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SOCIO-ECONOMIC BURDEN OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE YOUTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic affects several aspects of the human population, and more detrimental to the vulnerable including youth living in abject poverty and with disabilities. In order to understand the impact of the pandemic on the youth, this paper reviews the socio-economic burden of COVID-19 with specific attention on education, poverty, unemployment, and youth's involvement in crimes. The objective is to proffer solutions to socio-economic problems triggered by the pandemic concerning the youth. The paper's analysis is anchored on the structural functionalism approach being a theoretical review. This review argues that the pandemic came with difficult challenges, such as lockdown that have stagnated the lives of the youth, increased unemployment among them, and have also driven many into crimes. The paper recommends that the Nigerian government must cushion the effect of the socio-economic burden placed on youth by the pandemic through innovative and inclusive policy solutions targeted to promote employment and a healthy workforce in ways that would reduce poverty and crime rate among the youth.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, socio-economic burden, youth, unemployment, crime, education, development

Introduction

The coronavirus is a disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARSCOV-2) which has been labeled a COVID-19 or novel coronavirus. The virus has harmed several socio-economic systems with ripple effects on the various aspect of human life and was temporarily termed the new virus 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) on 12 January 2020 and then officially named this infectious disease coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on 12 February 2020 while it was declared a global pandemic on the 11th of March, 2020 by the World Health Organization (Sohrabi, Alsafi, O'Neill, Khan, Kerwan, & Al-Jabir, 2020). The pandemic outbreak affects several aspects of the human population and is more detrimental to the vulnerable populations including youth living in abject poverty, youth with disabilities, youths and indigenous people (UNDP, 2020). This indicates that the health and economic impacts of the pandemic are being borne disproportionately by the poor because they may be unable to safely shelter in healthy environments and they become highly exposed to contacting the virus.

Statistics from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) as at September 14th, 2020 revealed that there are 56,256 confirmed cases of people with COVID-19, 11,022

active cases, 44,151 discharged cases and mortality rate of 1,082 persons across the various states in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). In the bid to flatten the curve and reduce the spread of the virus, the federal government has enforced border shutdowns, travel restrictions, lockdown, and restrictions of inter-state travels across the nation. This action has spark fears of economic crisis and recession (Buck, Arnold, Chazan, Cookson, 2020) poverty, unemployment and social burden on the populace and especially on youths who are the focus of this paper. For the purpose of this paper, youth are classified as those persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years. United Nation Population Fund (UNFP) defines a youth as a period of transition from dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence while the African Youth Charter considers people within the ages of 15-35 years as a youth (UNDESA, 2014).

COVID-19 is potentially catastrophic for millions who are already hanging by a thread. It is a hammer blow for millions more who can only eat if they earn a wage. Lockdowns and global economic recession have already decimated their nest eggs. The chief economist Arif Husain posited that it only takes one more shock-like COVID-19 to push the impoverished youths over the edge and it is essential to act now to mitigate the impact of this global catastrophe (Olurounbi, 2020).

In Nigeria, the problem seems complicated considering that prior to COVID-19, there had been high rate of unemployment, poverty, poor education and other trainings among the youths. Crime was also high as a result of socioeconomic status of this group (youths). All these have been worsening by the shocking effect of COVID-19 which resulted to total lockdown of institutions in Nigeria. Many youths equally lost their jobs which were provoked by the economic reality of their employers. The family dependent of these youths have to go through hard times having been thrown into impoverishment. These are capable of pressurizing some family members into unusual behaviours. Moreover, Nigeria were unable to keep pace with the alternative means which was IT based. According to International Labour Organization(ILO), (2020)socioeconomic resultants of the pandemic are hitting youths all over the world faster and severely than other age groups. African youths are facing several shocks, including disruptions to education, training, and on-the-job learning; employment and income losses resulting from lay-offs and reduced working hours; and greater hardship in finding quality jobs. They also experience greater vulnerability stemming from high youth working poverty rates, and because they work more in less protected sectors, most of them are at risk of disruption due to COVID-19.

Olurounbi (2020) further argued that the unemployment rate forecast would rise to 33.5% by 2020 due to the global pandemic that could push at least 5 million people into poverty and, a near 14% inflation rate as well as an impending recession, the Nigerian future looks dire in the coming months, according to multiple data and reports from several agencies including the World Bank and the United Nation's World Food Programme. In an attempt to understand the mayhem and impact of the pandemic on the youth, this paper reviewed the socioeconomic burden of COVID-19 with specific attention on education, poverty, unemployment, and youth involvement in crime. A research on this issue becomes imperative because assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on societies, and active labour force is fundamental to inform and tailor the responses of governments and partners to recover from the crisis and ensure that no one is left behind in this effort. Without urgent socio-economic responses and revert to normalcy, national suffering will escalate, jeopardizing lives and livelihoods for years to come; hence, instantaneous development responses to this crisis must be undertaken to cushion the effect

socioeconomic burden placed on youth as a result of the pandemic. In view of this backdrop, this paper addressed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on poverty and youth's unemployment, the effects of the pandemic on educational and vocational development amongst youth and impact of COVID-19 pandemic on youths' involvement in crime.

Concept of COVID-19

The novel human coronavirus disease COVID-19 has become the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China, and subsequently spread worldwide. The coronavirus was officially named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) by the international committee on taxonomy of viruses based on phylogenetic analysis. SARS-CoV-2 is believed to be a spillover of an animal coronavirus and later adapted the ability of human-to-human transmission. Because the virus is highly contagious, it rapidly spreads and continuously evolves in the human population. As of now, we can trace the first report and subsequent outbreak from a cluster of novel human pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, China, since late December 2019. Chinese health officials informed the World Health Organization about a cluster of 41 patients with mysterious pneumonia. Most were connected to the huanan seafood wholesale market, a wet market in the city of Wuhan (Huang, Wang, Li, Ren, Zhao, and Hu, 2020).

Scholars have opined that the symptomatology of these patients, including fever, malaise, dry cough, and dyspnea, was diagnosed as viral pneumonia (Zhu, Zhang, Wang, Li, Yang, and Song, 2020; Huang, Wang, Li, Ren, Zhao, and Hu; 2020). Initially, the disease was called Wuhan pneumonia by the press because of the area and pneumonia symptoms. Whole-genome sequencing results showed that the causative agent is a novel coronavirus. Therefore, this virus is the seventh member of the coronavirus family to infect humans (Wu, Zhao, Yu, Chen, Wang, and Song, 2020). Coronaviridae Study Group on the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) (2020) officially designated the virus as SARS-CoV-2 based on phylogeny, taxonomy and established practice. Subsequently, human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 occurring within Hong Kong has been shown in clinical data (Chan, Yuan, Kok, To, Chu, and Yang, 2020). Since COVID-19 initially emerged in China, the virus has evolved for four months and rapidly spread to other countries worldwide as a global threat. On 11 March 2020, the WHO finally made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic, following 1918 Spanish flu (H1N1), 1957 Asian flu (H2N2), 1968 Hong Kong flu (H3N2), and 2009 Pandemic flu (H1N1), which caused an estimated 50 million, 1.5 million, 1 million, and 300,000 human deaths, respectively (Huang, Wang, Li, Ren, Zhao, and Hu, 2020).

Precautionary Measures to Prevent COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the World Health Organization (2020) the precautionary measures to be undertaken to reduce the chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 include firstly, regular and thorough cleaning of hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. This is important because regular hand washing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on the hands. Secondly, maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others. This should be done because when someone coughs, sneezes, or speaks they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain the virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person has

the disease. Thirdly, avoid crowded places. This should be strictly adhered to because where people come together in crowds, you are more likely to come into close contact with someone that has COVID-19 and it is more difficult to maintain a physical distance of 1 metre (3 feet). In addition, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth because the hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and infect the person. It is essential to follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands. This is important because the droplets spread the virus.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19. Stay home and self-isolate even with minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until you recover. Have someone bring you supplies. If you need to leave your house, wear a mask to avoid infecting others. Avoiding contact with others will protect them from possible COVID-19 and other viruses. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention, put a call in advance if possible and follow the directions of your local health authority. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent the spread of viruses and other infections. Furthermore, keep up to date on the latest information from trusted sources, such as WHO or local and national health authorities. The local and national authorities are best placed to advice on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves (WHO, 2020).

Theoretical Justification

Our theoretical framework of analysis centres on Structural-Functionalist Approach of Hebert Spencer (1820–1903) and Robert K. Merton (1910–2003), Structural functionalism, or simply, functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. Two theorists, Herbert Spencer and Robert Merton were major contributors to this perspective. The theory assumes that society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. It maintained that human lives are guided by social structures, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour. Social structures give shape to human lives. The various institutions within a society perform different functions to help achieve that social stability. Functionalism states that evolutionary social change is beneficial to a society's health, while revolutionary change can damage society. That is to say, anything that affects one part of the system automatically affects the other parts of the system. If equilibrium must be achieved, every part of the system has to keep functioning well, and in relation with other parts. Important concepts in functionalism include social structure, social functions, manifest functions, latent functions, and dysfunction. Robert Merton pointed out that social processes often have many functions. Manifest functions are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while latent functions are the unsought consequences of a social process. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are said to be dysfunctions.

The application of the structural-functionalism approach in this study would be appreciated if viewed from the point that health sector as one of parts of the

system, has been attacked by COVID-19 Pandemic and it triggered the global crisis, which has affected other parts of the system. A problem has been dictated in the system and in efforts to curb or slow the spreads of the deadly virus; stringent measures were taken which include restrictions and total lockdown. Hence, lockdown and other restriction measures is a health policy that has a manifest function of trying to avert the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the same policy came with latent functions that have very hard hit on other parts (institutions) of the system. For instance, unemployment, poverty and economical loss, dropping out from school, not finding desired employment, trauma, getting bad grades and half-baked graduate, engaging in crime, becoming a victim and widening the of inequalities gap are the effects.

Not that this theoretical view does not have its flaws, like its blunt rejection of revolutionary change has made it less attractive in the modern social milieu. This is because some social structure or its agency that benefits from the status quo will impede the needed change that could come evolutionally as advocated by this theory. And again, what it called dysfunction may not be dysfunctional. In a case of socioeconomic burden of COVID-19, the hardship brought by the policy move has exposed the extent of the fragile nature of our health system, the weaknesses of institutions and their operation. Like the needs to change our methods of operations. Though, in as much as there are some criticisms against this theory, it still stands as one of relevant approach to understand the current issue of COVID-19 Pandemic.

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Poverty and Youths Unemployment

Poverty, as defined by the United Nations, is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs such as food, sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, health, shelter, education and information (United Nations, 2010). Poverty is not limited to income but when a person cannot afford the necessities of life, such a person is said to be poor. People are poor when they do not have access to the things they need or lack the resources to get the things they need. In Nigeria, the national poverty rate stood at 40.09 per cent which represents 82.9 million persons living in poverty. The urban poverty rate stands at 18.04 per cent while the rural poverty rate is estimated at 52.1 per cent National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS, 2019). More so, COVID-19 is likely to have a particularly pernicious impact on young people already living in poverty in Nigeria. Pre-pandemic, 86.9 million Nigerians lived in extreme poverty according to a 2018 World Poverty Clock. The World Bank, which anticipates Nigeria heading into its worst recession in 40 years as it projects the economy to shrink between 3.2% and 7.4% this year, said COVID-19 shock alone is projected to push about 5 million more Nigerians into poverty in 2020 (Olorounbi, 2020).

It can be observed that financial instability would rise during the COVID-19 crisis and low-income families will be unable to budget for unexpected expenses as a result of the challenges accompanied by the lockdown. This short briefing focuses on the likely impact of COVID-19 on young people facing poverty or destitution. Costs of living will increase for families as more children are at home, while earnings for parents are likely to decrease, meaning families will struggle with the cost of food and other essentials. Increased childcare responsibilities for parents while children are not in school, and without the possibility of help from family networks (such as grandparents), are also likely to put an additional financial strain on families. The outbreak of COVID-19 will continue to impact family finances, both in reducing income for many (such as parents on zero-hours contracts, with little job security) and

who work in particularly affected industries such as hospitality) and increased costs (of additional childcare, higher food and utility bills caused by the family being at home more).

Before the pandemic, the number of poor Nigerians was expected to increase by about two million largely due to population growth. But that number will likely increase by seven million – with a poverty rate projected to rise from 40.1% in 2019 to 42.5% in 2020, according to the global bank's report. Already, 1 in 10 or more than 82.9 million Nigerians live in poverty according to the NBS in its poverty and inequality report published in May. The statistics agency defined national poverty as annual expenditure below N137,430 (N376.5 per day or roughly \$1 on 360/\$1). In updated data to reflect the expected impact of the virus, however, the World Poverty Clock reported on its website that 50% of the country's population or 102.1 million people are living in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2020).

Employment as one of the development index is a very important sector of any nation. Unemployment has negative effects both on individuals and national growth. Increase in the Unemployment rate is one of the unprecedented and harsh realities effusing from COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This came as a result of health measures to surmount global health challenge, and these measures have kept people away from their jobs or other economic means. According to Flatau, (2020) youths are the hardest hit group in this situation of pandemic crisis. Meanwhile, ILO data on the labour market effects of the COVID-19 pandemic shows the ruin of hundreds of millions of workers in the informal economy and on enterprises globally. The persisting acute reduction in working periods globally due to COVID-19 pandemic has pushed out 1.6 billion labour force in the informal economy, almost half of the global workforce into the instant danger of watching their livelihoods destroyed. According to the ILO Monitor third edition, COVID-19 and the global working sector, the decline in working hours in the current (second) quarter of 2020 is predicted to be significantly worse than previously estimated. In pre-crisis levels (Q4 2019), 10.5 per cent degeneration is currently expected, equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs (assuming a 48-hour working week). The previous estimate was for a 6.7 per cent fall, equivalent to 195 million full-time workers. This is due to the lengthening and extension of lockdown measures. Continentally, the situation has deteriorated in all major continents. Estimates suggest a 12.4 per cent loss of working hours in Q2 for the Americas (compared to pre-crisis levels) and 11.8 per cent for Europe and Central Asia. The estimates for the rest of the climes or continents toed the same line and are all above 9.5 per cent. The economic shock caused by the pandemic has ensured that approximately 1.6 billion out of 2 billion global informal economy workers (accounting for the most vulnerable in the labour market), and a 3.3 billion of the total global workforce, have suffered colossal harm to their capacity to meet their ends means, as a result of lockdown measures and/or because they work in the devastated sectors. The first month of the crisis is estimated to have caused a 60 per cent decline in the income of global informal workers. This overset into 81 per cent drop in Africa and the Americas, 21.6 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, and 70 per cent in Europe and Central Asia (ILO, 2020).

The socioeconomic resultants of the pandemic are hitting youths all over the world faster and severely than other age groups. African youths are facing several shocks, including disruptions to education, training, and on-the-job learning; employment and income losses resulting from lay-offs and reduced working hours; and greater hardship in finding quality jobs. They also experience greater vulnerability stemming

from high youth working poverty rates, and because they work more in less protected sectors, most at risk of disruption due to COVID-19. Young women experience a higher burden to manage both paid work and unpaid care and household work due to widespread school closures. Other vulnerable and marginalized youth, such as young people with disabilities or young refugees or displaced persons, are living with additional difficulties, with barriers youths are facing in accessing learning and decent work opportunities, it is worrisome looking into long-term effects of this pandemic on youths, (ITU/SDG, 2020). As research shows, unemployed youths are at greater risk of developing mental health problems. And if there are no spontaneous and focused interventions youths will face a huge risk of been unable to break into the labour market. Hence, they will become economically dependent and survive only on welfare packages, (Flatau, 2020)

However, in Nigeria, the economic effects of COVID-19 will be particularly harsh on the young population and small scale businesses. 60% population of Nigeria is between the age of 25, and still, 16 million Nigerian children were out of school in 2019, an increase from the last figure of 13.2 million in 2018 (African Report, 2020). The report further maintained that the increasing number of uneducated youths is a major cause of worry on the economy, as this group is likely to struggle amidst an economic decline. The situation has been exacerbated, given that approximately 40 million SMEs in Nigeria, where youths depend for employment, have also been harshly affected by the pandemic and unavoidable restrictions to business activity. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, being young is seriously challenging, and the chances for jobs are hardly available. With the COVID-19 crisis, there will be an upsurge in the nation's existing staggering youth unemployment data. In a report of the Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) (2020), it was predicted that **the** prevailing economic crisis risks throwing an additional 39.4 million Nigerians into unemployment by December 2020. These statistics do not only include youth but as 15-34 year-old represents half of the nation's workforce and a vast majority of small business, young people will have to bear the greatest consequences of this economic shock. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that COVID-19 pandemic as a health challenge has kept the whole world on the toes since its outbreak in Wuhan China. It has plunged the universe into the crisis of all kinds, apprehension and uncertainty is becoming the global order. The crisis of the pandemic came with devastating economic situations that have shocked all climes and races of the world, but its exponential rate in low-income nations or third world countries cannot be underestimated.

Given the economic reality of some African countries and Nigeria in particular, the instability, poor planning and lack of backup plans in the country's economic sector has put the nation into a more precarious situation. Consequently, the youth will be among the groups that will receive the hardest hit from this economic crisis, considering the statistical record of National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) which revealed that by the third quarter of 2018 Nigeria is already recording 13.2 million unemployed youths. Though, government agencies have made some efforts in offering welfare packages in form of palliatives but, there is an urgent need for more proactive measures to ensure that the long term effects are being cushioned. The shock of COVID-19 is so enormous that it has created very high youths' unemployment challenges that will endure for long time in post COVID-19 era. There is upsurge of unemployment among Nigerian youths either as a result of lay off from private employers or business closure, inability to complete ones' educational training and skill acquisitions which would serve as the basis of gaining employment or self-

establishment. All these have been ruined by the lockdown as one of the measures to combat COVID-19. According to ILO report Published in Oct 27, 2020, the estimated youth unemployment rate in Nigeria was at almost 14.2 percent. Again, According to the Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) report, the current economic crisis threatens to pushing an additional 39.4 million Nigerians into unemployment by December 2020. Though these statistics do not represent only youth, but as 15-34 year-olds' account for approximately half of the nation's working-age population and a vast majority of small business, young people will feel the highest impact of this economic shock. However, as job losses rise and consumption decreases, the struggle will affect small businesses, who already struggle with limited access to capital, knowhow and markets. When combined with a long running inability to create an enabling business environment, the picture for youths' survival needs is dire.

The Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Youths Educational Development

Education is one of the vital sectors in all human races; education is a catalytic agent to the progress or development of every other sector of life. Youths are been groomed through the educational system to take the challenges of life. The essentiality of the educational sector is not only because it prepares youths for economic gains or livelihood, but because it equips them for better living conditions. For instance, it helps in making decisions especially when there is a need to avert a risky situation. Unfortunately, the educational system has been plunged on crisis and has come under serious threat by an outbreak of this deadly virus, COVID-19 Pandemic, (United Nation, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the developments not only in the healthcare system but in various other sectors in which education is one of the highest affected areas. COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems globally, preceding a near-complete shutdown of schools, colleges and universities (Harsha and Thara, 2020). Most nations of the world after World Health Organization had declared the virus a pandemic disease began to close down their educational system in quick response to slow down the spread of the deadly virus, United Nations Education, Socially and Culturally Organisation, (UNESCO, 2020). While school period can be fun and can promote social skills and social awareness, economical the primary aim of being in school is to increase a younger person's ability (Burgess, and Sievertsen, 2020). The closure of the educational institutions has amounted to several apprehensions among the students and teaching folks. Youths are the worst hit group of this institutional shutdown because the majority of those who are in these institutions learning to acquire one skill or the other and those who teach them belong to this category/class (youth) (Harsha, and Thara, 2020).

According to Burgess, and Sievertsen (2020) many families around the world have felt severe burden brought by this Educational institutions disruption: homeschooling as an alternative came not only with a massive shock to parents' it affected the productivity of both old and young, and also to children and youths' social life and learning has experienced a very severe strain. This negative effect ushered in an untested and unprecedented scale in the system. While students' adjustment mechanisms came with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many assessments and important examinations have simply been cancelled or postponed. Unfortunately, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term effects on the youths and likely going to increase inequality. Even a

relatively short time out of school has consequences for skill growth (Burgess⁷ and Sievertsen, 2020)

COVID-19 pandemic has brought one of the highest challenges ever experienced in the history of the global education system. The shutdown of the system has created very large negative effects, especially on the youths and children. According to WHO (2020), unluckily, the educational sector is at the receiving end. According to UNESCO, an estimated 1.725 billion learners have been affected as a result of school closures, representing about 99.9% of the world's student population as of April 13th, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic came with the largest historic disruption of education systems, affecting approximately 1.6 billion learners in over 190 countries and all continents. The shutdown of schools and other learning environments have affected 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle-income countries. The crisis is aggravating by pre-existing education gaps, decreasing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children and youth, it has created difficulties for girls, refugees, youths with a disability, forcefully displaced persons to continue their learning, especially those in poor or rural areas. The educational ruin also threatens even next generation and obliterates educational progress of decades.

Some of 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone (United Nations, 2020). Similarly, Since the beginning of the pandemic over 70 per cent of youth who study or combine study with work have been negatively affected by the closure of schools, universities and training centers (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020). According to the report of ILO, on youths and COVID-19, 65 per cent of young people reported having learned less since the outset of the pandemic because of the transition from classroom to online and distance learning during the lockdown. While 65 per cent of youths in developed nations were taught classes via video-lectures only 18 per cent in low-income countries were able to keep with this learning pace. 38 per cent of young people are unsure of their future career prospects, as a greater percentage of the youth may not return to school after the crisis, with the crisis expected to bring more impediments in the labour market and to prolong the transition from school to work (ILO, 2020).

However, the burden of the pandemic crisis is globally felt but could be worse in low-income countries like Nigeria. Nigeria since the closure of educational institutions in April 2020 has experienced one of the worst scenarios in the history of youths' development via education. Maybe because of the fragility of the existing educational system in Nigeria which indeed, has been technological free, innovatively impeded and access limited. According to the UNICEF report, (2020) 10.5 million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Nigeria struggle before COVID-19 to ensure her young population stay in school and have access to proper education, as Nigeria contributes approximately 20% of the total global out-of-school population. Nigeria is currently facing the devastating effect of shutdown of schools, though, several concerted efforts have been made by the government, organizations, and individuals to proffer solution to this unprecedented decimate situation from the pandemic crisis. Some of the efforts include that of Teach for Nigeria group, First Bank Nigeria and many other groups and individuals who have aided the government in one way or the other to switch to a new method of learning. This method is information technologically (IT) based, which has been ongoing in the country to cushion the effects of the pandemic crisis on the education system.

In spite of all efforts, the country is still far from achieving the purpose because the system is still far from being normal. Rather it has succeeded in exposing the weakness of the system in place; the efforts are ruined by inefficient plans, ignorance, shortage of personnel, poverty, and poor; internet services, technology and technical know-how. These factors and many others have ensured that Nigerian youths are lagging behind their counterparts in advanced countries, and it has enduring effects in other aspects of their life. One of the long term effects is the ability to cause a strained labour market in future time, and widening the inequality in the system.

The Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on other Vocational Development among Youths in Nigeria.

Vocational training and development are regarded by this paper to mean other skills and semi-skill acquisition and informal training that is not academically institutionalized learning or training process. It involves both professional and non-professional skills acquired by individuals, mostly youths; either for their personal use or to offer it as service or labour to earn their living. This type of train has become a vital part of Nigerian economic development, as it helps the youths to acquire skills through shared experience and sufficient training. This will ensure that they are relevant in mobilization for national development; to enable Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance, by motivating them to develop skills for self-employment, to contribute to the expedited growth of the national economy. Sometimes, Nigerian young graduates from formal institutions of learning and still needs to be retrained either to be employable or self-reliance, to help cushion the effect of an unpalatable increase in unemployment among Nigerian youths. Hence the assertion WHO below; "Measures to address youths' development priorities should also fully take into account the necessity of equipping youth with the skills in demand in the labour market. This may require rethinking how these key skills are identified, for both current and future labour markets" (WHO, 2020).

Vocational training is being advocated for the youths, and several efforts were going on, before the eve of COVID-19 pandemic crisis that brought a huge slack to the on-going efforts and training. As a result of lockdown, social distancing and distance learning to avert the danger of spreading the virus. The unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic has affected youths tremendously. They are amongst the most vulnerable to its effects, with the majority at risk of being left behind at this important stage of their life development (UNESCO, 2020). In technical and vocational education and training systems, vulnerabilities including low levels of digitalization and long-standing structural weaknesses, have been brought to light by the crisis. Disruptions in workplaces made it difficult to implement apprenticeship schemes and work-based learning modes, key elements of a functional and market-responsive technical and vocational system.

Though, technical and vocational apprenticeship schemes and work-based learning centers were able to adapt in some countries. But, unorganized and inefficient system hampered its progress in this part of the world. Umar (2020) quoting The Director-General, National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Mallam Kashifu Inuwa Abdullahi, in an interactive session with Nigerian youths on 'education, employment and technology in Nigeria: gaps and opportunities post COVID-19 pandemic', organized by an international non-governmental organization, Global Shapers Community, stated that; "To overcome these challenges of illiteracy and unemployment amongst the population of teeming youth, there is a need Page 178

planning to harness the opportunities the pandemic presented by using technology for human capital development and employment for next generation to curb the impact of the pandemic" (Umar, 2020). It is a call for everyone in Nigeria to embrace information technology (IT) as their system of operation, having seen its possibility and advantage. This is very important in a critical juncture of this nature, to help prevent youths' sufferings from the effects of the pandemic crisis that could drive them into an abnormal lifestyle like crime.

The Impact of COVID19 Pandemic on Youths Involvement in Crime

In this paper, crime will be examined as intentional deviations from acceptable behaviour or acts that are capable of causing injury or harm to others. Youths often engage in such acts either for fun or as a means of earning their living. Every significant change comes with its consequences, and COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a massive change in human existence, which seemed to have pressed the global reset button. Some of the effects are negative ones; crime among youths may be one of the major effects considering the economic burden caused by the pandemic.

According to United Nation inter-agency network on youth development (UNIANYPD)(2020) report the unprecedented global health crisis we are facing is impacting on all parts of society and changing lives and economic means. In all types of crises and times of need, from climate change to armed conflict or political unrest, youths are mostly affected, either as perpetrators or victims. The same is taking place now during the COVID-19 pandemic. The social and economic devastations brought by COVID-19 is capable of increasing serious crime among youth in the United Kingdom. A [youth violence commission report](#) warns that incidents of unemployment, homelessness and trauma triggered by pandemic could have effects on vulnerable young people, and fears the possible loss of funding by many units in-charge of violence, reduction in Wales and England (Silverton, 2020). Seventy Million Pounds is being spent on the units modeled on a scheme which help to cut crime in Scotland (McCluskey, 2020). A lot of hardships faced during the COVID-19 crisis are equally known risk factors associated with crime, violence and drug use, and may expose youths to a higher rate of victimization and involvement in crime during and after the pandemic (UNODC, 2020).

While some clime of the globe has recorded reductions in homicides and other types of crime during COVID-19, organized crime and youth gangs have kept on operating violently in some regions (UNODC/CCSA, 2020). According to Inyang, and Inyang, (2019) Nigerian youths' unemployment has been on fast-rising, and the more unemployment among youths increases, the more increase in crimes like mobile snatching, pickpocketing, rape, drug abuse and armed banditry among others are often perpetrated by or with the active involvement of youth. These are crimes of various degrees and involving the deployment of various deadly tools and weaponry. This situation could be exacerbated after so many employers had relieved many of the youths their duties/jobs as a result of the effects of the pandemic. And there have been reports of criminal groups enforcing health measures and offering services to citizens in an attempt to gain more trust in local communities. In the view of Inyang and Inyang (2019) unemployment and crime are two evil twins and to avert crime Nigerian youths have to be gainfully employed. It is understood that persisted socio-economic and mental health challenges experienced by youths and their families could result in increased youth crime, violence and victimization further down the line. In this context, it is paramount to invest in preventive efforts now, ensure continuity of support

services and opportunities for positive youth's development during and after the pandemic (UNODC/CCSA, 2020). This could be realizable through empowering youths to be engaged in practical knowledge/skills, even after schooling considering the type of curriculum Nigeria is operating on.

UNODC, (2020) affirmed that global effort is required to continue supporting and engaging youths during the COVID-19 era, especially in the context of youth crime prevention. This component is under the global programme for the implementation of the Doha declaration which argues that to fight crime; the youths must feature prominently in the development programs as the target population. Scholars have articulated ways and approaches to fight youth crime in the past, including the engagement of youth in gainful employment (Ajaegbu, 2012). Nevertheless, not much has been said about a specific form of employment approach to be developed. This study believes that to gain an enduring point in the struggle to dissuade Nigerian youths away from criminality and cut down unemployment, concerted investment has to be made to engage youths in skill acquisitions and craftsmanship.

Recommendations

As a result of the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were proffered: (a) There is need for government to checkmate youth unemployment and underemployment; take targeted measures during the recovery to promote youth employment and healthy work which would reduce poverty and crime rate amongst youth. (b) Government at all level needs to adapt the delivery of education and other training sectors through digital and non-digital methods from early childhood education to tertiary education to guarantee the continuation of skills acquisition and learning. (c) There is need to enhance the social protection systems that will include every youth with specific attention given to the most vulnerable and marginalized people such as homeless youth, youth with disabilities, and financial incapacitated youth. (d) Government should ensure that palliatives are distributed amongst the poor and vulnerable youths in the society in order to reduce the economic burden that has been placed on them as a result of the lockdown.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian youth were reviewed, with special focus on how it affects youths' educational development, vocational training, poverty, and unemployment and crime involvement. The disease outbreak in a small city of Wuhan in China has escalated to global health emergency. Having been declared a pandemic disease on 11th March, 2020 by the World Health Organization, not only that it has been ravaging the world health system, its socioeconomic effects is also devastating, especially on youth as a vulnerable group in societies. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria was already facing challenges of youth's poverty and unemployment which trickles in millions; millions of young people were out schools or training centers and crimes were also high among youth. However, the deteriorating socioeconomic lives of Nigerian youths experienced exponential increase since the advent of this deadly virus. The measures that has been put in place to slow down the effects of this health crisis, has ended up creating a very serious socioeconomic crisis in lives of Nigerian youths. Consequently, youths being vulnerable in this season are facing the most difficult moment and highest risk of uncertainty about their future. The effects of COVID-19 are an unwanted addition to

an already dire situation, as many more are out of school and many have been relieved of their jobs as a resultant effects of the pandemic.

In Nigeria, government has made several efforts both at federal and state level to ensure that their citizens are thrown into shock by the hard knock of the crisis, which involves health control measures and economic policies (loan and palliatives). But socioeconomic problem of the youths has been exacerbated instead of been abated. Therefore, this paper advocates for more frantic efforts from Nigerian government and her development partners to ensure that the youths lives their normal lives without fear of the unknown, as this will boost their moral and increase their potentials, to make their contributions to the development of the nation. These can only be achieved through sincere and proactive intervention measures tailored specifically on addressing the youths' socioeconomic challenges in Nigeria. Though, the pandemic crisis came with economic hardship that has crippled the youths and their social lives, the crisis has equally exposed the inadequate and outdated mode in which Nigerian economy and policies has been operating on. There is dire need of new methods of operations which will be based on IT mode, digitalized method of doing things which calls for innovative and inclusive policy solutions. The sustainable development goals will be more important than ever in accelerating the response and recovery of this epidemic and will save the vulnerable groups from being crippled at any slightest wave of emergency.

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