Socio-Cultural Consequences of Covid 19 Lockdown and Social Distancing: The Nigerian Experience

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has disrupted social norms, values, and cultural ways of social engagements and interactions among the people in a society. The lockdown and social distancing rules aimed at preventing the spread of the virus through person to person transmission has confined people to their homes. These socio-economic restrictions and isolations have altered the social life and livelihood of people.

Frustrations and dissatisfactions arising from the social reality created by Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing have led to increased deviant and anti-social behaviors in society. This paper focused on some of the emergent deviant behaviors occasioned by covid-19 lockdown and social distancing in Nigeria.

Keywords: Covid-19; Social disruptions; Frustration; Deviant behavior

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the novel corona virus (COVID-19) turned into a pandemic, increased apprehension and desperate measures have been adopted by individuals and governments as coping measures and means of reducing the spread of the virus [1]. Most governments are copying the total lockdown method used by China to curtail the spread of the virus in Wuhan the epicenter of the virus. This lockdown has forced a wide range of human social interactions to a halt. It is pertinent to note that social interactions are necessary features in any human society. Once social interactions are restricted among human beings, what will emerge is a disconnected and socially isolated group of people whose behavior cannot be predicted and controlled easily in society [2].

In Nigeria, the total lockdown and social distancing imposed on the people by the various levels of governments have distorted the socio-economic wellbeing and livelihood of members of the society, particularly the poor and vulnerable who lack the economic capacity to stockpile food and other necessities of life [3]. In Nigeria, where we have an army of unemployed youths who usually depend on daily wages and informal economic activities to survive, asking them to remain locked down at home without any meaningful plan for their welfare is a social disaster in waiting.

It is expected that there will be an increase in some deviant behaviors in prominent urban centers in Nigeria. These behaviors are unique to frustrated individuals as a result of the lockdown with regards to COVID-19. The theory of anomie is applicable in this regard.

Anomie is a concept closely related to Emile Durkheim and Robert K Merton. In his book, The Labor Division in Society, Durkheim coined the word to describe a state of "deregulation" in society. This means that a society's general procedural rules (regulations which dictate how people should interact with each other) are disintegrated and that people do not know what to expect from each other. In Suicide, (1897), Durkheim used the word anomie later to refer also to an ethical reform of the situation. A society may also reach a state of anomie if people don't know when to quit striving for success or how to deal with others along the way. Either a collapse of the laws of society or moral standards, whichever of the two examples of anomie, it's clear that Durkheim was thinking about the destruction of normal societies. Such deregulation or unchecked activity quickly leads to deviation [4]. These anti-social behaviors include:

Theft

Theft is one of the usual consequences of economic crisis in Nigeria. The economic crisis and reforms of the 1980s and 1990s witnessed in Nigeria steadily eroded real income from wage labor resulting in the prevalence of theft cases in the country [5] As a result of the COVID-19 lockdown; there has been an upsurge in cases of theft and burglary in most parts of Nigeria [6]. The common items stolen are mainly raw food items, money, and other valuable properties. In some parts of Lagos, Nigeria, these thefts are perpetrated by angry and hungry youths who move as mobs from street to street robbing

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shops and homes of their victims openly. The police and other law enforcement agencies are currently incapacitated by the large number of these desperate mobs armed with all kinds of dangerous weapons [7]. Nigeria has always struggled with issues of security [8], this situation has led to the formation of various vigilante and neighborhood watch groups whose operations are currently not under police supervisions and violate the fundamental human rights of suspects and innocent members of the society alike. Many of these vigilante groups adopt jungle justice in handling suspects. This situation runs against the democratic principles of rule of law and perception of suspects to be innocent until proven guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction. The total lockdown and social distancing occasioned by corona virus have created anger and hunger among jobless youths and social miscreants who resort to theft as a means of survival and vetting their desperation to society.

Cyber bullying

Anotherexpectedconsequence of the current policy on managing the pandemic is cyber bullying. The total lockdown and social distancing caused by corona virus have led to the upsurge in reliance and use of internet facilities and social media platforms as a mode of social interactions and communication. While some use the internet connection to bridge the gap of social relations created by the lockdown and social distancing, others use it to carry out other heinous internet fraud and cybercrime including cyber bullying. Although freedom of expression is a crucial indicator of a democracy's strength, it is, however, noticed that people continue to show disinhibition on social media platforms in contrast with real-life interactions [9]. The cyber bully believes that there is an "opaque" barrier between him/her and the victim so that the antisocial conduct is emboldened and offensive [10]. The making of socially inappropriate comments and/or actions is expected to be on the rise, especially with the various "challenge" lunched on various social media platforms. Some of these "challenge" includes "He's got the whole world" challenge initiated by Tyler Perry, "BOB Daddy" challenge by Falz, and the various "challenge" on Tik Tok and Instagram including "Flip the switch" and "Your First Move Is Their Last Move" among others.

Cyber bullies are usually triggered by jealousy, obsessive fixation (professional or sexual), unemployment or work or life failures, the intention to bully and make others feel inferior, egotistical know-how, a desire to instill terror, financial gain or market rivalry intimidation, rebellion on perception or imagination [10]. Since all schools are physically shut down and active online, most youths and young persons who mostly engage in such challenge have the tendencies of exhibiting disinhibition online. This could cause a lot of emotional trauma and psychological stress on the victims most of whom are young and naïve.

Hate Speech

Hate speech could be on the increase since the lockdown and social restrictions occasioned by the corona virus and fear of its spread in the society. In general, hate speech is commonly defined, often to represent words that insult those in power or minority groups or demean people who are especially evident in society. Hate speech may be subject to manipulation at crucial times. The digital media provides an easy forum for quickly adapting and diffusing hate speech and expression due to its open, anonymous and interactive framework [11].

In Nigeria, where there exist ethnic rivalries and claims of political, economic, cultural, and religious domination by some ethnic and minority groups in the society, hate speech is used to fan the embers of mistrust and suspicion in the society. The spreading of hate speech is considered even more dangerous than the spread of corona virus in terms of its destructive potentials to society. The promotion of hate, doubt, mistrust, and suspicions among the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram has led to wanton destruction of lives and properties among different ethnic or religious groups in Nigeria [11]. The Federal government of Nigeria is currently in a dilemma of regulating social media without being perceived negatively and dictatorial by the public. The lockdown and social restrictions have left the people with internet and social media as a means of communication and interaction. People are now almost free to use social media to spread rumors, fake news, and hate speech which can affect the cooperate existence of Nigeria and sow the seed of social disorder and disintegration in society.

Domestic abuse

The compulsory stay at home caused by the corona virus pandemic has increased the proximity and duration of the family as well as all its latent consequences which may include domestic abuse. The weak and vulnerable made up of children, house helps, economically dependent wives, spouses, and the elderly constitute the most abused in society. The lockdown only mean that they are forced to remain together with their abusers for a long time. Other members of the community and religious organizations which usually served as a refuge for the victims are now disconnected from the victims leaving them at the messy of their abusers while the lockdown lasts. Hospitals and other health facility officials who usually observe and blow whistles against domestic abusers especially those that abuse their pregnant wives and spouses are at the front-lines against the pandemic which makes them reach due to the victims of domestic abuse.

Marital Rape

Another expected social consequence of total lockdown and social distancing is marital rape by male or female spouses. For couples who are locked down with no form of socio-economic engagements, desire for sex may increase and where a partner lacks restraints, it will result in numerous marital rapes while the lockdown lasts. The victim of marital rape lacks the power to give his or her consent before sexual intercourse. The victim equally lacks the power to exercise control of his or her body and sexual rights. The irony of the moment is that the police and other law enforcement agents are preoccupied with lockdown and social distancing implementation or enforcement rather than calls for marital rape. The victims will, therefore, suffer in silence and are predisposed to unplanned pregnancies.

CONCLUSION

The lockdown and social distancing enforced by most governments in the wake of corona virus pandemic have dislocated the social fabric of the society based on social norms, values, and group interactions within the society. This is made worse in developing nations like Nigeria where culture and communal efforts still form the fulcrum of human social interactions and livelihood. The worst form of punishment for any human being is social isolation or distancing from social groups and family members. This social

distancing and locked down is what makes prison life empty and lonely. Therefore the total lockdown and social distancing due to corona virus have added to the deprivations, hardships, and insecurity challenges of the poor and vulnerable members of the Nigerian society forcing some of them to take to crime and other deviant or antisocial behavior as a way of survival. The lockdown has created an atmosphere of broken social ties, lack of social control of behavior by family and other socialization agents, and social disorder.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The fundamental problem confronting most African and developing nations is bad governance due to poor leadership and corruption. The human and material resources in Africa are poorly harnessed and managed for the general good of all in society. Therefore to reduce the negative consequences of corona virus pandemic lockdown and social distancing in Nigeria, the following are recommended:

1. Government at different levels must diversify into Agriculture to take advantage of the arable land in Nigeria to create jobs and enhance food sufficiency and security.

2. The government should invest in the provision of health infrastructure across the nation. Access and use of hospitals and other healthcare infrastructure should be enhanced in all parts of Nigeria to promote public health and sanitation of the population at all times.

3. People should be motivated to create jobs through self-reliance economic ventures and entrepreneurship projects. This will reduce overdependence on government as the only source of job creation and reduce poverty occasioned by unemployment.

4. Members of the public should be enlightened to participate in governance and policing as the Police alone cannot prevent and control crime in society. Community partnerships in crime prevention should be encouraged.

There should be increases value re-orientation by the major socialization agents made up of family, religion, education and even mass media to preach the values of diligence, integrity, peaceful coexistence, and tolerance among members of the society particularly the youths and younger members of the society. These values will promote social order and sanction deviant behaviors among the people.

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