



# INCIDENCE OF SEXUAL CRIME DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health challenge with associated social problems such as sexual crime. The media reports of the surge of sexual crime during the pandemic is worrisome. Thus, this study examined the perception of people towards incidence of sexual crime during COVID-19. The sexual crime examined in this study includes rape, sexual assault/molestation, pedophilia, and homosexuality. This cross-sectional quantitative study employs online survey techniques to collect data from respondent. Using SPSS, univariate data was used to understand the incidence of sexual crime during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings indicate that there was an increase in the rate of pedophilia, rape, sexual assault/molestation, and homosexuality during the lockdown occasion by COVID-19. There is need to re-awaken the consciousness of relevant stakeholders toward taking proactive measures to prevent the trends of sexual crime, and severe punishment should be put into law to deter offenders in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, homosexuality, pandemic, rape, sexual assault.

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## Introduction

The novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has spread from China to the entire continent on earth. The World Health Organization declared the disease a public health emergency of international concern. The disease is highly infectious, and its main clinical symptoms include fever, dry cough, fatigue, myalgia, and dyspnea (WHO, 2020). On February 14, 2020, the first case was observed in Africa, specifically in Egypt. Non-surgical measures were suggested to reduce the spread of the disease. Such efforts include, social distancing, regular hand washing, wearing of facemask, lockdown of educational institutions and border closure. However, the lockdown has led to several social problems such as gender-based violence. For instance, one in three women are at risk of domestic violence during their lifetime, and more than 31% of this incidence occurs with intimate partners either sexually, socially, psychologically, and mentally (WHO, 2020). The situation is precarious in Nigeria where the United Nation Population Fund (2020) reports the surge of formal reported cases of domestic violence during the lock-down period occasioned by COVID-19 restriction. The prevalence of non-reported cases of gender-based

violence remains unknown.

Previous research has reported prevalence of violence during past pandemic (Kulkarni, Thomas, and Shenoy, 2021). The UNFPA reported that the COVID-19 pandemics has led to breakdowns of social infrastructures and exposed widespread gender inequality (UNFPA, 2020). The daily routine of women and children is characterized by sexual harassment and violence, especially in their pursuit for food, water and shelter. Reports further indicate that gender-based violence is more prevalent in HIV hyper-endemic countries (Ghanotakis, Mayhew, and Watts, 2009; Andersson, Cockcroft, and Shea, 2008). In India, the association between prevalence of HIV epidemic and gender-based violence was established (Godbole, and Mehendale, 2005). According to Menéndez, Lucas, Munguambe, and Langer (2015) women do not have rights over their sexual choices. Consequently, they experience sexual violence and the risk of exposure to the virus through the male carrier. Okur (2016) emphasized that sexual and gender-based violence increases during crises due to breakdown in law. According to the WHO global ethics unit (2016), gender roles affect all aspects



of an endemic including interpersonal violence. It also emphasized the need of various services to minimize the risk of violence when people are quarantined at home or in institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to resurgence of gender related violence worldwide. Previous studies on out-break of pandemic had been associated with household violence (Palermo and Peterman, 2011; Fothergill and Peek, 2004). For instance, high intimate partner violence was reported after the earthquake that occurred in Haiti in the year 2007, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, eruption of Mount Saint Helens in the 1980s, and at the South Asian Tsunami of 2004 (Campbell, 2020). Sikira and Urassa (2015) also reported an increase in wife battering in the face of the HIV pandemic due to suspicion of extramarital affairs. Recent outbreaks such as Ebola, Cholera, Zika, and Nipah have also led to an increase in the cases of domestic violence (Davies and Bennett, 2016). During the Ebola virus outbreak, women and girls were especially vulnerable to violence because of the inability to escape their abuser (Onyango, Resnick, Davis, and Shah, 2019). According to Yasmin (2016), cases of rape, violence against women, and sexual assault also increased during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Against the above background, it is pertinent to assess the level of sexual crimes associated with COVID-19 lockdown observance in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Below were the specific objectives of the study:

1. To examine the possible sexual crimes associated with COVID-19 lockdown protocol and sexual crimes in Nigeria.
2. To examine the effect of COVID-19 lockdown observance and sexual assault
3. To examine the nexus between Corona virus lockdown and incidence of rape

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **The Strain theory**

Robert Merton (1957) propounded the strain theory using Durkheim's concept of anomie. Merton posited that when a legitimate means, for example (job/employment) of acquiring a culturally defined goal (money) is limited by the

structure of society, the resulting strain may lead to crime. As such, strain theory explains criminality as a result of blocked opportunities or impediments which are put on the way of people by the society or government. This leads to social disorganization, which makes the individual strive to achieve the societal goals through deviant means (criminality). To such individuals, any institutionalized means is legitimate as long as the end justifies the means.

Furthermore, Merton (1957) postulated that individuals adapt to the inconsistency between means and goals in a society that socializes every one into wanting the same thing, but provides opportunities for only a few. Merton suggested that, except for the conformist, who accept the culturally defined goals and social means of achieving them, others take to innovation: those who accept the cultural goals but reject the institutional means of achieving the goals e.g armed robbers, rapist, perpetrators of sexual harassment. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to loss of jobs and increase of commodities, which invariably produces some element of strain. As a way to wade off depression that was generated by COVID-19 and loss of jobs, many spouse beat up their partners, while sexual crime continue to rise in an alarming rate.

### **Methodology**

This is a cross-sectional study that employs online survey techniques to collect data from respondents. Due to the pandemic, it becomes increasingly difficult for a face-to-face interview with respondents. Thus, online medium using kobo collect word processor to send online survey to respondents who completed the forms and revert. The Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to generate univariate data to examine the perception of people towards the subject matter.

### **Result and Discussion of findings**

About 400 respondents participated in the study and they comprises of 130 female and 270 male. The respondents cut across all socio-demographic strata in order to get a robust outcome.



Covid19 Pandemic lockdown protocols observance could lead to which of the following sexual crimes in Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent
Covid19 lockdown led to increase in sexual assault	158	39.5
Covid19 lockdown led to increase in rape	139	34.8
Covid19 lockdown led to increase in pedophilia	63	15.8
Covid19 lockdown led to increase in homosexuality	40	10.0

Source: (Field survey 2021)

More than two-third of the respondents opined that the prolonged period of lock-down increased the likelihood of sexual violence such as assault (39.5%) and rape (34.8%). The situation is precarious with about 15.8% pedophilia and 10% homosexuality rates. These findings emphasized that sexual assault, rape, pedophilia, and homosexuality were predominant sexual crime during COVID-19 pandemic. These findings implied that, Nigerians are of the view that sexual assault, rape, pedophilia and homosexuality were the sexual crime associated with covid19 pandemic lockdown. The above findings are in tandem with reports by the (UNPF (2020) that one out of ten women in Europe experienced a form of sexual violence before age 15 years. This implies that about 3% of female are harassed sexually before age 15 years each year. Several other studies affirms that young female were susceptible to sexual violence, irrespective of their country (Campbell, 2020; Wagers, 2020).

Perception of respondents on the nexus between covid19 lockdown and sexual assault in Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	134	33.5
Agree	98	24.5
Undecided	37	9.2
Disagree	72	18.0
Strongly disagree	59	14.8

Source: (Field survey 2021).

Specifically, one-third of the respondents strongly agreed that prolonged indoor due to observance of

COVID-19 protocol led to sexual assault. Only a few (9%) were undecided towards frequency of sexual assault due to observance of COVID-19 protocol. In total, about 32% of respondents disagree that the rate of assault would increase due to COVID-19 restriction to remain indoors. The findings above where 58.0 percent agreed while 42 percent disagree and were undecided respectively clearly show that there is a relationship between covid19 lockdown protocol observance and sexual assault in Nigeria. Several studies show that perpetrators of sexual violence may have experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse, and dysfunctional family relations (Craissati, Falla, McClurg, Beech, 2002; Beech, Fisher, and Ward, 2005). There are a number of reasons for such increase in gender violence cases during COVID-19. Arthur and Clark (2009) identified economic dependence as a cause for domestic violence. Female depends on male for economic survival and during COVID-19, many male lost their paid jobs. The situation become worst as women that work in informal sectors got laid off from their jobs. Thus, survival becomes difficult for many households. According to Alon, Olmstead-Rumsey, Doepke, and Tertilt, (2020), lesser women than men are in telecom mutable jobs, thus making it difficult for them to adapt to the changing conditions. This increased economic dependence not only increases their risk of gender-based violence but also makes it difficult to leave their perpetrators.

There is a relationship between Covid19 lockdown and rape in Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	129	32.2
Agree	103	25.7
Undecided	18	4.5
Disagree	85	21.3
Strongly disagree	65	16.3

Source: (Field survey 2021).

The rate of rape was perceived to be high (32%) during the lockdown. In addition, about one-third (26%) agree that the lockdown increase the rate of



rape in Nigeria. however, about 16% of the respondent strongly disagree with the above assertion that the rate of rape was increased due to COVID-19 restriction to remain indoor. COVID-19 seems to be similar to the pandemics in the past since this too has resulted in an increase in cases of domestic violence. According to Bradbury-Jones and Isham (2020), the lockdown imposed to deal with COVID-19 has granted greater freedom to abusers. Allen-Ebrahimian (2020) reported that China witnessed a three-fold increase in the cases of domestic violence after imposing quarantine. Different states in the United States also reported an increase of about 21–35% in domestic violence (Wagers, 2020). Even the UK has been facing concerns due to rising family violence. There has also been an apparent increase in the number of domestic homicides (Ingala, and Smith, 2020). According to Bradbury-Jones and Isham (2020), the lockdown imposed to deal with COVID-19 has granted greater freedom to abusers. It has become easier for the abusers to enforce control tactics by limiting the access of the victims to phones, internet, and other people. Van Gelder, Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell, Thompson, and Shah, (2020) also emphasized that the lockdown limits familiar support options.

Perception of respondents on the relationship between Covid19 lockdown and pedophiliain Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	132	33.0
Agree	126	31.5
Undecided	14	3.5
Disagree	74	18.5
Strongly disagree	54	13.5

Source: (Field survey 2021)

Majority of the respondents (61.5%) perceived that the lockdown increases the rate of pedophile in the country. About one-third of the respondents strongly agreed that the lockdown increased the rate of pedophile in Nigeria. However, only a few respondents disagree that the incidence of child abuse increased due to the lockdown.

Perception of respondents on the relationship between Covid19 protocol and homosexuality in Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	147	36.7
Agree	112	28.0
Undecided	19	4.7
Disagree	83	20.8
Strongly disagree	39	9.8

Source: (Field survey 2021)

Majority of the respondents perceive that the rate of homosexuality increase due to observance of COVID-19 protocol. While a few (9.8%) strongly disagree that, prolong outdoor restriction increase the chances of homosexuality in the country. In addition, a minor fraction (4%) of the sampled population was undecided.

### Conclusion

Sexual violence is a social problem that affects all genders irrespective of their socio-cultural cum demographic characteristics. Reports from this study indicated that its prevalence is alarming during the COVID-19 pandemic due to several reasons which include economic constraints, organizational changes, cultural shock, political and economic instability among others. Micro and macro measures should be employed within a community to reduce the menace of sexual crime in Nigeria.

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