



‘LOCKED-DOWN’ BUT NOT ‘LOCKED OUT’: EXPERIENCES OF NIGERIAN WOMEN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

To be locked down and not locked out of daily life, gave women a heightened moral obligation and responsibility to care for the personal, familial, relational, spiritual, and educational needs of their families. Adaptability, resiliency, and the digital frontier were critical for African women’s will to survive during the COVID-19 lockdown. Using a qualitative approach and from the experiences of 24 women, this paper contends that women were not ‘locked out’ of the day-to-day responsibilities to their faith, family and work. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has caused women to be prudent and purposeful in their decision-making as they continue to care for their family, friends and faith collectively. Although COVID-19 has thoroughly shaken the earth, the inherent caring and nurturing role of women and the Church remains stronger.

Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been very devastating and people continue to experience the almost paralyzing and multi-faceted effects of the pandemic. Many countries adopted a total or partial lockdown and this is affecting lives while the home has become all of a resting place, workplace, worship place, school place and recreational place for women during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The burden of unpaid care work of women has also quadrupled during the lockdown. The lockdown seemingly gave women a heightened moral obligation and responsibility to meet and care for the personal, familial, relational, spiritual and educational needs of their families. Considering the stay at home and lockdown guidelines, this paper using a qualitative approach contends that women are not ‘locked out’ of the day-to-day activities and responsibilities to their faith, family and work. Life continues at home using the digital platforms and phones for communication and to stay connected.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a novel disease and it has no known cure, suffice to indicate that there are several collaborations and initiatives in place by Pfizer/BionTech, Medicago and other bio-pharmaceutical companies including Covax, a global vaccine pool led by World Health Organization to develop a COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 spreads through airborne droplets, person to person contact, or contaminated surfaces. Not everyone is at risk equally; it is symptomatic in some people and asymptomatic in some other people, spreads like wildfire and is deadly. The “...Earth is thoroughly shaken” (Isaiah 24:18) by COVID-19, regardless of age, status, gender, nobility, affectual preference, or class, from aristocrats to bureaucrats, from new-born to octogenarians. COVID-19 is the greatest leveller of our time according to most women interviewed. Streets were deserted, sacred places, offices and commercial spaces remained closed due to stay-at-home orders, lockdowns, physical distancing, social isolation and quarantine rules. There is a sense of ‘quietness’ and ‘stillness’ all around us. The World Health Organization (WHO) under the International Health Regulation (IHR) declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, and further declared it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Most countries are using the WHO template guidelines for instituting the COVID-19 guidelines of lockdown, social distancing, and quarantining.

COVID-19 cases increase by the minute. As of May 30, 2020, there were about 5,775,043 confirmed cases globally (about 216 countries), with about 361,220 deaths. In Africa, there are about 96,902 confirmed cases and 3,337 deaths, while in Nigeria there are 9,302 confirmed cases and 261 deaths (WHO, 2020a). As of November 16, 2020, there were about 54,301,156 confirmed cases globally (in 216 countries), with about 1,316,994 deaths. In Africa, there were about 1,404,954 confirmed cases and 31,554 deaths, while in Nigeria there were about 65,148 confirmed cases and 1163 deaths (WHO 2020b, c). The intensity of the cases of COVID-19 varies across the continents, countries, cities and communities. While it’s peaking in some continents it is just starting in some others. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is the country’s national public health institute, with the mandate to lead the preparedness, detection, and response to infectious disease outbreaks and public health emergencies. The mission for the NCDC (2017-2021) is to protect the

health of Nigerians through evidence-based prevention, integrated disease surveillance and response activities, using a one health approach, guided by research and led by a skilled workforce (NCDC 2020).

Methodology

The authors set out to understand the experience of women during the COVID-19 lockdown and the impact it has on their relationships (God, Family, Friends and Work). Feminist theology and ethics of care are adopted as a theoretical framework to explain how women's care work has been elevated and practically accelerated by the COVID-19 stay-at-home and lockdown rules.

In feminist methodology, Liamputtong (2009:9) notes "women and their concerns are the focus of investigation. The intention of feminist research is to undertake research that is beneficial for women, not only about women". The aim of feminist research is to capture women's lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge (Campbell and Wasco 2000:783; Angrosino 2007).

The authors sought responses on these three questions through e-mail and WhatsApp communication while maintaining the confidentiality of respondents using "Engage consent":

1. How has COVID-19 shaped or reshaped your relationship with God, family and others?"
2. How has COVID-19 impacted your life and work/education/business as a Woman?
3. Describe the impact of COVID-19 in one word.

Due to time constraints and restricted access, on May 4, 2020 questions were sent to 30 Nigerian women residing in Nigeria and in the Diaspora or vacillating between Nigeria and the Diaspora. Feedback was received from 24 women from Australia, Canada, Germany, Nigeria, and South Africa. These were professional women in the education, business/entrepreneurs, health care, and civil service sectors. The study was intentional and the responses might have been different if the focus was on women in the informal sector. Content analysis was used to analyse the responses to the questions. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles and print media.

Responses were obtained from 12 Nigerian Women in the Diaspora (D), 11 Nigerian Women living in Nigeria (N), and 1 Nigerian Woman vacillating between Diaspora and Nigeria (NDW). For the interview excerpts, alphabetical and numerical codes were used to denote the respondents. The numerical numbers, for example, stands for the number of respondents.

- D represents Nigerian Women in the Diaspora;
- N represents Nigerian Women living in Nigeria, and
- NDW represents Nigerian Women vacillating between Diaspora and Nigeria;
- D1 represents Nigerian Women in the diaspora interviewee.

A Plurality of Feminist Theology

This section discusses feminist theology and feminist ethics of care within the context of the care work of women in the family and faith community during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Feminism usually refers to political activism by women on behalf of women...” (McCann and Kim 2003:1). The practice of feminist theology can also involve highlighting aspects of a tradition that have been largely neglected, but that do promote women's well-being (Gross 2005). “Feminism gives women a stronger sense of self-worth and wholeness. The common ground is that feminism is about change, choices, diversity, awareness, rights and women uniting for a cause” (Olufemi 2016:367).

Ruether (1992:18) asserts “the critical principle of feminist theology as the promotion of the full humanity of women”. This assertion has inspired a process of theological reflection that begins with women's experience, in recognition of the fact that theology has been almost exclusively informed by the experiences of men. Although theology as a discipline is concerned with reflection upon the nature of God as revealed in scripture, the natural law, and the prayerful use of human reason, feminists point out the extent to which theological knowledge is shaped by the cultural context and bodily specificity of the theologian, including his or her gendered embodiment (Beattie 2005).

Feminist theology now embraces a wide range of perspectives and methods. In seeking to express both a relationship to and a distance from Western feminism, these diverse theologies use a variety of names, including,

among others: womanist theology (arising out of the experiences of black North American women), *dalit* women's theology (which explores the situation of low-caste Christian women in India), concerned African women's theology (primarily focusing on the encounter between African culture, Christianity, and feminism), *minjung* feminist theology (Korean women's theology from the perspective of the poor and the marginalized), and *mujerista* theology (informed by the experiences of Hispanic-American women) (King 1994; Beattie 2005).

This plurality according to Beattie (2005) indicates methods and sources extend far beyond those regarded as theological in the strictly academic sense, including, among others, oral traditions, literature, art, biography, and autobiography. However, feminist theologians have adopted a post-modernist perspective informed by the deconstructive and poststructuralist approaches of secular feminist theory, and by the work of critical theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva (Chopp & Davaney 1997; Kim, St. Ville, & Simonaitis 1993). Thus, women's experience is problematized by the recognition that all experience is socially constructed and linguistically mediated, and it is argued that feminist theology needs to concern itself with the analysis of theological language and symbolism (Beattie, 2005). The above emphasises the importance of interrogating women's experiences especially during COVID-19 and embedding such experience in feminist theology and ethics of care.

Ethics of Care

Ethics of care or care ethics is a feminist philosophical perspective that uses a relational and context-bound approach towards morality and decision-making (Dunn and Burton 2013:1). Noddings (1984) argued, "care is the foundation of morality, caring should be a foundation for ethical decision-making". The natural caring which is borne out of inclination and love for those close to the one caring and ethical caring, which is the feeling response of "I must" to a person's predicament (Dunn and Burton 2013:1). In this context, the ones caring (women) are inclined to naturally care for their loved ones/family members but due to COVID-19, it becomes even more imperative for the women that 'they must' care more.

It is this ethics of care that women in this study have extended to the education (digital learning, home-schooling) of their children and their welfare-physical, spiritual and emotional.

Natural caring, such as that of a mother for a child, comes before ethical caring and is preferable to it (Smith 2004, 2020). The argument starts from the position that “care is basic in human life – that all people want to be cared for” (Noddings 2002:11). Noddings (2002:2) starts from the position that “while men and women are guided by an ethic of care, natural caring – a form of caring that does not require an ethical effort to motivate it (although it may require considerable physical and mental effort in responding to needs), can have a significant basis in women’s experience”. “Natural caring, thus, is a moral attitude – a longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for” (Flinders 2001:211) hence, the notion of ethical caring – a state of being in relation, characterized by receptivity, relatedness and engrossment (Noddings 2002). Put succinctly,

Ethical caring, is the relation in which we do meet the other morally... [arises]... out of natural caring – that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring... [is] ... the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as ‘good’. It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring – to be in that special relationship – that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be moral in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring (Noddings 1984:4-5).

Sander-Staudt (2014) notes the central assumptions of feminine ethics are that women share a common perspective, rooted in the biological capacity and expectation of motherhood and that characteristically feminine traits include compassion, empathy, nurturance, and kindness.

Feminist ethic of care comprises of:

- Ethic based on maternal thinking (Ruddick 1983)
- Ethic based on rights and justice (Gilligan 1982)
- Moralities of responsibility and care (Collins 1990; Tronto 1987)

A feminist ethic of care “is an ethic of resistance to the injustices inherent in patriarchy (the association of care and caring with women rather than

with humans, the feminization of care work, the rendering of care as subsidiary to justice—a matter of special obligations or interpersonal relationships)” (Webteam 2011:4).

Gilligan claims that there are two moral predispositions—one towards justice and one towards care—and they arise from the human experience of (i) inequality and (ii) attachment found in the relationship between child and parent (Gilligan 1982; McCullough 2010:238). “These two predispositions are the foundations for two forms of responsibility: one being commitment to obligations and the other being responsiveness to relationships” (Gilligan 1986:238). Gilligan illustrates an ethic of care in three stages of moral development (Gilligan 1986:238; see also Vinney 2019:1):

1. Pre-conventional stage: women focused on the self.
2. Conventional stage: women have come to focus on their responsibilities towards others.
3. Post-conventional stage: a woman has learned to see herself and others as interdependent.

Gilligan asserts that “the ethics of care starts from the premise that as humans we are inherently relational. Responsive beings and the human condition are one of connection or interdependence. An ethics of care directs our attention to the need for responsiveness in relationships (paying attention, listening, responding) and to the costs of losing connection with oneself or with others” (Webteam 2011:1,2). The COVID-19 pandemic has really fostered women’s responsiveness to their relationship with self and others.

COVID-19 stay at home and lockdown policies have re-enacted the connection women have with self and others particularly their family and faith community. Care is essential for and key to human survival (Webteam 2011). Being relational and caring constitute very strong parts of the Nigerian culture and the Church in Nigeria. In Nigeria, most citizens, especially women, breathe, eat, and live Church. The Church is the anchor of peoples’ lives and seemingly their survival and sustenance (emotionally, spiritually and materially). Without the Church, some women are lost and cannot deal with the notion of not connecting physically. A respondent affirmed:

I haven’t done well, so I’ve maximized my relationship with God. I always looked forward to Church services for spiritual upliftment, but now, the situation is not helping me (N10).

Women are naturally and inherently caring, kind, and nurturing, and thus, “women develop an ethic of care, a morality of care and responsibility...” (Gilligan 1982:164) especially in the family, workplace and Church. The role of the Church including caring for its congregation (sheep/flock) both in physical and spiritual terms is evident during the lockdown. This corroborates John 21:16 “Take care of my sheep” and 1 Peter 5:2-3 “Be Shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not greedy for money, but eager to serve...being examples to the flock”. The ethics of care extends to the Church leadership especially the women congregants in the palliatives distribution to those in need in the congregation.

The next section examines the responses of the Church to the COVID-19 lockdown, the implementation of lockdown and physical distancing.

Church Response to COVID-19 Lockdown

Pandemic is a leveller, regardless of age, gender, class or occupation the virus impacted everybody in some capacity (D13).

Guidelines for congregating were issued especially on how to plan, prepare, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in places of worship. The guidelines were intended for administrators and leaders of Community Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) – congregations and places of worship (churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc.), voluntary social service agencies and other non-profit organizations, and community organizations. The CDC (2020) issued interim guidelines to help FBOs prevent the transmission of COVID-19 within their facilities and communities. FBOs need to be able to react quickly if there is a confirmed COVID-19 case among staff, volunteers, the people they serve, or visitors. The guidance includes considerations to help administrators and leaders plan for the continuity of services depending on the level of community spread of COVID-19.

Other notifications of Church suspension were sent through emails. Examples of emails read:

Due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus health crisis, ...services will be online only. All other in-person activities are cancelled until further notice.... This decision is necessary in view of the directions and best advice from local

and national health officials. Social distancing (limiting close contact and large group meetings) is the most effective way to contain the spread of the virus and to protect the most vulnerable. In-person programs and events are cancelled until further notice. Our Offices are closed but we remain open (copied from Author's e-mail, Canada).

Due to the social distancing announced by the Federal Government, all Sunday and mid-week services are hereby suspended. Please connect with the senior pastors on Facebook Live-streaming (copied from Author's e-mail, Nigeria).

Church leadership got creative about it and even organized online prayer meetings and chat responses to the live services. In a way, the Digital Church blossomed, many people got connected even the non-church people connected online. A few Churches with the approval of their local municipality offices engage in preparing food or other humanitarian/ ompas- sion work for those in need or vulnerable in the community.

Similarly, in the Global South, specifically in Nigeria, announcements were made on radio, television, newspapers, phone, social media and word of mouth. For most Nigerians, initially, they were in a state of denial. The religious ones are quick to say,

“it is not our portion” bearing in mind that Nigerians are incurably reli- gious. It is now obvious that religious institutions must respond promptly and appropriately.

Most Churches moved swiftly to online platforms with the emphasis that ‘You are the Church, the body of Christ, so the Church is wherever you are.’ Many religious institutions in Nigeria and the diaspora had to alter long-standing religious practices to avoid spreading the new virus. This is because religious gatherings are hotbeds for outbreaks. For instance, in the Catholic churches, the priests now administer Communion of the hand instead of placing it on the tongue as they used to do, and they have also stopped administering the wine in Communion chalices. There is also no more shaking of hands during the sign of peace. For some other denominations, Holy Communion is administered virtually by congre- gants bringing their own pieces of bread or biscuit and wine/juice and the officiating minister prays over it before it is taken. In some Churches, 10 persons hold the service and it is recorded for others to watch. However, congregants connect to the digital online Church at a cost. Congregants have to buy internet data to be able to connect to the internet or use their

phones. For most women congregants, this can be daunting due to loss of income during the lockdown.

Responsibility of the Church during COVID-19 Lockdown

The All African Conference of Churches (AACC), in providing theological reflection, claims that the body of Christ is saddled with responsibilities of guiding the thinking and actions of the church and its members in a time like this. Presently, as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic the integrity and relevance of our faith rest on how Church leaders speak about God and connect with the people of God.

The Church is presently faced with lots of challenges as a result of the pandemic and the imposed lockdown and social distancing protocols. As part of the churches' response, the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) proposed ten theological theses on the pandemic to assist the churches as they continue to reflect and act. Aside from the theological reflection, which is spiritual, the churches also came to the aid of their congregational members and members of the communities within which they are situated by giving palliatives in the form of money and food stuffs to help cushion the effect of the pandemic. Items were also donated to the state government by different churches. For instance, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints donated N95 masks, disposable masks, surgical gowns, protective eye shields, disposable hand gloves, hand sanitizers, antiseptic liquid soaps, disposable shoe covers, veronica buckets and tissue papers to the Lagos State Government. The vulnerable are also not left out as the church also provided food relief packages for them. Most churches in Nigeria responded positively.

However, a few church leaders are agitating for the reopening of churches, referring to the lockdown as 'an attempt to cripple Christianity.' It should be noted that the agitation for the reopening of churches is mainly from the Pentecostal churches. Other church leaders called for collaboration with the government and even offered some of their halls for the government to use as isolation centres.

Practising physical distancing is one measure to stop COVID-19 transmission while social distancing measures are taken to restrict when and where people can gather to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases. Social distancing measures, which include limiting large groups of people coming together, closing buildings and cancelling events (WHO 2020d,

e), really impacted most religious organisations which usually have large congregations and multiple services.

Physical distancing (Government of Canada 2020) means making changes in your everyday routines in order to minimize close contact with others, including:

- avoiding crowded places and gatherings
- avoiding common greetings, such as handshakes
- limiting contact with people at higher risk (e.g. older adults and those in poor health)
- keeping a distance of at least 2 arms lengths (approximately 2 meters) from others, as much as possible

Applying the lockdown rule biblically, the passage “Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by” (Isaiah 26:20), holds true during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Congregants believe this verse is applicable to the Church during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Countries have responded differently to the lockdown and physical distancing guidelines. The lockdown prohibits mass gathering of more than 5 to 20 people in a building in most countries, restricts access to open markets, reduces hours for grocery shoppers, bans interstate or provincial movement/travel. Depending on where you are located globally, the pandemic lockdown varied between 6 weeks to about 2 months or more. Recently the lockdown measures are being eased globally.

Keeping the faith during COVID-19, though hard without physical contacts and connection, was much easier digitally. While most Churches closed their buildings, the online Digital Church, either through Zoom, YouTube and other social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, SMS, and Facebook, re-emerged with unimaginable fervour. Church services, meetings, small group/cell group meetings, Daily doses (short Bible verses to encourage congregants) moved online. The online faith collective was more intense than ever and congregational programming during the pandemic changed completely.

Since the commencement of the stay at home and lockdown, technology continues to be used for good for the gospel of Christ globally. Daily dose, Divine daily prescription, prayer vigils, prophetic sayings, praise and worship online, online praise parties, continue unabated. Stay-at-Home vir-

tual concerts increased to help ease anxiety and mental health issues experienced during isolation or self-quarantine; or people experiencing cabin fever.

Experiences of Women During COVID-19 Lockdown

Restrictive measures, such as physical and social distancing, limiting interaction and engagement with others outside one's household, community, workplace and religious centres (especially Church) were imposed as public health measures to contain the transmission and spread of COVID-19. Women are physically separated (Lockdown) but they are still socially connected (not Locked-out) with their families, friends, and faith communities.

The African women's will (Nigerian women in particular) to survive, thrive and nurture their families while maintaining their faith is unprecedented even during COVID-19 pandemic as evidenced in this study. Women constitute the majority of Church worshippers and they are at the forefront of home worship. "Women support and guide; without them, there is no church (Toulis 1997:225). Women have been "active participants in religion throughout history" (Bates et.al. 2005:297). The caring and nurturing role of women during the pandemic lockdown was more intense and practically accelerated as can be seen in the responses. For example:

Women naturally tend to be caregivers and nurturers. COVID-19 has developed a tendency for me to be more engaged in "domestic affairs" like cooking etc. in efforts to keep busy. While I continuously strive to be independent in many aspects of my life, COVID-19 has reconfirmed to me that women are at the forefront of both professional and home life - we are versatile and powerful and should continue to advocate for one another. Neither role is bad - whether you're in a season of being a homemaker or working, this is something to celebrate because as women the sky's the limit - we truly can do it all! (D4).

I am learning each day how to accomplish what I now call 'Pandemic Schooling' of four children under the age of 9. Even though I do not work outside the home, it is still like two full-time jobs being responsible for my children's academic, social, emotional and physical well-being and growth, 24/7 (D11).

I have become a lot busier at home. I used to come home to rest, now home is my workplace. It's like you have nowhere to go for some rest (D7).

Specifically, in Nigeria, the Minister of Women Affairs ensured that palliative care got to women during this pandemic and the need to create safe spaces for all women especially pregnant and lactating women who are afraid to go to the hospital for antenatal care, and women experiencing domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Impact of COVID-19 on shaping Women’s relationship with God, Family, and Friends

The lockdown has strengthened the relationship of most respondents with God. Most respondents indicated they have been drawn or brought closer to God and fully rely on God. Respondents had more time to study the Bible and pray. Lockdown has given respondents more appreciation of God’s sovereignty, use of time and technology (Table 1). COVID-19 lockdown has also strengthened interpersonal relationships, renewed intentional connection, and enhanced communication within the family and among friends. However, a respondent noted:

I appreciated the physical contact I had much more finding that a lot of online connections after some minutes starts getting boring (D7).

Reflecting on the number of cases, recoveries and deaths from COVID-19 pandemic, it can be seen that the mind-set of some respondents has changed and they are inclined to take a look back on life and what it offers. The number of poor, vulnerable and marginalized people with no access to housing, employment or health care facilities lays heavy on the minds of respondents.

However, a few respondents indicated the lockdown has brought no change in relationship with God, family or friends.

Table 1: Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Relationships

COVID-19 and Women’s Relationships	Women’s Responses
Drawn closer to God	“The pandemic drew me closer to God” (N1). “COVID-19 moved me closer to God and my family members now pray together since everyone is around” (N8).

	<p>“COVID has been a reminder to be led by faith and not by fear in times of uncertainty. Fully rely on and trust in God” (D4).</p> <p>“My relationship with God has improved, especially in terms of prayer” (N2).</p> <p>“The period that has necessitated staying home most of the time has helped to strengthen my relationship with God (N3).</p> <p>“I have had more time for Bible study and prayers. Therefore, my relationship with God has grown deeper” (N5).</p> <p>“I have more time to read my Bible and pray more than before” (N7).</p> <p>“COVID-19 has strengthened my relationship with God and desire to pursue His will even more. It has shaken me out of my comfort zone of day-to-day living to the reminder that many do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, and that as the Word of God unfolds before our eyes, are we ready for His return? COVID-19 has highlighted the urgency of sharing the gospel with others, and living how God has called me” (D3).</p> <p>“I know God is not the cause of COVID-19 and is calling Christians to be channels of practical interventions and givers of hope. This has inspired me to find ways of being such a channel. The suffering and threat to life has made me treasure relationships with biological and the global family. God loves humanity and has made us one global family” (D10).</p> <p>“This pandemic has enhanced my reliance on God as the omnipotent and omnipresent God. It has drawn me closer to God because I depend on him especially since I am within the age group that is most vulnerable. As a woman and mother, I check on my family/ colleagues more and pray for them. I felt powerless and scared especially when they started announcing the statistics and the spread. I look at Coronavirus as God’s request for undivided attention from me as an individual and from other believers” (D13).</p>
God’s Sovereignty	<p>“The entire process of adjusting to the news and scare of COVID-19 has definitely illuminated the vivid and humbling reality that GOD is our Creator, all-knowing and sovereign God and we are merely the created and powerless beings. All our abilities and knowledge come from Him” (D11).</p>

	<p>"More appreciative of my family and friends. Missed them. Forgiveness to others and not taking anything for granted. As an African woman, I had a Christian foundation relying on God that He can do all things. I believe this has strengthened my love and respect for God. So, I have a positive approach to the fact that God allowed me to see the beginning for a reason and I will see the end of Coronavirus to testify to his goodness" (D13).</p>
<p>Appreciated the time and use of technology</p>	<p>"COVID-19 has given me an appreciation for time and technology. Time in the sense that I can really focus on my walk with God, the quietness is there and there's no excuse of 'I didn't do my devotions because there was no time.' Technology has helped the church meet virtually and it's so important to still meet and carry on business as usual because it shows the Devil that church is not a physical building" (D2).</p>
<p>Cherished family and connection with friends</p>	<p>"I was able to enjoy the presence of my husband at home. This is because he works in another location far away from home. The lockdown enhanced our intimacy" (N1).</p> <p>"With family and friends, it is all good, you can't just see each other like before and you are worried that everyone will be safe through it all" (N4).</p> <p>"With family, I have found my patience stretched but thankfully not beyond endurance because of the enforced almost around the clock stay with husband. With a few friends, we have had time to connect and even reconnect and revive ailing friendships" (N5).</p> <p>"I have learnt to communicate with family and my friends, constant daily communication" (N6).</p> <p>"The global slow-down has allowed me to connect with family and friends more easily and intentionally. A relationship is so valuable" (D3).</p> <p>"Minimal social interaction has given me a deeper appreciation for family and some friendships" (D4).</p> <p>"I have spent much more time with family than I have ever done in a long time. I got stuck in the village in Nigeria with my 90-year-old dad for a month. I think the time spent with him gave him immeasurable joy and probably added to his longevity. The whole incident made me and the entire family draw closer to God and spend more time in morning prayers to read the scriptures. It presented opportunities to</p>

	<p>share the Words in-depth with family. We got to talk more and know each other better” (D5).</p> <p>“There is more closeness to family since we are in the same house together. With friends also more on the phone asking after other” (D8).</p>
Reflexivity	<p>“In this scenario, the people that will suffer most are poor people who don’t have options. Check the proportion of people who have died in UK and USA. They are Blacks, Latinos, i.e. Minorities. In Nigeria people cannot feed themselves and the government is no help at all. I don’t think God is enjoying this either. Some billionaires are getting richer, especially the folks in technology. How does this solve anything? Another apocalypse that has happened in the past hit everybody hard both rich and poor. All that is going on is as a result of human carelessness ... Can you imagine if this issue has started from Africa and consumed the world?” (N4).</p> <p>“It is an ongoing reflection, bonding and communication” (N6).</p> <p>“COVID-19 has brought a new form of stillness and reflectivity to my life and relationships. All is vanity, home restricted cannot go out, all material things become nothing. “Be still and know that I am God”. Apart from the intensity or overload of the online faith activities I think my walk with God is consistent and growing. However, one thing is clear God is sovereign over His creation! I am in awe of His power” (D12).</p>
No change	<p>“I understand the relationship I have with God before this, I do not need a catastrophe to start changing things” (N4).</p> <p>“My relationship with God and family has not changed” (N9).</p> <p>“Relationship with family and friends haven’t changed because I was calling, Face Timing and still being my social self before the virus. I do miss driving over to friends just for a check-up or having people over at my house” (D2).</p> <p>“With my family and friends, I still connect with them as usual through WhatsApp, nothing really has changed in that regard” (D12).</p>

Impact of COVID-19 on Women's lives

COVID-19 has put a pause on the life and activities of most respondents. It has also affected respondents in different ways. The precarity of the global slow down or pandemic lockdown and uncertainty though boring for some, causing job insecurity and anxiety for some respondents, has allowed some respondents to relax. The lockdown has also brought opportunities for online creativity, bringing out the entrepreneurial skills and need for knowledge acquisition in the area of information technology or Internet technology for other respondents. Most of the women have also had to be frugal with their resources because of job insecurity or loss of employment or uncertainty with regard to the lifting of the lockdown (Table 2).

Table 2: COVID-19 Impact on Women

COVID-19 Impact	Women's Responses
Restriction and Relaxation	<p>"I have time to relax and not work always like before" (N7).</p> <p>"I have decided to take things easy both business and education because nobody knows when COVID-19 will end. When things become normal again, academic work will continue" (N8).</p> <p>"COVID-19 impacted my life and work in the sense that my work and regular activities were restricted (D6).</p>
Frugality	<p>"COVID-19 has caused me to manage my resources more carefully" (D6).</p> <p>"As a businesswoman, this lockdown has made me realize the importance of a side hustle and not to rely on one income" (D2).</p>
Online Engagement	<p>"The pandemic has given me ample time to focus more on my education as a doctoral student. I was able to write articles, conduct surveys. I have become more aware of the opportunities to make more impact online and also learnt new skills in making hand sanitizers" (N1).</p> <p>"Business has slowed down remarkably. But has made me even more appreciative of the customers who have reached out and made orders in spite of lockdown. A little anxiety has plagued one also in wondering what lies ahead, moving forward" (N5).</p>

	<p>“As an Engineer, I haven’t had time to do much considering I work within a facility that is currently on lockdown” (N6).</p> <p>“I have been working from home, which I love and don’t mind not going back to the office. Ha-ha. I miss attending seminars however, and building those professional networks with other young professionals and experienced individuals in my field” (D2).</p> <p>“The lockdown, though unexpected break and boring, has helped me to work on long-neglected papers” (N2).</p>
Use of Technology	<p>“COVID has challenged me to integrate the pandemic in all my lectures. I teach part-time so I am now teaching online. Conscious that some students have no access to data and computers (D10).</p> <p>“More online engagement; meetings, both professionally and spiritually. It’s become a fast-paced digital connection and I am learning so fast. I almost thought one has to wean oneself off the digital world post-COVID” (D12).</p> <p>“COVID-19 has brought so much uncertainty in my life and work. I have had to settle for less (virtual lectures) in terms of my education, so practically just live each day as it comes” (N10).</p> <p>“Forced one to rethink the business plan I had. I see the dire need to acquire some Information Technology (IT) knowledge in the new dispensation because the world is fully going digital, aftermath of COVID. Working from home will be the new normal, so I need to acquire skills that will enable me to play in that space” (NDW).</p>
Job Insecurity and Precarity	<p>“It has created a sense of job insecurity” (D3).</p> <p>“I lost my job in June of 2019 and all interviews were cancelled due to COVID-19” (D1).</p> <p>“Empathy for those who are less fortunate, those who have lost their jobs without the ability to meet their financial obligations. Appreciate my colleagues more as I care for their well-being too” (D13).</p> <p>“Not good for business, loss of income and revenue in total. You cannot sell your services this period, it is quite precarious. Long term consequences may be dire” (N4).</p>
Creativity/ Opportunity	<p>“I also was able to start working on a musical album” (N1).</p>

"As a creative person in the media and communications space, it has opened me up to becoming a better version of myself. Understanding branding and what it means to speak the language of a customer through visuals on channels like websites and social media" (N6).
 "I have become more aware of the opportunities to make more impact online" (N9).
 "I also work outside college and most of the work has come to a standstill. This has made me pursue other options online, not easy, and also to be aware of vulnerable groups" (D10).

Respondents were asked to describe the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in one word (Figure 1). Women respondents used these words to describe the impact of COVID-19 lockdown: New Normal, Patience, Enlightening, Intense, Revealing, Destabilizing, Challenging, Deadly, Renewal, Reset mode, Devastating, Deadly, Terrible, Humbling, Eye-opening, Disruption, Negligible, Phenomenal, Mixed, positive and negative, Vanity, Love, Intentional.

Figure 1: COVID-19 Impact in One Word by Women



Source: Authors conceptualisation, 2020.

Below are qualifying excerpts from some of the respondents:

“It has brought about a new normal in the way we act and interact with one another, things are never going to be the same again” (D1).

“The entire world has entered reset mode. We do not know how it will play out precisely but this is the beginning of huge changes and paradigm shifts. People have to be prudent in spending as the financial impact will be significant. Family ties will be stronger as we get to know one another from spending time together. On the lighter mood, I am one of those that believe the decision to shut down was excessive. Nevertheless, I believe something good will come out all these, for all things work together for good” (NDW1).

“Patience. COVID-19 has taught me not to be in a hurry or feel the need to accomplish so many things at once because I will run out of time” (D2).

“I have become patient and intentional with my actions” (D3).

“COVID-19 has impacted the economic and psychological aspects of the lives of many. I have personally become less committed to many material things in life. Since the only thing that matters is how COVID-19 will come to an end” (N8).

“I use a few words to qualify the impact of this virus. Vanity (I now realize that all the rush and run around I do could also be vanity, my love for flashy things has now changed as I have no more desire for flashy things); Intentional (God works out everything for the good of those who are called according to his will. He needed to teach us some lessons); Eye-Opening; Love (love and appreciate others); Rest (everything came to a standstill all the hustle and bustle came to a stop and it gave me some ability to take a break and let God sort things out” (D13).

Lessons Learned

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered anxiety for most of the women because of restricted movement, access, and physical connection. The uncertainty of reopening, physical distancing, inability to go to work, attend Church or engage in normal social activities caused by the COVID-19 lockdown caused panic and emotional distress to most of the women.

Women have become more intentional in their walk with God and in their relationship with family and friends. There is an increased yearning to seek and pray to God more. The restriction has allowed some women to relax from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Women’s reflection on the quietness and stillness brought by the lockdown and stay-at-home orders

corroborates the Biblical saying “Be Still and know that I am God...” (Psalm 46:10).

Women’s ingenuity also created opportunities to be innovative, creative, learn and re-learn new skills using technology at work, to teach, and engage their children and to connect with the faith collectively.

The accelerated burden of unpaid care work increased for women respondents. In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, much of care responsibility and caring work, whether natural or ethical, falls on the women both in the private and public realms. It is also not different for Nigerian women living in the diaspora. The burden of care and caring during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated for most of the women respondents because now they are immersed in caring for the whole family - children and husbands, entertaining children with activities at home, domestic chores, and saddled with the additional work of pandemic home-schooling manually or online. The multi-tasking nature of women has been practically accelerated by the lockdown.

Care sharing becomes very significant during these unusual times to relieve women from the burden of the unpaid care work (caring for the family) and the added burden of pandemic schooling of their children. Disruptions are inevitable, but how African women, particularly Nigerian women, respond is extremely critical. Majority of African women in the informal sector are primary breadwinners in the family while the group of women respondents in this paper contribute significantly to the family upkeep financially. Women learned to be prudent in the way they live and do life. Due to job insecurity and the imminent uncertainty of getting their jobs or businesses back, women have learned to be prudent in the way they utilise their resources and spend money.

Finally, women learned to value time. Time is of the essence for these women. The COVID-19 lockdown has not locked out the women from pursuing valuable things with their time. Indeed, time spent with family is very important because it allows for genuine bonding and learning new things (which otherwise were not learnt pre- COVID-19 lockdown order because of busyness) about the family according to the respondents.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures have disrupted the normal way of life for most of the women sampled. The lockdown has shaped and reshaped the way women visualise the world in which we live, work, play and learn. The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped all societal institutions. Remote working, remote learning and how we congregate as a faith collective seemingly might continue post COVID-19. The reset mode and new normal mentioned by the respondents give a new meaning to life as we know or experience it as women as we go forward. Women will have to reset work, family life/living, learning, and Church. To be locked down and not locked out of daily life, adaptability, and resiliency are critical for African women post- COVID-19 and the digital frontier or the opportunities for digitalisation seem inevitable. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has caused women to be prudent and purposeful in their decision making going forward as they continue to care for their family, friends, and faith collectively.

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