

THE ROLE OF CONSUMER SCIENCE IN CURBING GENDER ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN POST COVID-19 ERA IN NIGERIA

¹Shu'ara, Jamila., ²Mbah, Patricia., ³Thensekhien, Isoken

¹Baze University Abuja

²Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike.

³University of Benin, Benin City

Jamila.shuara@bazeuniversity.edu.ng

pat_mbah@yahoo.com

isoken.ihensekhien@uniben.edu

Abstract

This paper examined the role of consumer science in curbing gender issues and challenges in post COVID-19 era in Nigeria. The paper noted that women are burdened with devising skills to cope with high prices of goods in the face of limited funds while men remain under intense economic pressure to provide for the needs of their families. The paper, therefore, opined that consumer science promotes skills, research and knowledge that assists people to make informed decisions about their well-being, relationships; to wisely deploy resources to achieve optimal quality of life and also plays a significant role in curbing gender issues and challenges created by COVID-19. The paper recommends the teaching of all aspects of consumer science at all levels of education in Nigeria; gender mainstreaming in the pedagogical training of teachers; and a Government gender post-COVID-19 national strategy that includes special grants to retool women and counselling for the victims of GBV.

Keywords: Consumer Science, Gender, Gender Issues, Challenges, Post COVID-19 Era.

Introduction

Gender in Nigerian society amplifies socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women. The society identifies gender roles of men as owners of the property, decision-makers and as heads of households. These roles are socially, historically and culturally defined. According to Makama (2013), in any developmental discourse, gender is more likely to refer to women or the female sex. Today, many gender issues are inherent, among which gender discrimination is apparent. This phenomenon is quite evident and ubiquitous in all facets of the global society, especially in third-world countries where culture, social norms and legal systems stifle and undermine the capacity of women to strive in economic, political and educational spheres. Despite societal subjugation and discrimination, women remain the epitome of socialization, and self-sustenance and play a vital role in maintaining the social system.

Nigerian society is traditionally patriarchal and has several social norms that allow men to dominate women. In many families, women are treated as second-class citizens, on the belief that their highest intellectual level is in the 'Kitchen'. This belief has led to a grievous misrepresentation of women at the

family, community society and national levels. In most cases, women are discriminated against, mistreated and treated as housekeepers especially when they have little or no education. It is the reason why there is a preponderance of prostitution, forced marriages, street hawking, begging and human trafficking among many Nigerian women (Makama, 2013). In addition to these problems confronting the women's gender in Nigerian society are the emerging challenges created by the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

According to Ubi and Akie (2021), COVID-19 is a novel virus that became a global health pandemic; but was first discovered in Wuhan Province in China in 2019. The rapid spread of the virus across the world was a source of concern given the high number of related deaths recorded. In Nigeria, the informal sector of the economy is where most women eke out a daily living. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown were the attendant disruptions of food supply chains, low purchasing power, and high incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) and all these created disastrous consequences for women. Many women in the informal sectors lost their means of livelihood and were unable to support family income or children's education, many were

victims of domestic violence from their spouses' misplaced anger on restrictions, some died due to GBV and yet as many had unplanned pregnancies. Today, the post-COVID-19 pandemic era in Nigeria comes with harsh realities for women who now bear the burden of being the sole breadwinner or managing the meagre family feeding allowance that the spouse provides or the high cost of living due to inflation and the reduced value of the Naira (FEWS NET, 2020). The knowledge of consumer science is therefore essential in the post-COVID-19 era as it provides coping skills to deal with economic hardship and the attendant gender role crisis in households.

Consumer science studies the interaction among consumers, businesses, and government to advance the well-being of consumers, families and communities. Its knowledge plays a significant role in ameliorating gender challenges in the post-COVID-19 era. One important aspect of Consumer Science is consumer education; which, according to Kolawole (2019) is the process of assisting people to acquire correct information and understanding to help them make wise decisions when purchasing goods and services. As an aspect of consumer sciences, it exposes individuals, families and corporate bodies to the knowledge and skills needed to become competent consumers in a constantly changing world Ukpore (2006). Consumer education includes strategies, methods or means by which consumers are enlightened to optimize limited funds in the choice of goods and services; these knowledge and skills when deployed appropriately become most useful for survival in the post COVID-19 era.

It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the role of consumer science in curbing gender issues and challenges in Post COVID-19 era in Nigeria. This paper explains the meaning of consumer science and gender; examines gender issues and challenges in the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria and explains how consumer science can curb these.

Consumer Science

Consumer science encompasses ways through which individuals and families improve their overall well-being. According to Long (2022), it includes concepts related to how interactions between people, businesses, government, and the surrounding environment impact daily life. It focuses on choices

related to household finances, nutrition, parenting, and education.

Fasoyiro (2021) opines that consumer science is a field of study that focuses on family, work and the interrelationship encompassing a broad range of intellectual, moral and career goals that inculcate the right values and character for successful living. This includes the study of nutrition, food, clothing, child development, family relationships and household economics. Consumer science, therefore, prepares students for career and family life.

The nine (9) goals that provide direction for curriculum development in the field of consumer science according to Fasoyiro (2021) are:

1. strengthen the well-being of individuals and families across the lifespan
2. become responsible citizens and leaders in family, community and work settings
1. promote optimal nutrition and wellness across the lifespan
2. manage resources to meet the material needs of individuals and families
3. balance personal, home, family and work life
4. use critical and creative thinking skills to address problems in diverse family, community and work environments
5. foster successful life management, employment, and career development
6. function as providers of consumer goods and services for families
7. appreciate human worth and accept responsibility for one's actions and success in family and work life.

The knowledge of Consumer science therefore is most beneficial to all genders as they navigate their daily lives in the midst of numerous global challenges including survival in the post COVID-19 era.

Gender

In many discussions about gender, attention is most often focused on women, although it refers to roles, attributes and values assigned by culture and society to both women and men. Gender roles, attributes and values define inter and intra-relationships and behaviours between men and women. In African society, and indeed Nigeria, gender roles, traits and characteristics are ascribed to men and women and the distinction is strictly maintained by social

institutions; families, governments, communities, schools, churches and media (Obiunu, 2013).

The term gender can also mean an individual concept based on societal attitudes and values which differ from place to place and change over time. Unlike sex which according to Alamveabee (2005) is the naturally fixed biological differences between male and female, gender connotes the roles, attributes and values assigned by culture and society to men and women in the society which change over time.

Afu, Gbobo, Ukofia and Itakure (2017) see gender as social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships among women and men; girls and boys, as well as the relationship among women and even among men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in women or men in a given context. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in assigned responsibilities, undertaken activities, access to and control of resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.

Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women

Although COVID-19 Pandemic had a debilitating effect on the total human race across the world, there was a differential in the impact on both gender but there were reports of more negative impacts on women:

1. service occupations with high female employment restaurants, hotels, eateries, spas, etc that closed up and left many women with no means of livelihood;
2. need for services in the informal sector majorly serviced by low-skilled women from lower strata (cleaners, water vendors, domestic workers, etc) became limited and the few available job opportunities favoured men rather than women.
3. Occupations where remote work or telecommuting can't be easily adopted so low-skilled women who traditionally do not have higher education or skills that can adapt to remote became even more vulnerable economic groups.
4. the existing distribution of childcare responsibilities because the shutdown of schools and day-care facilities increased

mother's family workload as additional time on child care, babysitting, and childminding left them even more stressed and fatigued;

5. unbearable the cost of living especially for single mothers, who themselves were already in a disadvantaged economic position;
6. spike in gender-based violence due to pandemic-related economic and social stressors in already fragile homes and public space environments. Since health and social services were already stretched beyond capacity, support services for victims and survivors most of whom were women have been largely inadequate.
7. overburdened healthcare systems led to the closure of public maternity centres and interruptions in critical health services for women (pre/post-natal care and another reproductive and sexual health service);
8. heightened risk of COVID exposure and/or death due to an overrepresentation of women in frontline health care workers and caregivers services.

Gender Issues and Challenges in Post COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

The post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria, like other developing countries, has ushered harsh economic realities for both male and female gender. However, women have become the most negatively affected because they are most often excluded in family decision making unlike their male counterparts (Zinyemba, 2013). Unfortunately, in periods of hard economic situations, it is the women that are burdened with the negative consequences of managing the affairs of the home after the ego-related decisions of men.

The post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria comes with an increased level of household poverty, especially among low-income earners with large family sizes. Household poverty denies equal access and participation of boys and girls in functional education. A girl-child in many homes because of the tough economic situation is given out in early marriage. Nwagbara (2004) posited that having a large family size and living in a crowded poor environment deepens poverty; and to secure a female child's future, many parents give their daughters hands in marriage early to shed parental responsibilities and disgrace from unwanted pregnancy.

Evans-Obinna (2016) also noted that women are more susceptible to abject poverty due to inequalities in income, paid wages, credit and loans, control on earned income, right to own properties and as gender biases in labour markets. Resource allocation within households in particular and even in several instances in the larger society is often gender-biased. Some men collect the income their wives earned at work. While some women give their husbands willingly, some husbands through violent threats collect their wives' money, making it harder for women to transform their capacities into meaningful incomes or well-being. All these are challenges that have further complicated the post-COVID-19 era.

The challenges confronting the female gender have become more visible in the post-COVID-19 era. In many households in Nigeria, women have limited powers with regards to the allocation of financial incomes as men most often give their wives a limited amount of money for family needs. During COVID-19 in Nigeria, there was the depreciation of the Naira, double digits inflation and high costs of consumer goods due to movement restrictions and pressure on global trade (FEWS NET 04/2020).

Similarly the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria has ushered in higher transaction costs of essential goods due to previous breaks in the supply chain, continued currency devaluation, the decline in the sale of crude oil, etc and these have further negatively affected the purchasing power of many individuals and households. This scenario has put a lot of burden on women in the management of the limited resources at their disposal for family use.

Undoubtedly, from disproportionate job losses to heightened gender-based violence in the COVID-19 era, women and girls remain victims of negative health, economic and social impacts that need to be addressed through targeted policy interventions. There were differential impacts on women and men in the course of the COVID-19 Pandemic and any intervention to ameliorate the challenges created should be gender-sensitive.

A gender-sensitive post-COVID-19 response must acknowledge the peculiar impact on women and incorporate policies to specifically ameliorate them. This should incorporate policies, initiatives and measures to mitigate gender-based violence, reduce the burden of unpaid care and domestic work,

promote women's access to jobs and financial resources, and provide robust and comprehensive social protection for all women and girls in the larger society.

Role of Consumer Science in curbing Gender Issues and Challenges in Post-COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

Consumer science is the study of peoples' needs as regards housing, clothing and food, and the management of available resources. According to Fasoyiro (2021), consumer science assists individuals to learn about themselves, career and family responsibilities, life skills, orientation in life and career, adult roles and responsibilities, leadership in the workplace, career choices, financial and life planning, and entrepreneurship. Consumer sciences cover academic competence in knowledge and skills, employability skills as in critical and creative thinking skills, written and oral communication skills, problem-solving skills, planning, teamwork, self-management, initiative, enterprise skills, resourcefulness, motivation, commitment, life skills, leadership skills, digital skills, and character

Consumer science has the potential to curb gender issues and challenges in the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria. The management of households' resources in the face of economic hardship is one of the major gender issues in the post-COVID-19 era. Long (2022) asserts that the management of household finances: including analyzing how families spend money, what they purchase and factors that determine spending or saving habits; is one major focus of consumer science. For individuals, educating them on how to manage finances in the post-COVID-19 period will reduce friction.

In Post COVID-19 era, consumer science can (irrespective of gender) improve the skills and competencies of families and individuals for safe sanitation, resource management, food production, nutrition skills and health (Gamawa, 2015). Nutrition is one area of concern of consumer science and ensuring that households have access to healthy food sources and choices is the goal. Studies in this area of consumer science support ways to improve the food supply chain in impoverished areas to alleviate the suffering of people irrespective of gender.

Education and knowledge in consumer science empower people irrespective of gender to manage scarce resources in the post-COVID-19 period. Gamawa (2015) asserted that education in consumer science skills of wise resource management, and household finances combined with psychosocial stabilization can improve the production and regeneration capacity of the impoverished individuals. Consumer Science focuses on the regeneration of households and supports family well-being, with providing members with knowledge in food production, poultry and animal-rearing nutrition skills.

Consumer science does not only ensure self-sufficiency for the individual, families and communities but also income-generating opportunities for all gender in the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria. By selling the excess food produced, animals reared, eggs and birds from poultry, the family generates a sustainable income. Availability of food, combined with nutritional and health skills improves the nutrition status of family members irrespective of gender to contribute to the growth of society.

In the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria, the use of consumer science in all the parameters of life can improve healthy family living. The quality of life of citizens of any nation is dependent on the happiness, health and comfort of its families. Roberts (2011) asserted that the primary determinant of a country's standard of living is how well it succeeds in developing, utilizing skills, furthering health and educating the majority of its population. The knowledge of consumer science, therefore, has great potential in helping individuals (regardless of gender) to build capacities for a better quality of life in the post-COVID era in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The economic hardship that emerged in the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria has greatly impacted the female gender; they contend with competing demands for funds, high prices of goods and services, low purchasing power and other psychosocial challenges. This paper therefore recommends the following:

1. the teaching and learning of consumer science should be a compulsory module in key subjects such as general studies, civics, etc at all levels of the educational system in the country; to assist

students to develop coping skills in various areas for the future.

2. gender mainstreaming should be a critical aspect in pedagogy, so teachers acquire skills to impart gender inclusiveness among students so that when they become parents they appreciate a woman as an equal partner in family decision-making;
3. the private sector, corporate bodies and civil societies should embark on consumer science advocacy as a social responsibility strategy. To this end, special consumer science training centres can be established in cluster areas and megacities to train women and girls, especially those from low-resourced backgrounds on relevant skills for self-employment in the informal sector.
4. As part of Government gender post-COVID-19 national strategy, concerted efforts should be put in place to:
 - a. provide social safety nets like grants for female graduates from the consumer science training centres to purchase basic work tools that will assist them to re-enter the job market in the informal sector, alleviate poverty and reduce the economic hardship in the post-COVID-19 era in Nigeria.
 - b. provide special counseling support for women and girls who have been victims of GBV (this can be situated in public health centres as in the case of HIV Aids support).
 - c. use technology and innovation to boost agriculture and speed up an economic recovery that is desperately needed in the post-COVID-19 era to improve food production and food supply chains to reduce the cost of foodstuff.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic killed many persons across the globe but the aftermath in Nigeria is the attendant economic crisis impacting the lives of women. With low purchasing power, devalued income, and double-digit inflation; many women in the informal sector have become jobless. The management of household income has also become daunting for both genders (men and women). The effects of post-COVID-19 will not easily dissipate

as humanity navigates its aftermath; governments at all levels should promote gender-sensitive initiatives as a collective response. The knowledge of consumer science holds an important key for individuals to mitigate the gender issues and challenges in Post COVID-19 era in Nigeria.

References

- Afu, M.O., Gbobo, V.F., Ukofia, I.F. & Itakure, Z.S. (2017). Effect of gender imbalance alleviating Gamawa/16bc4c1a83250030a8d080fe9afbae52717d2d44
<http://journals.rcmss.com/index.php/jggsda/article/view/39> in the enrolment of students in public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area
- Alamveabee, N. Y. (2005). *Women and politics*. New York: Mcmorris Press Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. *International Journal of Development Studies*, 3 (2), 37-46. Retrieved from <https://www.eajournals.org/journals/european-journal-of-training-and-development-studies-ejtds/vol-3-issue-2-may-2016/issues-challenges-southeastern-nigerian-women-educational-management-21st-century/educational-management-in-the-21st-century>. *European Journal of Training*
- Evans-Obinna, R.N. (2016). Issues and challenges of southeastern Nigerian women in
- Fasoyiro, S. (2021). The role of consumer sciences in contributing to national development in Nigeria (Lead Paper, 8th Nov, 2021). Conference: *Family and Consumer Sciences Society of Nigeria*, held at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun state, Nigeria
- FEWS NET (April, 2020). *Food security outlook update. Covid-19 pandemic and conflict impacts livelihoods increasing food assistance needs*. Retrieved from <https://fewsn.net/west-africa/nigeria/food-security-outlook-update/april-2020>
- Gamawa, A.I. (2015). The role of home economics education in alleviating poverty for sustainable development and human capacity building in Nigeria, *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 6 (7), 325-330. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-role-of-home-economics-education-in->
- Long, N. (2022). *What is consumer science?* Retrieved from <https://www.smartcapitalmind.com/>
- Makama, G.A. (2013). Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward. *European Scientific Journal*, 9 (17), 115-144
- Nwagbara A.C. (2004). *Population /family life education, women and gender issues in Nigeria*. Owerri: Tait Publishers.
- Obiunu, J.J. (2013). The effect of gender sensitivity on discrimination among secondary school students. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 4(6), 888-894
- Robert, L (2011). Mechanics of economics development. In Gamawa, A.I. (2015). The role of home economics education in alleviating poverty for sustainable development and human capacity building in Nigeria, *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 6 (7), 325-330
- Scientific Research in Education*, 10(2), 201-211. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Effect-of-Gender-Imbalance-in-The-Enrolment-of-in-%2CAfu/8e0986f7e276cc33c3956930cdde2a0f6737afb3>
- Ubi, O.U. & Akie, R. (2021). Covid-19 pandemic challenges and opportunities in the development of rural areas in Nigeria. *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa (JGGSDA)*, 6(1), 41-48. Retrieved from
- Zinyemba, A. (2013). Leadership challenges for women managers in the hospitality and financial services in Zimbabwe.

International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Services, 2 (4), 50-57. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/3486823/LEAD>

ERSHIP_CHALLENGES_FOR_WOMEN
_MANAGERS_IN_THE_HOSPITALITY
_AND_FINANCIAL_SERVICES_IN_ZI
MBABWE