



Research article

Baby Boom amidst Covid-19 Pandemic: Of Unwilling Fathers, Painful Motherhood and Poverty in Ozuitem Rural Community, Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

This study interrogates the socio-economic outcomes of the COVID-19 lockdown especially the unexamined theme of the baby boom and unrestrained sexual behavior of teenagers in Ozuitem rural community, Abia State southeast Nigeria. It contends that although the lockdown restricted movements by keeping nearly everybody at home, it inadvertently provided opportunities for the predictably idle teenagers to grow their sexual appetite and experiment with their bodies. This yielded unwilling fathers and painful motherhood. With thirty-five (35) teenage mothers and a colony of male partners as of December 29, 2020, what appeared as a sex bazaar in a sleepy rural community clearly put UNICEF's prediction of a massive baby boom for Africa between now and 2050 in sharper perspective. Using an admixture of oral interviews, participant-observer method and secondary sources, the study yielded curious and bizarre outcomes particularly the demography of the unwilling fathers, inappropriate rural perceptions and unpalatable insight into the future of the community and the wider society. To achieve this, newspapers, interviews, archival materials and other extant secondary sources have been used for data collection, analysis and for the interpretation of results. The paper employs the qualitative method of analysis.

Keywords: Baby Boom, COVID-19, Unwilling Fathers, Teenage Motherhood, UNICEF, Africa



[Gender Equality, Good Health and Well-being, Reduced Inequalities](#)

Introduction

This study analyses a neglected outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria notably the unexamined theme of baby boom and the unrestrained sexual behavior of teenagers amidst the crippling poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant influence on the world economy

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as well as Nigeria (Peterson & Thankom, 2020), having an impact on international trade, national healthcare systems, the food and beverage industries, as well as education. The dependence of emerging and developing nations on developed nations for the importation of goods and services has led to anticipation of spillover effects from globalization (Peterson & Thankom, 2020). A recent body of research (Nuno, 2020; Andrew Atkeson, 2020; McKibbin, & David Altig, et al., 2020) has been published that looks at how COVID-19 affects economic activity. Yet the impact of COVID-19 on economic aggregates in emerging nations like Nigeria has not been studied in recent literature. In recent literature, the effect of COVID-19 on the Nigerian economy has not been investigated. This work closes this gap in the body of knowledge. During the COVID-19 lockdown, at the final count, more than 75 young girls were pregnant in Ozuitem (HRM J. Njoku, 2020). From this figure, about 35 of them were willing to speak about their travails and challenges. The girls were all below 20 years with the oldest being 19 years in January 2021. Whereas 20 were in senior secondary schools, 10 were enrolled in junior secondary schools with the remaining 5 were secondary school drop-outs whose parents were unable to continue the payment of their school fees. A preliminary study on this dilemma revealed that the lockdown cut down on economic activities from where a multitude of families fed with the consequence that many households had to go hungry on a normal good day. Menial duties from where youngsters tried to eke out a living such as hawking of wares, working as hired hands in local farms, hair-making/barbing etc were no longer available; thus, a measure of pressure was evident on these teenagers. Again, there was the visible loss of parental support and supervision for these teenagers during the pandemic; a condition that worsened the conditions of the youth population and steered them irreversibly into crime and loathsome activities.

Why were there so many pregnancies and consequently many babies born in Ozuitem within the period of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020? From the outside, this would seem most awkward but, it probably is actually in tandem with recent projections about population increase in Africa (Stiegler, 2020) in particular and the world in general. The present and current study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in teenage pregnancies and births leading to an exponential increase in the number of unwilling fathers (Sheldon, 2003:175-194) and female teenagers passing through painful motherhood (Adeagbo, 2019). This is strikingly worrisome but does not eclipse the reality that isolation and loneliness are curious factors that fuel and engender coupling at the slightest opportunity. This is more so if the 'couplers' are still impressionable youths with probing minds and are reasonably idle either by choice or circumstance; in most cases leading to exploration of their bodies. It is necessary to affirm that just as the lockdown increased cannabis use amongst youths in some climes (Bartel, Sherry & Stewart, 2020), this same youth population used increased sexual activities to cope with the negative effects of involuntary isolation during the lockdown.

From the date of the pandemic lockdown in Nigeria, what happened in the Ozuitem rural community during the 2020 pandemic is in several respects like the post-WW2 baby boom and with it a foregone conclusion. Both situations were all too similar given the level of fertility in the United States at the time and fertility in the Nigerian rural community now. The only verifiable difference is that while the American baby boom was well-planned and accepted, the COVID-19 baby boom in parts of Nigeria was largely circumstantial. Several recent reports have predicted a worrisome increase in global population by 2050. In all the reports, Africa sits atop this baby-

boom prediction with her population almost certain to double or even triple; the lowest being 2.4 billion inhabitants by 2030. The United Nations, World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations International Education Fund (UNICEF) and several other organizations including but not limited to the Washington DC-based Population Reference Bureau (PRB) affirm this rise in population projections with a curious linkage to the poverty status of the continent. This is even direr as Africa south of the Sahara houses the most fertile women on earth with mothers in ten (10) of these countries having an average birth rate of 5.2 children (PRB, 2013). Indeed, poor and ecologically ravaged Niger has the unenviable record of the world's fastest-growing population by posting an average birth rate of 7.6 children; a figure that is four times higher than the affluent and prosperous United States' estimate of 1.9. Specifically, the World Health Organization (WHO) global population estimate berthed at the 7 billion mark in 2011 with the figure hovering around 7.7 billion, with the quarter of the century in 2030 averaging around 8.5 billion and midway in 2050 with a damning figure of 9.7 billion and 10.9 billion in 2100. This can only be so if the UN projection of Africa producing almost two billion babies by 2050 and eventually hits an all-time high of 4.2 billion by the turn of the century in 2100 (The State of World Population 2015). With a crowded Africa and without visible investment in reproductive health and education, the continent becomes a disaster waiting to happen. In all of this, the sharp reality is that by 2050, the continent will be home to about 41% of births worldwide, 40% of children under the age of five, and 37% of all children (under 18). Africa will get more and more crowded as its population is expected to increase. The population density of the continent is anticipated to rise from 8 people per square kilometer in 1950 to 39 in 2015 and to roughly 80 by the middle of the century (UN Report, 2020). The UN Report is no less emphatic about Africa's demographics. As a matter of fact, 'with an estimated 1.033 billion inhabitants in 2013, Africa is currently the second-largest and second-most-populous continent on Earth. The population of the continent will keep growing and finally top 4.2 billion by the year 2100. By the middle of the century, the population under the age of 18 would rise by two-thirds to about 1 billion (UN Report, 2020). In a 2020 study/report by PRB 2020, the world's population was put at 7.8 billion inhabitants during the novel Coronavirus lockdown. The Report showed somewhat disturbing comparative demographic realities between Africa south of the Sahara and other parts of the world. With the COVID-19 deaths, population growth in the US and China will be extremely slow while countries south of the Saharan such as Congo DR and Mali with a few Asian countries will experience rapid population growth and high fertility rates. Within this bracket, 25 of these countries must experience at least a double population growth between 2020 and 2050 (Kaneda, and Kline, 2020). Africa's predicted demographic boom will not be the first and certainly not the last as the western hemispheres were the first with this experience after the Second World War but it does seem that the continent's population boom is largely unprecedented because by 'the year 2050, four out of 10 people on planet will be African'(UNICEF, 2020). This study using the high birth rate, (largely unintended) in Ozuitem rural community during the Coronavirus lockdown affirms the reality of Africa's population projection thus amplifying the dangers ahead linking population and poverty. It throws up vital issues on parenting such as motherhood, fatherhood, and the general issue of wellbeing of the society. A cumulative appraisal and assessment of births during the Coronavirus lockdown would reveal how the projected population increase in Africa (Nigeria) will stealthily dawn on the continent in the most unsuspecting and unexpected manner.

Ozuiem Community: An Exploratory Survey

The 2006 national census conservatively put the population of Ozuiem at about 20,000 even as the entire Bende Local Government area into which Ozuiem is configured of a population of about 192, 621 people within the same period. The geographical position of the community is most strategic being at the centre of the local government area and sharing common boundaries with most of the communities in the area. This probably justifies the selection of the community as the headquarters in the defunct Elu-Elu County Council between 1960 and 1966. The County Council administered and supervised the day-to-day running of the areas under its jurisdiction, especially in the areas of education, justice administration, social welfare etc. This same jurisdiction is what is today the Bende local government area constituting the present 13 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) delineated electoral wards and 20 Abia State Independent Electoral Commission (ABSIEC) electoral wards. Ozuiem is bounded to the North and North West by Igbere and Alayi respectively; to the South and South East by Bende and Amaeke Abam respectively; to the East by Umuhu; and to the West by Uzuakoli. A road of six kilometers from Ozuiem joins the Umuahia–Arochukwu Road at Uzuakoli.

The origin of the people comes in folklores; 'romanticized by exotic legends' and 'chronicled in European travel diaries '(Harris, 1943, Martins, 1988); and like Uchendu (1965) affirmed on the Igbo origin, it remains a subject of much speculation and has become very worrisome to scholars. It is possible to insist that there are many variants of the origin of Ozuiem but similarities abound in all the narratives. One such narrative by Abraham Idika (Idika,1984) and put out in the public domain with further corroboration by some other elderly individuals volunteered that Ozuiem is culturally divided into three broad sub-groups; the first of which is Isiegbu comprising Obuofia, Ofiavu, Amaeke and Amakwu. The second is Agbua comprising Amankwu, Ndiagbo, Ebem, Amagbo, Umuokorieukwu, Ogboko and Ndiambe. The third is Mbalaka made up of Mba, Elugwumba, Mgbele and Ndiobu. Ozuiem took its name from the individual who founded the town and according to oral traditions its origin is traceable to Ntu, a verifiable place near Ugwueke in Bende Local Government Area. An earlier movement had taken the migrants from Okpanku in Afikpo to the new place of Ntu. A brotherly migration took two brothers namely Omaka and Item Okpi from Ntu to Item where Omaka's wife delivered twin babies then regarded as taboo and desecration of the land. As a result, Omaka was banished with his wife. He proceeded on exile to Agbugbo near Amiyi in Igbere and later moved to Avu (Ofiavu). Omaka decided to rest in Avu in present-day Ozuiem and with time took his new abode as his home without the wish nor desire to return to his original home. Avu thus became the '*OZUZU IKE ITEM*' (the place where Item rested) which was thereafter shortened to Ozuiem. Many independent scholars seem bold to affirm the authenticity of this account for which the unity and cultural ties between Item and Ozuiem remain a bold confirmation of consanguine ties.

Conceptual Insights

An understanding of what happened in Ozuiem rural community during the coronavirus pandemic requires further clarification to enable a greater understanding as well as creating a sharper perspective to the seeming time bomb. Accordingly, concepts such as baby boom, painful motherhood, and unwilling fathers come to the fore as guide in this direction.

Baby Boom

This concept has a history by itself as it is subject to diverse interpretations but in its original context especially from a demographic perspective, the 'baby boom' clearly focus on the incredible rise in the birth rate in many developed countries at the end of the global war in 1945. It became a major theme in social gerontology in both American and European contexts (Phillipson, 2008). The concept is an acknowledgement of the upsurge observed in developed countries, particularly in the light of 'fertility surveys' conducted in these countries seeking explanations for this increase (Bean, 1983). An observed explanation for surveys was to aid economic planning given the upsurge in birth and very lower mortalities. So very rightly, these developed economies lavished resources and attention on coming to terms with the fertility trends in their countries. High birth rates and low mortality rates were until recently the characteristic hallmark of poorer countries (Tabah & Ldon, 1980) hence the seeming overpopulation in these countries. It is true that developed states typically had records of lower birth rates, fertility information and records count as a crucial, critical, and combustible constituting part of population increase (Freedman, Freedman, & Thornston, 1980). There is no uniform explanation about the baby boom in all these countries but two reasons notably socio-cultural and economic (Andrew, 1981) broadly attempt to offer an insight. The socio-cultural explanation emphasizes the growing importance of motherhood, the house, and the family during the 1950s, whilst the second identifies the Great Depression's impact on those growing up during the 1930s as being crucial to the baby boom. According to Philipson, the "former approach gives precedence to the influence of contemporaneous conditions thought to affect reproductive behavior, the latter locates the explanatory factors in behavioral experiences occurring a generation earlier." These entire explanations pale into nothing given to the reality that whereas foregone discussion on baby boom resulted from willful pregnancies, the boom experienced during the lockdown in Ozuitem and several parts of Igboland¹ was largely unplanned and thus became unwanted pregnancies; but with a society that has increasingly grown with anti-abortion mentality,² the baby boom was inevitable. With this anti-abortion mentality and the rise of 'baby factories,' (Okonkwo and Obi-ai, 2000) where pregnant teenagers are kept in parts of Igbo land is all but expected.

Covid-19 Pandemic

A new infectious disease called Coronavirus (COVID-19) was discovered in 2019 with mild to moderate symptoms causing all infected to gradually deteriorate and die in a matter of weeks. It spreads via droplets released during coughing, sneezing, or exhaling by those who are afflicted. These drops swiftly land on floors or other objects because they are too heavy to hang in the air. People can become infected by the virus by breathing it in, especially when they are near an infected person. One also gets infected by touching the contaminated surface and using the same hands to spread across the face, eyes, nose or mouth.

¹ It was observed after the lockdown that several female university students returned to campus with babies or burgeoning pregnancies. Of the 18 identified female undergraduates in the faculty of Arts in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, only 3 had 'legitimate' marriages, with the remaining 15 unplanned.

² Majority population in Igboland is Catholics with stringent indoctrination on abortion matters.

An Italian who lives and works in Nigeria arrived in Lagos from Milan on February 25, 2020, and contacted a Nigerian from Ogun State. On February 27, 2020, he received a Covid-19 diagnosis. This was designated as the index case since it was the first COVID-19 case ever discovered in the nation (NCDC, 2020). The news was not unexpected because, prior to that date, a lawmaker at the National Assembly in Abuja had expressed concern about the lack of security personnel at Nigeria's various international airports, whose duty it is typically to conduct a routine check of every passenger upon arrival. With weak and fragile health infrastructure, Africa is a critical playground for the pandemic, and given Nigeria's poor infrastructure, response to the pandemic was a major source of worry. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which had its origins in Wuhan China where it was first reported in late 2019, grew into a serious global health challenge when it killed over 100,000 people in 100 countries. In order to avoid stalling the sector, the lessons learned from the COVID-19 epidemic call for a thorough examination of our knowledge of the pandemic on the one hand and a thorough evaluation of the various e-learning choices for students and teachers on the other. In response to the pandemic, Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari on March 30, 2020, rolled out stringent non-medical interventions generally referred to as 'lockdown strategy'. This involved orders to sit at home and the stoppage of movements and activities that were not important in three states of Lagos, Ogun States and Federal Capital Territory for a period of 14 days at the first instance. This was further extended and thereafter, the whole country was locked down. This movement restriction kept every non-essential service provider indoors with all schools shut down all through the period. For teenagers, this was a period to fully express their sexual freedom and they indeed unleashed it on themselves across the land.

Unwilling Fathers, Teenage Motherhood

Accidental pregnancies leading to childbirth naturally result to the emergence of 'unwilling fathers'(Sheldon, 2003:194) and 'painful motherhood'(Dlamini,2016). And this for the most part is not unexpected for dwellers in the developing world such as Nigeria. Despite widespread agreement that "men who father children outside of marriage share in an obligation to support their offspring financially," this is true even in affluent countries (Sheldon, 2003), a preponderant number of these men turn out to be unwilling fathers. With the appropriate name 'men's advocates', these so-called "unwilling fathers" contend that it is wrong to hold biological fathers financially accountable for child support if women are given discretion over the decision to keep or end a pregnancy (Sheldon, 2003). Teenage motherhood in most cases is painful motherhood; both resulting from risky sexual behavior. This aptly explains the sentiments in the public domain that perceive these teenagers in mothers' apparel as "a uniform group of immatures, reliant on benefits, careless, and unfit parents" (Yardley, 2010: 671). The emotional pain associated with the above is further deepened by such opinion as contained in a community church's website in South Africa that likened teen pregnancy in the country as 'a menace to our society'. (Dlamini, 2016). The pains of motherhood for teenagers with impressionable minds worsen when the same article above further averred that children of teenage mothers tend to become criminals; moving in and out of prison. (Dlamini, 2016). It is this negative perception about teenage mothers as delinquent that more than anything agonize the youngsters and push their parents to the brink of emotional torture and turmoil.

Covid-19 Pandemic, Baby Boom and Poverty: Some Background Issues

There is a cyclic nexus between Covid-19 pandemic, baby boom and poverty in parts of southeast Nigeria where Ozuitem is located. Whereas the pandemic ensured that a lockdown was in place globally, the outcome of such lockdown became very pronounced in not just the glaring poverty in the land evidenced by food deficit in the region but footnoted in the multiple pregnancies and childbirths that followed thereafter. The difficulty associated with raising children at this very difficult period expectedly threw up issues of 'unwilling fathers' and 'painful motherhood'. On the 25th of February, 2020, an Italian worker flew into Lagos from Milan en route Ogun State, contacted a Nigerian, and was later diagnosed with Covid-19 disease on the 27th of the month. This became the index case in Nigeria as was announced by the presidential task force on COVID-19 (NCDC, 2020). This index case was identified immediately after a member of Nigeria's upper legislative chamber raised an alarm on the floor of the House on the absence of routine checks on passenger's arrival from abroad. There is an agreement that Covid-19 began in Wuhan China. It was here that the disease was first identified in late 2019 but it irreversibly grew into a huge global medical challenge with over 100,000 deaths in 100 countries (Callaway, 2020). The severity of the health situation was very devastating, thus it compelled WHO to declare the disease a pandemic. Thus:

With poor and weak medical infrastructure, Nigeria and indeed Africa failed to provide a critical response signaling a major concern amongst the frightened population. This poor 'medical Infrastructure ensured dire implications for Nigeria especially given the severity of the lockdown that affected the movement of persons, goods and services' (Ukaogo, et al:2021).

With the accompanying lockdown, sources and means of accessing food not just dwindled but became paralysed. Indeed, food shortages surfaced in the southern part of the country particularly the southeast region of Nigeria. Thus, it is safe to affirm that the pandemic and the lockdown that followed ensured a debilitating food deficit that was made more manifest by poverty. So, the availability of food for the poor in rural communities became a stimulant for all manner of deviant behaviors chief among which was sex-for-food (Imo: Personal communication, 2021). Keke/okada riders that were at the vanguard of violating the lockdown in the quick transportation of fellow violators of the lockdown became 'kings' as they were among the very few that still had a way of raising money through quick business. Young girls in the villages traumatized by hunger thronged and flocked around them and quickly became acquainted with the riders and before long began to cater for the girls in reward for the obvious. There is a critical nexus between poverty exemplified by hunger and the baby boom that was witnessed at this time. Should there be any doubt in this regard, cases of food deficit abound at the time compelling the United Nations World Food Programme to warn that:

The COVID-19 pandemic could almost double the number of people suffering acute hunger, pushing it to more than a quarter of a billion by the end of 2020...(UNWFP, 2020).

Increasingly therefore food shortages in rural communities became critically visible and challenged the morality of young girls who had to weigh the damage between hunger and daily sleeping with boys that could support their survival. Many girls, people and groups were indeed at risk. Teenage girls and others with no clearly identified means of livelihood suffered the more

and buckled on account of the debilitating impact of the pandemic restrictions. The food deficit or crisis came hard on many:

without capacity to save up reserves of money and food, folks in poor health or those living with stigma, the homeless, the elderly, Orphans and vulnerable children, caregivers, people employed in occupations that may be severely impacted and individuals who rely on public transportation to get to job as well as individuals that migrate for income (Okonkwo et al, 2021).

The pandemic hasn't completely solved the issues that rural towns in the nation have been dealing with, and the southeast continues to be the area most at risk from a food catastrophe. Even before Covid-19 broke out in 2020, this issue was a concern, but the restrictions made it worse. Food production was halted nationwide as a result of the lockdown measures announced by the President on March 29, 2020, and similar pronouncements made by state governors. Expectedly, prices of food tripled beyond the financial reach of rural peasants; a situation that reduced individuals and families to the very worst of endurance. The grim lamentations of a petty trader at Ogige market Nsukka at this time was insightful:

all foodstuffs is beyond my reach in this market and I am yet to sell anything to enable me buy our daily stock of food. Imagine a painter of garri we bought #400.00 now #1200.00 this morning (FGD, Ngozika, 2020).

In light of all of this, it's critical to consider how the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged food insecurity in southeast Nigeria (FGD, Igwe, 2020) and exposed teenagers both gender to conjugal danger that has fractured many families (Ohucha, 58 years - personal communication, 2021). With the rising skirmishes between herders and farmers in the middle belt region of Nigeria, food supply to the south became a challenge leading to increase in prices of staple foods. Lamenting on this, Ejinkeonye (2020:12) frowned at the impact of herdsmen attack on farms and food supply thus:

It is true that beef is required as a source of protein for humans, but that is not the only thing that Nigerians feed on. The farmers need to work on their farms too to produce yam, cassava, vegetables, grain and several other food items for the consumption of the people.

Research Discussion (2021) at Ozuitem reveals the nexus between poverty evidenced in hunger and teenage pregnancies at the covid-19 period and this was not helped in any way by the crippling inflation (Usim, 2020:25) in the economy of the country. From the Research Discussions, we gained a critical insight into the pregnancy boom in Ozuitem and how the loss of traditional/cultural values combined with parental laxity promoted threads of abomination in the community under focus.

Ride-a- Bike, Sleep-a-Night: the Gathering of Teenagers and its Harvest during the Pandemic

The traffic roundabout at Amagbo-Ozuitem is a point where *okada/keke* riders congregate to wait for prospective customers heading in diverse directions across Ozuitem and beyond. It is reputed to be the central community that strikes the cord of equidistance to or from other Ozuitem

communities. It is therefore not in error that teenagers who constitute the greater population of the riders will always assemble there to either do their business or pursue other imaginations. One such other imagination is the prospect of wooing girls of their ilk that passes or uses that stretch of road. In pursuit of their fancies, the young boys lay siege on equally young girls there or prey on them when the former patronizes the latter. As discussion ensues, alliances and ties are forged into 'unholy' unions that yield fruits of patronage initially at night and subsequently in the daytime.

Credible discussants, the majority of whom eke out a living ferreting individuals to their respective destinations provided information on the relationship between young girls and boys during the pandemic at Ozuitem. According to Iroka and corroborated by Iroham (Iroka, 24 yrs, Iroham 22 yrs – Personal communication):

In pursuit of our fancies, we invested in young girls who appreciated us given the period we operated in. We provided for them and even their families and the much they do is to accompany us home where a mere massage is all that we have. We usually compared notes and with time, and without planning it, we pushed our luck further and before long, what we wanted became ours.

Nlebedim (21yrs) narrated his experience with the girls more creatively. I began 'by offering free services to the girl admired; I also spent much of what I earned on her but after that, I had no problems having my way'. Amoral and amorous testimonies filled the air at the venue and location of the focus group but the take home for the researchers was that 'all the girls had a common problem – food which we provided and a ready cash as back-up'(Ndubuisi, 19 years).

Testimonies of cooperation by teenage girls were not in short supply as the majority of them; even in remorse and agony confirmed that they became breadwinners at home as their parents had nowhere to go to assist the family. Short of admitting a frolic or descent into commercial sex work, Ihuoma (18 years – FGD) affirmed that what began as a plot to extort money and favour 'from Obinna boomeranged when I discovered two months later that I had taken in' (I had become pregnant) for him. Ogonnaya (20 years – FGD) speaking for a concerned trio impregnated by one person – Jackson – fumed and blamed her poor background for falling into the hands of 'a serial deceiver' who deceived all of us into an avoidable mayhem'. Today:

We are family liabilities and social misfits because I could not go out, as usual, to fend for myself as a trained hairdresser in Umuahia. See Rose cuddling her baby, she is also in pain as no one is willing to get the least of medication for her or her baby. The three of us are better dead than alive. I am a pained mother of no consequence and the father of our babies is an unwilling father (FGD - Ogonnaya, 2021).

Narrating her ordeal Cynthia (FGD-19 years), said that hunger and poverty were weaponised during Covid-19 and 'many of us became collateral victims'. Asked to explain her submission, she volunteered thus:

For no fault of mine, I am imprisoned by circumstances beyond me and yet I have no capacity to express my dissatisfaction to my oppressors. I am asked not to come out to engage in my life-supporting duties and nobody has provided for me and my family. My singular resort to see how I can cope has made me a crying mother...

Counting the Unwilling Fathers and Sorrowful Mothers

While it is painful that the pandemic left indelible marks on the vast population of urban and rural dwellers, the Ozuiten debacle would seem to have torn families apart. A closer look at the verified list of the unwilling fathers in the mix would reveal their job specification to be individuals at the lowest echelon and strata in the communities. They were as indicated earlier largely keke (tricycle) riders and an admixture of backwater individuals with very uncertain means of livelihood. A helper in a building site in Isiegbu axis of Ozuitem clearly told us that 'love and manly needs do not recognize anybody's means of livelihood' rather 'it is the blood that flows in the veins of the rich that is also seen in the veins of the poor'(FGD- Chibuisi, 2021). However, a curious inquest into the role of sex education and the use of contraceptives by rural teenagers elicited responses ranging from the sublime to the bizarre.

Select Number of teenagers Involved in the Baby Boom Scare in Ozuitem

S/N	Couples' Names	Male Occupation	Age	Village
1.	Ndubueze & Angela	Keke Rider	23 & 19	Amaeke & Obuofia
2.	Maduka & Ogechi	Bike Rider	20 & 18	Elugwumba & Ogboko
3.	Ejike & Nneoma	Keke Rider	20 & 19	Umuokorieukwu & Mba
4.	Okorie & Chioma	Apprentice Iron Bender	19 & 17	Umuikwuoma & Ndiokala
5.	Ndudim & Nkechinyere	Block Molder	23 & 18	Ameke & Ofiavu
6.	Chinedu & Ihekerenma	Carpenter	20 & 17	Mgbele & Ndiagho
7.	Chukwu & Ngozi	Keke Rider	23 & 19	Ndiuguru & Ndiambe
7.	Chibuzo & Adanma	Keke Rider	22 & 17	Umuokpeyi & Ndiogaba
8.	Okereke & Obianuju	Bike Rider	24 & 20	Eluzo & Umuokpeyi
9.	Obinna & Cynthia	Bike Rider	20 & 19	Ebem & Ndiagho
10.	Onyeji & Mmirinma	Keke Rider	21 & 18	Elugwumba & Ndiuche
11	Ndubuisi & Ihuoma	Keke Rider	19 & 18	Ndiobu & Ebem
12	Nlebedim & Ogonnaya	Iron Welder	21 & 20	Ameke & Oke-Ube

Source: Fieldwork by the Authors, 2021

Conclusion

In this study, we have established Covid-19 pandemic had adverse repercussions on many societies in Nigeria. For the Igbo ethnic nationality, it has exposed the dilemma of food deficit in the land and at the micro level of the community; it has had a more devastating impact as evidenced in Ozuitem whose teenagers that engaged in fleshy games now tell stories of despair and agony. The study has painfully established a nexus of evil and thus created the link between poverty, hunger and the pregnancies that resulted in baby boom syndrome in the community. In addition to drawing attention to the bleak future and the psychological trauma teenage girls go through, this study affirms the imperative and duty of critical makers of policy and other interest groups especially the government on the need to create emergency response initiatives with the capacity to mitigate the hardships suffered by teenage girls and the vulnerable population that endure inhuman challenges of poverty, avoidable/unwanted pregnancy and the loss of traditional social values.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The author declared no potential conflict of interest.

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