%	No F/ %	Yes F/%	No F/ %	Yes F/%	No F/ %	P-value
Based on age								
< 25 years (n=79)		25-44years (n=145)		>44 years (n=61)				
37(47.4)	2(52.6)	74(50.7)	71(49.3)	41(64.6)	20(35.4)			0.00001
Based on the level of education								
No formal education (n=8)		Primary(n=46)		Secondary (n=123)		Tertiary (n=108)		
3(33.3)	5 (66.7)	18(38.7)	28(61.3)	47(38.2)	76(61.8)	47(43.5)	61(56.5)	0.00001
Based on occupation								
No job (n=32)		Self-employed years (n=133)		Employed (n=120)				0.00001
14(44.3)	18(55.7)	54(40.6)	79(59.4)	51(42.5)	69(57.5)			

Table 1 revealed that the single mothers in Rivers State, Nigeria had a high perceived impact of covid-19 pandemic on their social health (63.7%). This agrees with the findings of Paris (2020) and Alon et al. (2020a). This is not surprising because the Obia/Akpor Area is the epicentre of social activities in Rivers State.

The results in Table 2 indicate that single mothers significantly have different perceived impacts of the pandemic on their social health based on their ages which agrees with Melo and Soares (2020) who found significant differences in the effect of the pandemic on health based on age. The results could stem from the fact that single mothers beyond 44 years would have more responsibilities attributable to age and with less assistance. The table further showed that participants with tertiary education had a higher impact than their counterparts.

This is expected with the social networking and relationships of women with tertiary education; social distancing, and staying at home will impact their social health significantly. This is consistent with the study of Bassuk et al. (1999) and Paris (2020) who found that educational level was significant in perceived stress by individuals during the pandemic. Table 2 also showed that single mothers had the average perceived impact of the pandemic on their social health across all occupations. This could be as a result of the lockdown which forced everyone to stay at home and be exposed to the same concerns. This agrees with Wang et al. (2020).

5. Conclusion

There was a high perceived impact of covid-19 pandemic on the social health of single mothers in Rivers State, Nigeria. The demographics showed that older women, those with tertiary education and employed were mostly affected. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that social health support should be considered by policymakers when making certain policies. Comprehensive global and national strategies including social and mental health supports, targeted support programs, healthcare service access, financial aid, and efforts to end gender-based violence are needed to address these issues. Community organizations, governmental organisations, and non-governmental organisations can be extremely important providers of support and resources for the social health of Nigerian single mothers.

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