



‘STAY AT HOME ORDER’:

A COVID-19’S CHILD OF NECESSITY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ‘FEMALE’ IN YORUBA (NIGERIA) HOME SETTINGS

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Abstract

Studies on COVID-19 regarding its cause, effects and remedies are many. However, insignificant attention is paid to the implications of the effect of the disease on the ‘female’, as noticed in some extant studies. This work examines the ‘Stay at Home Order’ as one of the mechanisms put in place to minimise the spread of COVID-19 with a view to ascertaining whether or not the act is a child of necessity in Yoruba (Nigeria) home settings. Research data were gathered through telephone interviews with 50 families, coupled with several sessions of observation in select streets of Ibadan. Consequently, we found out that there was division of labour between male and female children and husbands and wives in many homes in dealing with house chores and religious activities due to the ‘Stay at Home Order’. The social relationship, however, improved through helping one another, playing games together, respecting one another in relationships, mutual involvement in taking decisions, engaging in division of labour in handling the numerous home chores, tolerating one another, and managing and sharing peacefully the quantity of food that parents could provide. Such a new experience in male and female dynamics in Yoruba (Nigeria) home settings may help redefine gendered interactions, now and in the future.

Introduction

The year 2019 ended with many sad stories, including with the emergence of the incurable and novel COVID-19 disease, which is said to have begun in Wuhan, China, emerging in December 2019 and since spreading to many countries globally. The disease has remarkably thrown the world off balance because of its ravaging nature. Consequently, it has affected many people including the health workers who are managing victims. One of the universal effects of the disease is the declaration of lockdowns otherwise known as ‘Stay at Home Orders’. The Stay at Home Order, as it shall

be described in the course of this discussion has effect on many things but significantly, on the female in Nigerian Yoruba home settings.

Given the tremendous impact of the COVID-19 phenomenon and its global reach, the attention of scholars and non-scholars has been considerable. Many of the scholarly works, especially from the scientific perspective, regarding its causes, remedies, measurement, effects, and suggestions-cum-solutions in addressing the pandemic are widely consulted and dispersed. But, all in all, we are of the view that too little attention has been given to its sociological dimension, particularly, as it relates to the Stay at Home Order (given by the government). It is on this premise that the current study examines the Stay at Home Order, its forms and conditions, with a view to underscoring its effects on the 'female' in Yoruba (Nigeria) home settings. The work is divided into sub-sections and discussed as follows: a brief literature review, the 'female' in Yoruba (Nigeria) in pre-COVID-19 home settings, COVID-19, Stay at Home/lockdown, implications of the Stay at Home Order for Yoruba home settings in Ibadan, effects of the Stay at Home Order on the 'female' in Yoruba homes and concluding remarks.

COVID-19 Pandemic in Perspective

As earlier indicated, much of the literature on COVID-19 is science-based and for this reason, the researcher intends to review two. Harapan et al (2020) in collaborative research reviewed COVID-19 in the context of its causative agents, pathogenesis and immune responses, epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment and management of the disease, control and prevention strategies. Backing the above scientific findings with necessary data, these authors recommend that due to the rapid transmission in countries around the world, there should be an increase in attention to disease surveillance systems to scale up the country's readiness to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Such efforts should include the establishment of rapid response teams and, improving the capacity of the national laboratory systems to carry out tests on COVID-19 patients appropriately and in timely fashion around the globe (Akanti 2020). No doubt, the work provides us with some basic background information about the pandemic from which we can draw some inference, particularly, on the attention paid to the perceived risk associated with the spread of the disease, which

has led many governments to institute a variety of control measures including a Stay at Home Order. But our point of departure into the study is that it has not looked at the aftermath of the order and its sociological implications (Harapan et al. 2020:667-673).

Still from the scientific point of view, Ahmet et al. (2019:1-7) also in a collaborative work shed significant light on COVID-19 from the medical and oncological perspectives. These authors examined the meaning, history, outbreak, treatment, and prevention of COVID-19 in its early stage. These authors also concluded instructively that there is an urgent need to impose some restrictions on people's movement on the account that coronavirus has the capacity to spread widely in the coming years. These authors are of the opinion that there is also a need for increased scientific collaboration to fight the disease now and in the future. A cursory look at the position of the authors indicate the justification for the Stay at Home Order, which some people criticize on the grounds that it has affected national/global economies. The current study does not underrate the economic matter that may arise from the lockdown order but also considers the phenomenon and its sociological impacts.

From the above, we are of the position that the books reviewed have provided some insight into the problem of COVID-19 and the possible justifications for the declaration of the Stay at Home Order. This however calls for moving a step further, which includes a probe into the gender dimension of the Order by looking at the fate of the female in Yoruba home settings in Nigeria. We shall expound on the meaning of 'the female' and the context in which it is used as we commence our discussion.

Writing from the view of sociology of religion, data were gathered through telephone interviews with 50 families in Ibadan, regarding their dispositions to the fate of the female during the lockdown. We must state that the families interviewed are categorised into two. Thus, the elite family, that is, the ones whose father, mother and children are educated to University first degree level. The majority of them are lecturers and the senior cadre of civil servants. The second is non-elite with the educational qualification of the members of the family between primary and secondary schools. The two categories comprise both literates and semi-literates. We weighed the responses of the two sets in terms of whether they still retain their traditions, or accept also (some) modern ideas held about the 'female' in their Yoruba settings. Furthermore, we also had casual interviews with randomly selected ten females and ten male adults in five streets in

the Ajibode area of Ibadan, regarding their disposition and experience with regards to gender differentiation in the sharing of house chores among children during the on-going ‘Stay at Home Order’. This was complemented with a non-participant observation regarding the sex of children and adults fetching water on the five streets in Ibadan. It is important to note, that Ibadan, though a large city in Nigeria, has problems with access to potable water and this is one of the reasons why people have to go about in the morning and evening looking for houses with boreholes from which they can fetch water.

We also gathered information from fifteen selected YouTube video clips about husband and wife with regards to their handling of house chores during the lockdown. These included: “How to share household responsibilities”, “Splitting house tasks in marriage”, “Let’s cook dinner together”, “Should a man do house chores with the wife?”, “Husband and wife divide household”, “Talking about household chores in English”, “3 Tips to avoid fighting with your partner over house chore”, “How to divide house chores”, “How to get husbands to do chores without nagging”, “Staying home is actually fun”, “Are chores hurting your relationship? The remaining four were not labelled, they were posted via WhatsApp messages. The video clips were subjected to content analysis while the other sources of information earlier mentioned were subjected to descriptive and sociological analysis.

The Challenges of the ‘Female’ in the Pre-COVID 19 Home Settings

The Yoruba is a group of Nigerians found in the South-western states of Nigeria. The Yoruba are made up of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and Lagos States. A few of them are also found in Kogi and Kwara states in Nigeria. There are three major religions practised by the people. These are Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam.

For emphasis and clarity, the word ‘female’ is used in the context of femininity to refer to a girl, woman, wife and mother. It is germane to mention that the Yoruba people, like many other African ethnic groups, are patriarchal in nature. That is, the group and her society hold the belief that the male, comprising boy, man and husband, is superior to the female counterpart. Thus, based on the patriarchal tradition, the girls, at the domestic level, are saddled with more duties, including washing of plates,

grinding of pepper, beans, maize, and melon, fetching of water for cooking and bathing, fetching of firewood, sweeping of the house and its environs, cooking and serving of food. It is also a common practice that while girls are doing the jobs mentioned above among others, their counterparts, that is, the boys, are playing around or sitting somewhere, waiting for the food to be served and the plates to be carried and washed by the girls.

In the same vein, the men dictate what the women should do regarding taking care of the compound like sweeping, general cleaning, and supervision of the girls in doing their jobs. At this point, the man is also considered superior to the woman. The same scene plays out regarding the relationship between husband and wife. The husband is the overlord who determines, designs both the economic, domestic and political agenda for the running of their homes. The wife is expected to listen attentively to the rules of family engagement designed by the husband such as what food and soup to be cooked, who takes what portion of meat (whenever it is available), when to sleep and when to wake up and who handles which aspects of the house chores.

On childcare, the wife is expected to bathe the children, guide them to do their school assignments where applicable, carry the baby on her back while working in the house, or do house chores, with the husband relaxing by reading newspapers or watching movies. When the child is playing around but needs attention, the husband calls the wife with strict instructions – 'So, So and So, come and carry your child'. Or, 'take this child away from the sitting room because he/she is disturbing our peace' At times, he shouts to the child: 'go and meet your mummy in the kitchen', 'Don't disturb me in my library'.

On religious matters, particularly at the level of conducting the family religious service in the morning or at the night (which some Christians call the family altar), it is seen as primarily a male affair. The husband conducts the whole service starting with singing of choruses, reading of Bible passages, delivery of sermon, and benediction. In all these, both the girl child and the mother or wife play subsidiary roles under the patriarchal canopy.

Ayantola (2001:79-88) has discussed this tradition, pinpointing its social, political, moral and economic implications both in positive and negative terms, but we are not going into a full debate about it, rather making allusion to some of the reasons as is apposite. A lot of reasons are adduced to

the marginalisation of girls, women or mothers in the home setting. For instance, there is a cultural belief that the male is superior to the female and should, on that account, take the lead in everything that concerns them over their female counterparts. Those belonging to this school of thought lean on an oral tradition which remarks that the males are more rational and less emotional than women and by so doing, women can hardly handle things emotion-free, hence the saying, *Oro-Obinrin ko se te le*, which means “it is not wise for a man to follow a woman’s advice or act on a woman’s suggestion”. Beyond the shore of Yoruba state, this stance is also upheld by a sociologist – Steven Goldberg (1987:148), who wrote in his work: “The inevitability of patriarchy’ that males have a hormonal aggressive advantage over females and therefore, are better in leadership than women.”

None of the above arguments is absolute because both male and female are making significant contributions to development in the field of science, technology, business, education and politics among others but the cultural belief about gender disparity still holds water in some quarters. Practically, we observe that among the Yoruba people, there is male child preference over female children. This has provoked some mothers whose children are all girls to pray to have male children at all cost. Evidently, some women, among whom are Christians, go as far as having many children all in the name of looking for a male child (Ojebode 2016). Some of the Christians who prefer male children to female children are probably influenced by the traditions of Judeo-Christian religions, which gave man superior right of leadership over woman, as epitomized in the work of Josephus (1962:373), who argues that women are inferior to men in every way as strengthened in the biblical injunction that wives are subject to their husbands with their husbands being their heads.

COVID-19 and Stay at Home /Lockdown

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus said to have originated in Wuhan, China, in late 2019. Identified in December, it spread from there to many countries globally (who.int/health-topic). The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks. These droplets

can land on objects and surfaces around the person such as tables, door-knobs, and handrails. On this note, it is proved that people can become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth ([who.int/emergencies](https://www.who.int/emergencies)). The disease manifests with some symptoms such as fever, dry cough, tiredness, aches and pains, sore throat, and sometimes also diarrhoea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain, or pressure, loss of speech or movement and a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes.

Since its emergence, the COVID-19 virus as at 9th May 2020 is reported to have infected 3.94 million, out of which 1.32 million have recovered and 275 thousand have died worldwide. The rapid spread of the disease provokes global concern about how to stop the spread, and get vaccines to protect against infection. This led to setting out some regulations spear-headed by the World Health Organisation and reinforced by national governments in countries that are affected by the pandemic. Substantial portions of the regulations are regularly and thoroughly cleaning of hands with an alcohol-based hand rub, washing of hands with soap and water, in order to kill viruses that may be on the hands, maintaining at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between two people because when someone coughs, sneezes, or speaks they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth, which may contain the virus. If one is too close, one can breathe in the droplets, and get infected with COVID-19 if the one who coughed has the virus. On account of this, crowded places are to be avoided. This is because when people come together in crowds, one is more likely to come into close contact with someone with COVID-19.

Other strategies include avoiding touching of eyes, nose and mouth because hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to our eyes, nose or mouth. Also important is following good respiratory hygiene. This involves covering of one's mouth and nose with the bend of one's elbow or a tissue when one coughs or sneezes, disposing of used tissue immediately and washing one's hands, because droplets spread the virus, wearing of masks covering both the nose and the mouth, staying at home to avoid contact with an unsuspecting carrier of the virus and, self-isolation for someone who has even minor symptoms of COVID-19 such as a cough, headache, or mild fever, until you recover, seeking of medical attention for anyone who has fever, cough and difficulty breathing by calling the National Centre for

Disease Control, or visiting the centre personally and finally, keeping up to date on the latest information about the disease from trusted sources, such as WHO, local and national health authorities.

Of the above regulations, we shall dwell on the ‘Stay at home Order’. The Stay at Home Order is also synonymous with Lockdown in Nigeria and Movement Control in South East Asia. The term stands for an order from a government authority to restrict movements of a population as a mass quarantine strategy for suppressing, or mitigating an epidemic, or pandemic, by ordering residents to stay home except for essential tasks or to work in essential businesses. Different nations redefine the scope and contents of the ‘Stay at Home Order’ which generally include:

- i. The stay at home order was characterised by lockdown which involved restriction of movement of human beings from their homes to their places of work or places of their choice.
- ii. It goes with closing of business centres, companies, warehouses, and religious centres such as the Mosque and the Church.

On religious matters, all religious activities such as congregational prayers, vigils, Friday Jumat services for the pilgrimage exercise for Muslims, Sabbath services for Seventh Day Adventist Church members, and Sunday services for other Christians, as well as conventions, camp meetings and many other liturgical services, were banned. Religious centres in support of the government issued a series of bulletins and letters readable in public domains to ensure that people stayed at home. Other rules include allowance for minimum hours of outdoor activities, attending to non-essential business activities to be carried out at home, the imposition of curfew for a number of hours – that is 7.00 pm to 6.00 am as in the case of Oyo State, banning of social and religious engagements except where the ones to attend are not more than 20 people, banning of commercial activities except those that are essential to living and management of COVID-19 (e.g. selling and distribution of food stuff, health and security), curtailing of non-essential journeys but permitting what are described as essential journeys (which include shopping for food, travelling to work, accessing healthcare, and engaging in physical exercise within 1 km of the home for up to 1 hour). Others also include the closure of schools at all levels, suspension of parliamentary sessions, prohibition of all gatherings of more than 10 people, and permission to operate essential services such as

supermarkets, petrol stations, and health services. Also enforced were formal and informal closure of bars and the prohibition of the sale of alcohol, cancelation of sporting activities as well as non-essential services such as pools, bars, cafes, restaurants, playgrounds and closing of permitted business activities in specific hours of the day at the commencement of the curfew.

To make this Order effective, security agents were drafted to major roads, interstate roads and some hotspots in the main cities and towns, as a strategy for preventing unauthorised journeys. This led to the emergence of road blocks and police or security checkpoints to check people who were out and about had good reason to be and that their exemption declarations were in tandem with the existing stay at home order.

Implications of Stay at home Order for Yoruba Home settings in Ibadan

The 'Stay at Home Order' with its attendant instructions has implications for all Yoruba homes but I limit my research area to Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, Nigeria where I have gathered first-hand information. Based on research findings, the Stay at Home Order means the following: husband and wife have to be indoors and by implication have to relate with one another more than during the pre-COVID period when they usually met at home possibly late evening after each of them might have returned from work as the case may be. Children too are fully home because their schools have been closed. It has given them ample opportunity to enjoy more intimacy with their parents. Children being at home calls for full feeding, i.e. three meals per day, seven days a week. It implies that their parents would need to spend more money on food, compared with pre-COVID times. It also has implications on whoever is the bread winner among the husband and wife. There will be more cooking of food, fetching of water where there is no flowing water at home, washing of plates and grinding of pepper and beans among others. This is followed by more cleaning of the house, mopping of the floor and sweeping of the house and more of the general house chores than before. Where electricity supply is stable, the 'Stay at Home Order' calls for more consumption of energy, which leads to purchasing more energy power points. In essence, the 'Stay at Home Order' led to the closure of religious centres and re-

sulted in the emergence of home cells and family altars for Sunday worship. In most cases, there was an allowance for online worship particularly for those who had access to some social media applications like WhatsApp, and Zoom applications, or their church television stations. In some cases, the order of service including the sermon was sent online to church members for them to follow during their family Sunday service.

On the whole, there are many needs to attend to, many assignments to carry out in the running of the home and more expenses to be accommodated with little or no resources particularly for families whose livelihood depends on daily income. All these put together call for a new order, a re-orientation, and absolute tolerance as parameters to manage the home.

Effects of the Stay at Home Order on the ‘Female’ in Yoruba homes

Leaning on our research tools as mentioned earlier, we discovered that the Stay at Home Order has some negative and positive effects on the ‘female’ in Yoruba homes selected for our study. The findings are discussed thematically as seen below:

1. Maintenance of status quo

We gathered that a majority of the families belonging to the non-elite still maintain the status quo; all the house chores such as sweeping, cooking, fetching of water and wood among others are still reserved for the female members of the family. This information is further strengthened by the researcher’s observation during one of their morning exercises where a conversation ensued among some girls fetching water by the borehole about whether or not they have male siblings at home who could have joined them in the task. The majority of them said yes, and that their male counterparts were still sleeping. They added that they are the ones who have been doing the major work in the house while boys are just playing one game or the other, sleeping or pressing their phones while they are saddled with so much of the house chores. What this revelation translated to is that some homes still do not approve of gender equality or equity even in a time like this. This is suggestive that the female under these settings has many painful stories of being overwhelmed with work associated with the lockdown. It is a trend that needs further attention as the global world strives towards gender respect and tolerance.

2. Division of Labour

Far away from the first research findings, we gathered that some homes, especially the elites, subscribed to what can be described as division of labour among boys and girls, and husband and wives in handling the demands in their home occasioned by the stay at home order. The division of labour has an outstanding history in terms of its meaning, theory and applications in economic history and it positively correlates with societal advancement because it increases as society progresses (Smith 1970). The thesis of the division of labour as mentioned elsewhere is characterised by the division of a large task, contract, or project into a smaller task so that each of the people involved in the task or labour would have a separate schedule of duty based on their specialty within the overall project schedule; allocation of tasks to individuals or organizations according to their capacities (Ayantoyo 2019:173-185). This is exemplified in some homes where boys were asked to wash plates and fetch water; a job that was typically reserved for males. In fact, according to Prof B (anonymous name), a timetable was made for children in the house (including a child of a family friend who came on visit but could not travel back before the lockdown) on who should cook on each day, wash the toilets and cars, sweep and mop the floor without reference to gender factor. The same sharing of work is displayed among some husbands and wives on driving, bathing of children (particularly those who have small children) feeding the children, monitoring them while doing their online lessons and assignments among others. In fact, it is interesting to note that there was a WhatsApp video clip showing a man putting one of their twin babies on the back and at the same time working with the wife in the kitchen.

The emerging development in the home as characterised by sharing of responsibilities has sociological dimensions because the practice is a form of role responsibility. Role responsibility is a sociological term denoting the specific tasks or duties that members are expected to complete according to their roles. In other words, role responsibility in the context of our discussion is the specific home chore, specifying what each member of the family should do at a specific time and for which individual members of the family are held accountable.

The responsibility is not limited to sharing home chores and other domestic activities, it is also extended to the handling of religious programmes which various churches in most cases have sent to their church members

for the purpose of Sunday service in replacement of congregational service they would have held on Saturday or Sundays. For example, a family notified me how the division of labour is applied in handling the programme sent to them by their church – Christ Apostolic Church, (Oke Ife) Agbowo, Ibadan in the order listed below: Pre-service Choruses: Female Children, Hymn 1 (GHB 70: The God of Abraham praise): All of us with our eldest daughter taking the lead, Processional Hymn: (101 70: Thank God of Abraham) All of us with our eldest son taking the lead in turns, Opening Prayer: Daddy, Lesson/Bible Reading: I Pet. 4:7-: Mummy, Hymn 2 (GHB 823: God moves in a mysterious way): All of us with our eldest daughter taking the lead in turns, Testimonies/Offerings/ Thanksgiving: All of us comes out one after the other to give testimony; Male Child takes the offering and Mummy does the Thanksgiving prayers, Hymn 3 (GHB 454: Break Thou the bread of life): Thank God of Abraham). All of us with our eldest son taking the lead in turns, with the Sermon by Mummy, and the General Prayers by Daddy, The Fourth Hymn 4 (GHB 723: How, my comrades! see the signal): All of us with our eldest daughter taking the lead in turns, and the Benediction by Daddy.

From the above, we can see that both male and female are involved in the conduct of the service; both the female and male children were given the task to take the lead in handling one part of the programme or the other, while both Daddy and Mummy functioned in equal capacities.

3. Improved social relations

We also gathered information that there is a considerable improvement in social relationship between male and female, boys and girls and husbands and wives in the majority of the homes of both the elites and non-elites. The social relationship is manifested in all of them helping one another, playing games together, respecting one another in the relationship, mutual involvement in taking decisions, engaging in division of labour in handling the numerous home chores, tolerating one another, managing and sharing peacefully the quantity of food that parents could provide. In addition, it is noted that husband and wife have much more time to interact, interrelate, communicate, share ideas of their experiences in their places of work, discuss issues bothering their family prospects and coping strategies for the aftermath of COVID-19.

The improvement in social relation is of sociological significance because the act propels cooperation, which implies collegueship, co-partnership,

and tie-up relationship. It is a good development because as Ayantayo puts it, 'where there is cooperative spirit, there is always the growth of fraternity, solidarity, fellow-feeling, voluntary association, coalition, federation, united fronts, common front, mutual assistance, reciprocity, spirit of give-take mutual concession, compromise and comradeship' (Ayantoyo 2009:78).

4. Domestic Violence

The researcher discovered that a few women in Ibadan suffered domestic violence from their husbands during the lock down. The violence manifested in physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse. Three cases of such were reported to the Women and Child Rights wing of the Justice, Development and Protection Commission (JDPC) in Ibadan. The violence erupted as a result of the inability of both the wives and husbands to resolve some issues related to finance. Further investigation shows that the husbands and wives that were involved had been avoiding each other before the enforced stay at home. Now that they were forced to stay together, their disagreements apparently and consequently developed into domestic violence.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to remark that most 'females' in our research locations enjoyed some level of respect, appreciation, cooperation, and justice from their male counterparts during the Stay at Home Order. This is a good departure point from the pre-existing order, in which the female was made a second-class citizen. We are of the opinion that the gain made by the 'female' during the period of Stay at Home Order will endure for a long period. The new experience may help define a lot of things regarding male and female interactions, now and in the future. Hopefully, many conferences, talk shows, workshops, and various fora for discussions will emerge after COVID-19, the result of which could help raise the dignity of the female even more.

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