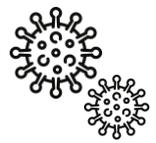


# RAPID ASSESSMENT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NIGERIAN WOMEN

THE RULE OF LAW AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE  
ALSO KNOWN AS PARTNERS WEST AFRICA NIGERIA  
(PWAN)





## COVID19 AND ITS IMPACT ON NIGERIAN WOMEN

### A RAPID ASSESSMENT

#### Background

Current worldwide statistics on confirmed cases of the Corona Virus stand at 2,471,136 with 169,006 persons confirmed dead according to the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>1</sup>. On the African continent, WHO postulates that there are currently 16,115 confirmed cases, and 720 deaths as a result of the virus; South Africa and Algeria have the highest number of confirmed cases at 3,465 and 2,811 respectively, and highest number of deaths are seen in Algeria at 392<sup>2</sup>.

Nigeria received its first confirmed case of the Corona virus on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 in Lagos state. The index case was an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2020. He was confirmed by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, part of the Laboratory Network of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control<sup>3</sup>. Since then, the pandemic has spread to 26 of the 36 states, with 873 confirmed cases, including 504 in Lagos, 119 in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and 73 in Kano<sup>4</sup>.

As the disease continues to spread across the nation, the Federal and State Governments have put into place structures to reduce the spread, and 'flatten the curve'. These include the shutting down of all educational institutions, restrictions on large public gatherings, and social distancing. Most significant however, is the restriction of movement instituted by the President in the FCT, Lagos and Ogun states<sup>5</sup>. Businesses and companies have been shut down, and residents have been instructed to only come out for the purchase of essential materials e.g food and medication, and at stipulated times.

The executive ordered lockdown (in the FCT, Lagos and Ogun states) was instituted on the 30<sup>th</sup> March for an initial period of 14 days, and was extended for another 14 days on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2020. In Kano state, the Executive Governor ordered a 7-day lockdown which commenced on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2020<sup>6</sup>. Borno state on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April recorded its index

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200422-sitrep-93-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=35cf80d7\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200422-sitrep-93-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=35cf80d7_4)

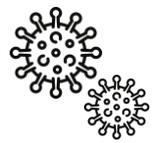
<sup>2</sup> All statistics from WHO are as of 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

<sup>3</sup> <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/first-case-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria>

<sup>4</sup> <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/nigeria-extends-coronavirus-lockdown-key-cities-weeks-200413185335045.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/coronavirus-gov-ganduje-shuts-down-kano/r2gyph3>



confirmed case of the Corona Virus<sup>7</sup>, and since then has recorded 8 additional cases. Prior to this, and as a preventative measure, the Borno state government had instituted a lockdown which shut its borders to non-essential movements in a bid to contain influx of COVID-19. The order which took effect from Monday, April 13, was to completely restrict movement in out of the state<sup>8</sup>.

In Enugu state, a closure of all markets and land borders was announced on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, in response to two confirmed cases<sup>9</sup> of the corona virus. The state government also stopped inter-state transportation in the state until further notice, except those on medical emergency services. In the South South, states such as Bayelsa<sup>10</sup>, Delta<sup>11</sup> and Edo<sup>12</sup> states have instituted dusk to dawn curfews to curtail spread of the virus across the states.

Most recently however, is the unanimous decision of the Nigeria Governor's forum on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 to implement an inter-state lockdown in the country over the next two weeks to mitigate the spread of the pandemic COVID-19 virus from state to state<sup>13</sup>

While the restrictions on movement are a necessary preventative measure, certain considerations should be given to the ripple effects it will have on the lives of affected Nigerians, especially vulnerable populations such as women, children and persons living with disabilities. Women are always more greatly affected in emergency situations and disasters, and a pandemic of this nature is no exception. According to a UN Women report titled, 'COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls'<sup>14</sup>, emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and particularly domestic violence, has intensified.

In France and Argentina, reports of domestic violence and emergency calls for domestic violence cases have increased by 30% and 25% respectively since the lockdown on March 17. In Cyprus and Singapore, helplines have registered an increase in calls of 30% and 33%,

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/breaking-fears-in-maiduguri-as-nurse-dies-of-covid-19-related-symptoms.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://guardian.ng/news/covid-19-borno-government-announces-total-lockdown-shuts-borders/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/03/enugu-govt-reacts-to-two-confirmed-cases-of-covid-19/>

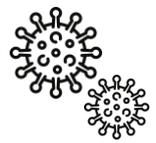
<sup>10</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/04/bayelsa-govt-imposes-curfew-on-state-as-covid-19-fears-heighten/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://guardian.ng/news/delta-imposes-curfew-to-track-covid-19-contacts-extends-lockdown/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://guardian.ng/news/edo-government-imposes-dusk-to-dawn-curfew-to-check-covid-19-spread/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/governors-agree-on-14-days-national-covid-19-lockdown.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>



respectively, and there have been increased cases of domestic violence and demand for emergency shelter in Canada, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States<sup>15</sup>.

In Nigeria, reports of rape and sexual violence have increased over the past few months. In Owerri, Imo state, a father has been accused of raping his 15-year-old daughter and encouraging his friends to rape her as well<sup>16</sup>; In the FCT, a Pharmacist at the National Hospital has been arrested by the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) for the rape of a 12-year-old boy<sup>17</sup>. In Kogi state, the Commissioner for Water Resources has been accused of battering a raping a young lady. Most horrific is the rape of a 4-year-old girl in Kano state who was left in the care of a neighbor; the perpetrator is currently in police custody, and PWAN through its Public Defenders Office (PDO) in the state, is working with prosecutors to ensure the victim and her family get justice.

In addition to the effects of the lockdown on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Sexual Gender Based Violence, PWAN seeks to understand the socio-economic impacts of the movement restrictions for women across the country. This rapid assessment is focused on the effects of the lockdown in the different geopolitical zones across the country, using the FCT, Borno, Kano, Enugu, Lagos and Delta states respectively as focal points, with anecdotes from other states where applicable.

### **Impacts of the pandemic in FCT, Borno and Kano states**

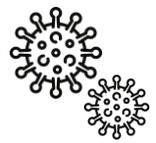
A situational analysis was conducted to gain insight into the impacts of the virus on the lives of women in the three states. In addition to this, first hand opinions were obtained from women across the 6 states including medical personnel, petty traders, market women, students and law enforcement.

- Reports of Sexual Gender Based Violence in the FCT have increased since movement restrictions were put in place. According to the Special Adviser to the Chairman of Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), and representative of the social welfare unit, *“There has been an increase in the rate of reported cases (of SGBV). I am currently handling a case of rape... It has been transferred to force CID for prosecution. The lockdown has lowered economic activities for everyone but women are feeling the impact more because the larger percentage of people in poverty are women. Most women rely on daily income to feed their families; women are forced to be on lockdown*

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.lindaikojisblog.com/2020/4/teenage-girl-raped-by-her-father-and-his-friends-narrates-the-sordid-details-of-all-her-father-subjected-her-to-video-2.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://punchng.com/naptip-nabs-imam-with-phd-for-sodomy/>

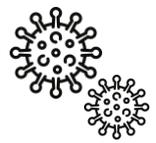


*with their abuser because of no movement and no available alternatives causing them to endure violence*". A respondent from Kano stated that a friend of hers was raped; the case has been reported to the police, and the perpetrator arrested.

- In Lagos, according to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response team (DSVRT)<sup>18</sup>, the number of domestic and sexual abuse cases being reported daily has increased by as much as 50% since the Coronavirus lockdown started. According to the LSDSVRT, before the lockdown they received 8 domestic abuse cases daily but now that number has increased by 50% as the lockdown has made it difficult for victims at home to avoid their abusers. According to the coordinator of the DSVRT, *"Because of this pandemic, we had to include two other hotlines and we have our USSD short code that people are taking advantage of to report, as well as social media."*
- Onitsha, Anambra state, a nurse expressed the fears of medical personnel, indicating that some doctors/ nurses tend to avoid treating suspected cases for fear of contracting the virus themselves. She stated that, *"there is general fear in the hospitals because once a patient is coughing and has high fever with shortness of breath, they usually don't get attended to even if it's not corona virus."*
- The impacts of the lockdown on small businesses vary depending on the goods/ services being provided. Women selling essential items such as food have experienced an increase in demand for their goods, especially within small communities and neighborhoods. A baker in the FCT stated, *"The pandemic has increased the demand for my goods. I'm a baker so the entire neighbourhood depends on our locally made bread and snacks."* Alternatively, a tailor stated that the lockdown has had adverse effects on her business since lockdown restrictions apply to all public gatherings.
- Market women are largely affected by the lockdown as they earn a living on a daily basis, and are unable to provide for their children. According to a respondent in Borno state, *"Our means of livelihood is no more functioning like before because of the restriction imposed on travels and how we relate with other people. Food stuffs are a bit scarce and demand is on the increase. Our means of livelihood normally is buying*

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.lindaikejisblog.com/2020/4/covid-19-lockdown-domesticsexual-violence-cases-rise-in-lagos-by-50-2.html>



*and selling of vegetables and other perishable cooking ingredients but now, due to the restriction and lockdown in some state, we don't get such items as much as usual. With this, we earn less and struggle to put food on our table”.*

- Some respondents in the FCT opined that the neighborhoods are more secure, because of the increased security presence as a result of the movement restrictions. This seems to be contrary to the experience in Lagos and Ogun states where there have been numerous incidences of armed robbery attacks over the past few weeks<sup>19</sup>. In Delta state, an extension of the lockdown by two weeks caused residents of Sapele, including market women, to demand for the provision of palliatives to cushion the effect of the lockdown<sup>20</sup>.
- The palliative measures earlier announced by the Federal Government which include food distribution, cash transfers and loan repayment waivers are yet to be implemented according to the women PWAN interacted with on this assessment. A respondent in Enugu stated that palliatives she had received were from the church or individuals. However, according to a report by the SAY NO campaign<sup>21</sup>, distribution of palliatives has commenced in Abaji area council of the FCT.

### **How can living conditions of women be improved in the lockdown?**

The following recommendations can be taken into consideration to ensure safety, security and improved quality of life for women during the lockdown:

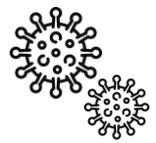
- As stay-at-home orders expand to contain the spread of the virus, women with violent partners increasingly find themselves isolated from the people and resources that can help them. Globally, 18% of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15–49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a current or previous partner in the previous 12 months. Governments must include essential services to address violence in COVID-19 response plans, ensuring that violence survivors have access to hotlines, shelters and other protection services in the context of social distancing. Police should also continue to prioritize reports of domestic violence<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/residents-turn-vigilantes-as-robbers-attack-lagos-ogun-communities-amid-lockdown/re9sxdq>

<sup>20</sup> <https://thenationonline.ng/one-shot-as-women-youths-protest-lockdown-in-sapele/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://saynocampaign.org.ng/say-no-campaign-commends-distribution-of-palliatives-in-abaji-by-the-fcta/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/covid-19-emerging-gender-data-and-why-it-matters>



- Civil Society Organizations especially those that focus on the safety and security of women can continue to create awareness on available mechanisms for reporting of such cases, as well making reporting mechanisms more accessible. PWAN has compiled a list of organizations, including relevant desks of the Nigeria Police Force where such cases can be reported<sup>23</sup>. PWAN through its Public Defenders Office in Kano state, and Public Defenders Unit in the FCT continues to provide support for victims of all forms sexual and gender-based violence.
- As the lockdown is still in place, and because SGBV cases are mostly perpetrated by individuals that survivors are closest to, we encourage families to be vigilant and observant of their environments to prevent likely occurrences of SGBV. Families should be watchful of the behaviors and movements of their children and importantly report any case of SGBV to the security agencies, human rights organizations or NGOs across the country.
- The Chief Justice of Nigeria on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020, had directed all heads of courts to suspend sittings for a period of two weeks, which was to expire on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April. The CJN on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April, however extended the suspension of court sittings with the exemption of matters that are 'urgent, essential or time bound' till further notice<sup>24</sup>. This will affect the prosecution of SGBV related offences, and consequently reduce the likelihood of survivors getting justice in this period. Prosecution of SGBV related offences should be deemed as essential and time bound, and concessions should be made by the courts to hear such matters.
- During his Presidential address on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2020, President Muhammad Buhari stated that palliative measures earlier announced would be sustained, and also directed that the current social register be expanded from 2.6 million households to 3.6 million households in the next two weeks. There is a need for a gender sensitive approach to all palliative measures instituted; to mitigate women's economic dependence on men which sometimes exacerbates domestic violence, governments should target individuals rather than households when implementing direct cash transfers. Policies should also address vulnerabilities of the extreme poor living in settings with inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://twitter.com/partnersnigeria/status/1250714301855404033?s=20>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.channelstv.com/2020/04/06/breaking-cjn-extends-suspension-of-courts-sittings-over-coronavirus/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/covid-19-emerging-gender-data-and-why-it-matters>