EFFECTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON URBAN FAMILY LIFE IN MARARABA SUBURB OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The emergence of Coronavirus in Nigeria and other countries of the world had far-reaching consequences, especially on the family as a social system. In the context of the Coronavirus as a public health pandemic, this study examined the effects of the Coronavirus on urban family life in the Mararaba suburb, in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The study was exploratory and adopted the ethnographic thematic approach in the analysis of findings. The study employed the Frustration-Aggression Theory as a theoretical perspective. The Key Informant Interview guide was the primary instrument used in the collection of data from twenty-five family households selected through a multistage sampling technique. Findings revealed that the Covid-19 lockdown in the study area had far-reaching negative effects on the well-being of many urban families. These were in the aspects of irregular daily/monthly incomes, reduction in daily food consumption, and frequency of incidents of family conflict/violence among others. The study suggests social safety nets strategies such as

increased farming activities through provisions of subsidized farming inputs to improve food production. Also, the need for urban families to create social security for themselves in form of increasing savings in the bank as well as investment in small-scale businesses such as poultry, and fish farming as alternative sources of livelihood in times of pandemic like the Covid-19.
Keywords: Lockdown, covid-19, family life, pandemic, public, and health

Introduction

Human societies since time immemorial have been plagued by one form of virus or the other. For example, history tells us that the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919 killed more than 50 million people worldwide over two years (Anjorin, 2020). At that period, the world had just 1.5 billion populations, and 500 million people were infected with the disease and that was out of the total population. Although, literature remains scanty on the coping mechanism and the direct impact of the pandemic on urban family lives in the past. The coronavirus is considered a novel virus, which originated in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China and spread to over a hundred countries in the world. The World Health Organization in late 2019, declared the outbreak of Covid-19 to be a public health emergency of international concern on 30th January 2020. As of 5th May 2022, about515,398,115million cases of Covid-19 infections have been reported in 226 countries and territories, with over 6.2 million deaths (Worldometer, 2022). The virus has had devastating consequences on most countries of the world in addition to the huge human cost, in terms of morbidities and mortalities with more than seven million people directly affected (Yakasai, 2020:12). The first Covid-19 case in Nigeria was recorded on February 27, 2020, since then the pandemic has affected all sectors of the country, even the family as a social unit (Alumona, 2020). On the contrary, little or no data are available on the impact of covid-19 in Nasarawa State and particularly in the Mararaba suburb in Karu Local Government Area (LGA) of the state. The general belief is that Covid-19 has affected livelihood in Nigeria generally but little is known about the direct impact on the people across different locations.

In modern history, the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is the most

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difficult health issue faced by humanity, with every continent being affected, and governments facing variations of social, economic, and health challenges (Durankus & Aksu, 2020). The pandemic is affecting livelihoods, increasing mortality, and crushing social systems. Even before the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures adopted to mitigate the spread of the virus, millions of families globally struggle to meet their basic daily needs for food, medical care, or housing utilities due to little savings for an emergency (Karpman, Zuckerman & Gonzalez, 2020; Adigun, 2021). This struggle became even worse during the strict nationwide lockdown measures in urban areas in Nigeria with its multiplying effects on family life. A lockdown is an emergency process that temporarily prevents people from entering or leaving an area initiated by those in authority to protect people from a threat or external event (Lyman, Cherven, & Emergency Alert Solutions Group, 2016; Kummitha, 2020). The implementation of lockdown in Nigeria by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) established in early March 2020 (Ameh, 2020), became necessary to reduce physical contact, outdoor social, and economic activities to slow down the spread of the virus. This is due to the widely held view that the virus is mostly contracted through saliva droplets or discharge from the nose or mouth of an infected person especially when they sneeze or cough around uninfected persons. Not that alone, the lockdown has proven to be an effective measure to level the infection curve and delay more infections, especially in the absence of an effective cure or limited vaccine (Chirisa, Mutambisi, Chivenge, Mabaso, Matamanda & Ncube, 2020; Adigun, 2021). It is a known fact that the lockdown as a measure has helped in containing the spread of the covid-19 pandemic in the study area but, little is known of the consequences associated with the lockdown. A lot of families lost their loved ones from fear and other diseases associated with

being trapped in a place, these and other factors have not been discussed in many studies on the impact of Covid-19 in Nigeria.

Some of the adverse effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on urban family life cut across social, economic, mental health, and demographic factors. For instance, some urban families depend on informal employment to earn money for their basic needs such as food supplies (Blekking, Waldman, Tuholske, & Evans, 2020; Corburn, Vlahov, Mberu, Riley, Caiaffa, Rashid, *et al*., 2020). When such people are restricted to their homes, with little or no access to their main source of livelihood and no financial support from the government like in the case of Nigeria and Nasarawa State, in particular, the risk of food insecurity leading to hunger increases which may also increase risk of being infected by other diseases. Also, the lockdown worsened several social ills such increase in rape, food shortage, cohabitation, and drug and substance abuse among other things. (Oche, 2021). These processes can provide explanations for the differential costs and benefits of lockdowns for the poor and the rich in low-income countries (Hyder, Zafar, Wali, Gulnaz, Aadil, Shagufta, Nasir, & Shehriyar, 2020). Imposing stringent lockdowns in urban areas; where individuals often depend on daily or hourly paid jobs to earn enough to feed their families; could lead to a comparable number of deaths from deprivation, hunger, and preventable diseases (Lawton, 2020). As the African continent is becoming more urbanized, there tends to be more urban poor than rich (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013). The majority of the people live in high-density residential suburbs and informal settlements with insufficient service delivery (Pariente 2017). The views of scholars reviewed above speak to the realities experienced during the covid-19 lockdown period in the study areas except that some certain differences still abound.

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In the least developed countries, the lack of major investments particularly in the urban health sector to prepare for pandemic outbreaks has led to a higher risk of disease outbreaks and infection among urban residents than rural residents (Adams, 2018). Thus, in the wake of large-scale disease outbreaks, urban families become most vulnerable. It is instructive to note that, the social consequences of Covid-19 lockdown place women and children at higher risk. In a recent study by Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell, Thompson, Shah, Oertelt-Prigione and van Gelder (2020) they noted that there are direct and indirect linkages between epidemics and increased gender-based violence (GBV). In particular, enforced isolation from violent family members could give rise to an increased risk of domestic violence not only against women but also children. The economic impact on the poor urban families will have a further compounding gender effect; when schools are closed and gender norms force them to discontinue working, women may face potential difficulties to re-enter the labour market. There will likely be also a negative educational and health impact on poor children for whom schools are not only a source of education but also of a healthy meal (Peterman *et al.* 2020; Baker *et al*., 2020). In Nigeria and Nasarawa State for instance, in areas where school feeding programmes are in place have attracted children from poor homes to attend schools especially orphans and the destitute as such, life has not been the same for such children which much literature has inadvertently neglected.

In the same vein, Fawole, Okedare and Reed (2021) carried out a study on women's intimate partner violence experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown in Nigeria. The study found intimate partner violence forms such as economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence to have

increased. It was also discovered that they were expected, and even some pregnant women were shown the door due to incessant intimate partner violence. This threatened women's capacity to protect themselves from Covid-19 related complications. The study further found that many women were denied access to social services, transportation, and resources during the lockdown period. This act was linked with economic stressors associated with the lockdown period (Fawole *et al*., 2021). The study relied on how the lockdown affected social support; prevent accessibility to both formal and informal sources of assistance. However, their study did not attend to issues beyond the family setting which could also exert an impact and determine how the relationship among family members can be. Issues such as access to transport, sources of income and crime are not adequately examined in the previous studies. Besides, despite the globalization of lockdown, there are context-specific differences in terms of patterns and impacts it has on the people which many studies in Nigeria have not sufficiently examined which the current study has looked at.

The lock-down experienced has technically ambushed women who are already witnessing intimate partner violence, risk of more severe violence and issues to deal with violent experiences. More to that, many of them experienced another form of intimate partner violence during the same lockdown, which includes a threat to life, security, and inability to protect themselves. However, given the high levels of informal urbanism and increased poverty in low-income areas such as Mararaba, in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, which serves as a commuter zone where a huge population of public servants, private employees, and self-employed persons reside. The measures adopted to address the Covid-19 pandemic had adverse effects on the possibility of endangering more lives

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or disrupting family life than they were meant to save and protect (Mobarak & Barnett-Howell, 2020). Hence, the lives of residents in the study location have not been the same as many families are still struggling to regain their source of livelihood. It is against the above background that this paper has examined the effects of the covid-19 lockdown on urban family life in the Mararaba suburb, Nasarawa State.

Theoretical Orientation: Frustration-Aggression Theory

The Frustration Aggression Theory was originally proposed by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears in 1939 and was further developed by Leonard Berkowitz (1969), Anifowose (2003), Sarah (2008), Slater (2012) among others. The frustration-aggression perspective's central premise holds; that aggression is always the result of frustration. According to them, frustration produces instigations to several different types of responses, one of which is an instigation to adopt aggressive means to achieving goals. Expatiating on the above postulation, Anifowose (1982) submits that, 'given the requisite conditions, individuals or groups who feel frustrated in the attainment of their desires and demands often react by the direction of aggressive behaviour at what is perceived as being responsible for depriving or thwarting those desires, as a substitute. He further submits that; it is not utter lack but unfulfilled hopes and expectations that engender violent conflict'.

Using this theoretical lens, one can conclude that the lock-down initiated to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus stiffened family income and contained individual freedom from which many families became tense owing to food shortages, movement restrictions and increasing family

demands among other things. Many heads of households resort to violence to contain the excess of their dependents, especially women and children. Some youths resort to several crimes to meet their basic survival needs. Hence, the increase in domestic violence and other criminalities in the Mararaba area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. This theory has unscreened the motive behind certain violent behaviours during the lockdown period in Nasarawa State and Mararaba and Karu in particular.

Research Setting and Population

This study was carried out among urban rich and poor family household heads aged 18 years and above who have been residing in Mararaba, Karu Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria for the past three years. Mararaba is a district and among the towns that make up the Karu urban area, a town stretching to Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory. Mararaba is believed to be one of the most densely populated suburbs around the Nigerian capital city Abuja and this contributes to its reputation as having one of the busiest road channels with the longest traffic jams, especially during rush hours. Mararaba suburb contains slum areas and the socio-economic conditions of the people living in the slum areas are adjudged to be poor because of the physical environment that is characterized by almost absence of social amenities such as potable water and affordable health care facilities. It also has poor housing plans and drainage systems. All these poor conditions expose families to different hardships.

Design

The study adopted an exploratory and a case study design to explain the effects of covid-19 lockdown on urban family life in Mararaba. Urban family households were chosen as the population for this research because

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of their significance in achieving the research objectives. Besides, households in urban areas that were most affected by lockdown as such, are in a better position to explain the effects better. Thus, 25 key informant interviews were conducted among family households.

Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure for the selection of KII respondents started with clustering Karu LGA into suburbs of Ado, Kurunduma, Mararaba, Masaka, New Karu, and One-man Village. Afterwards, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select Mararaba as the study location. This was a more efficient technique as it provided access to a self-selected population for the research. Also, Mararaba has a mixture of rich and poor families and is closer to the FCT, Abuja coupled with the poor socio-economic conditions of the residents and the physical environment. In addition to that, geographical and economic considerations were made by researchers. Finally, a convenient sampling technique was used to select 25 heads of households for interview.

Data collection procedure

Furthermore, data were principally generated through the Key Informant Interview (KII) guide. This proved important for enhancing the explanatory significance of the research. Moreover, it was by this means that insights were gained into the experience of families during the lockdown period. The KIIs were conducted basically because the population of the study was composed of literate and non-literate members. Therefore, where required, the Pidgin English language was used for the interviews. The interviews were structured in line with the study objectives to elicit information on the standard of living of urban families,

involvement in recreation, familial relationships, socioeconomic support to extended family members, postponement of annual family/religious celebrations, discontinuation of major family projects, incidents of criminal activities, mental health and coping strategy of urban families.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the fieldwork. Here, prior verbal consent and permission were obtained from participants before they were admitted into the study. Moreover, the researchers briefed the subjects on the general purpose of the study as well as information regarding anonymity and confidentiality.

Data analysis

The data generated were content analysed using the thematic technique of reporting and ethnographic summaries. This involved careful transcribing, detailed description and interpretation of the tape-recorded data and field notes.

Results and Discussions

The section discusses the results that emanated from the objectives set out to achieve in the study. The findings were thematically presented as a means of ensuring the logicality and lucidity of the discourse.

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on the standard of living of urban families

The lockdown for many families in the study area was never expected. It came like a thunderbolt, bringing austerity measures, especially for the working-class families. For more than four months the salaries of most workers were not regular. And this led to untold economic hardship, especially for families whose breadwinners solely relied on monthly income. The foregoing situation adversely affected the standard of living of many families in the study area. A key informant expressed her personal opinion this way:

The lockdown affected my savings because someone unable to work for some months cannot be able to save anything. So, it affected my savings largely because I was unable to go out and work to earn my monthly income (KII, 36 years Public Servant).

Another informant admitted that:

> Things became very hard and unbearable for my family. Since the lockdown was continually extended for some months. We were no longer going to work, and earn money. So, I started even looking for where to borrow money from close friends who I felt were better off than me. I did that, by talking to a few people that I know. And they gave their support to me (KII, 36 years old Public Servant).

The foregoing situation was due to the stoppage of monthly salaries by the government and some private organizations during the period the lockdown lasted. The foregoing was corroborated by a female informant thus:

> My husband's salary was stopped just after two months of the lockdown. The stoppage was because he works in a private secondary school. The salary stoppage was because students in the school were all staying at home and did not pay school fees (KII, 30 years old Housewife).

According to another Informant:

> Things became very tough for my family since we were no longer going out for our daily bread to earn money. It came to a point, we started even looking up to people (in our church) that were better than us. This happened when the regular household food item started depleting (KII, 30 years old Housewife).

A particular female informant who operates a grocery shop avers thus:

> The lockdown no doubt adversely affected my business. Regular income was not coming from my grocery shop business, because with the stoppage of my husband's salary, we had to solely rely on the small profits coming

> from the business. It came to a time I could not go to the Orange market to replenish new stock for the shop KII, 45 years Business Man).

In fact, the account of West (2021) aptly summarizes the condition of many urban families in Nigeria with the ravaging Covid-19 pandemic:

> Many families are in a financial mess as the means of meeting the basic needs: feeding, rent medical and children's school fees, are all getting harder by the day. Hunger in the land is evident as many families could not feed themselves sufficiently. The level of penury in the land has projected about 20 percent of Nigerians as feeding on less than one dollar per day (KII, 36 years old Public Servant).

Effect of Covid-19 lockdown on urban family's involvement in recreation

The total lockdown the federal government imposed came with self-isolation and social distancing. The Presidential Task Force headed by Boss Mustapha, the Secretary to the Federal Government banned all social gatherings, which resulted in the total closure of recreational facilities in the Federal Capital City, Abuja and other State Capital in Nigeria. This was a clear indication that families were compelled to stay indoors throughout the period the lockdown lasted. Our findings revealed that people were denied regular recreational engagements during the months of the total lockdown. According to one key informant:

> Even for regular entertainment, the lockdown negatively affected my family. We were unable to subscribe to the regular higher DSTV package of Compact. Instead, my family had to subscribe to the Access package, so that the children can be entertained by watching some interesting Channels such as cartoons programmes (KII, 30 years old Housewife).

According to a mother of three children:

> The Covid-19 lockdown adversely affected regular family involvement in weekend and holiday recreations. The lockdown inhibited our going for picnics at the Abuja Millennium Garden, and the Zoo, where the children catch fun. We used to take the children out for such recreational activities. But, during the lockdown, there was no going out for recreation. So, we could only try to catch some fun at home. Also, another father of two narrated his own experience thus (KII, 40 years old Housewife). Similarly, another key informant reported that:
>
> The early stage of the lockdown resulted in a shutdown of Viewing Centres in many neighbourhoods in Mararaba, and so we entertained ourselves at home. There were no more weekend visits to Amusement Park, the Zoo, or attending wedding ceremonies or birthday parties.

Furthermore, another informant enthused that:

> The period of the lockdown was so boring and frustrating. Due to the suspension of professional football matches, especially in the Premiership League. My weekend was devoid of entertainment and fun (KII, 45 years old Business Woman).

Also, another informant avers this way:

> The lockdown to a large extent restricted our regular weekend recreation. And this was necessitated by the lockdown that lasted for months. So, we had to devise alternative means of making things happen for our weekend recreation. We had to buy badminton kits at home, table tennis balls and bats for the children and ensured their bicycles were in good shape. All of these helped to remove boredom for my family during the lockdown (KII, 40 years old Housewife).

Effect of Covid-19 lockdown on urban familial Relationships

Also, the findings of this study revealed that marital relationships depicted some level of intimacy and violence. The lockdown provided ample opportunity for couples to spend more time together. In the words of a

middle-aged woman:

> Generally, what applies to one family cannot be applied to another family. For instance, my boys were not able to go out for their usual social activities during the lockdown. In most cases, we advised them not to go out, which made them feel bad about the situation of the lockdown. The boys especially wanted to see their playmates, which led to serious disagreements and quarrels during the lockdown. Me and my husband, with much counselling and persuasion and understanding, we and the children reached a consensus, realizing that Covid-19 is a very dangerous virus that has been killing people. And this made them realize the importance of staying at home and being safe too (KII, 42 years old Beautician).

For another middle-aged mother of four, she narrated her family relationship this way:

> The lockdown period gave us ample time to observe the children's character traits. I personally instilled moral teachings in them. I made sure they spend more time praying, reading the Bible and engaging in some kind of religious piety, like fasting, or doing vigil. Also, the lockdown made my children cultivate self-help activities in the home-doing house chores, washing their clothes, sweeping, and cooking meals too (KII, 45 years old Business Woman).

Another informant stated his experience thus:

> The lockdown made it possible for me to spend more time with my family, especially my wife. It brought me and my wife closer in terms of the flow of marital communication, resolving issues relating to trust, tolerance and fidelity. We found mutual ground to amicably settled disputes, not earlier resolved before the lockdown (KII, 48 years old Insurance Broker).

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on socioeconomic support to extended family members

Many informants admitted that during the initial period of the

lockdown they extended some form of financial support to relations. However, as the economy became more severe, such financial support began to reduce.

According to a middle-aged female informant:

> For me, the lockdown did not seriously affect my family's income, because my employer did not stop my salary. So, this gave me ample opportunity to support a few of my extended relations. In the middle of the lockdown, around April, I had to contact some of my siblings through the WhatsApp Platform. We tax ourselves, by pooling financial resources together and sharing the proceeds with other of our siblings and relations who experienced hard times during the lockdown. Though it was little as ten to fifteen thousand, it gave them some kind of succour. At that time, it was helpful to keep life going forward (KII, 48 years old Businessman).

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on the postponement of annual family/religious celebrations

This involved a careful transcription, detailed description and interpretation of the tape-recorded data

Another informant stated:

> The lockdown adversely affected the celebration of the Easter ceremony. We could not even go to church during the period, because the church was closed throughout the Holy Week of Easter. We missed the normal Stations of the Cross, Holy Thursday Ritual of washing of the Feet, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ Drama and other programmes (KII, 65 years Proprietor of Private School).

For another informant:

> The lockdown really restricted our active participation in the annual Easter celebration. For me and my family, the rule of social distance and self-isolation compelled us to participate in the church Services through virtual. We had to view all the Church Services at home, via

cable television (KII, 48Insurance Broker).

Similarly, another male informant narrated his experience this way:

> There were two significant religious events the lockdown negatively affected. During the month of Ramadan last year, there were no congregation prayers and even the Eid Prayer was suspended. This was also applicable to the second Eid prayer which was the time we used to slaughter and share the Rams. It had never been observed in a low key since we were born (KII, 34 years Fashion Designer).
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> As a result of the total lockdown, where people were not allowed to gather in large numbers, we could not do an elaborate burial ceremony for our grandmother who died in April 2020. I could not personally attend the burial ceremony in the village. I was only able to send money for my other siblings, who were able to participate in the burial ceremony (KII, 42 years old Beautician).

According to another informant:

> The lockdown brought about the postponed of my younger sister's wedding in April. This was due to the ban on inter-state movement, and the restriction of gathering in public places. My younger sister's wedding had to be shifted to February this year, 2021 (KII, 45Civil Servant).

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on discontinuation of major family projects

The imposition of the lockdown was unexpected by many individuals. It was sudden and this resulted in the disruption of some people's yearly projects such as buying a car and building a house among others. From the study, there was disruption of plans and projects of most key informants. As a key informant stated:

> The lockdown made my family to discontinued our house building project. It retarded some of my actions. For example, the house I was building before the

> lockdown. because the lockdown resulted in movement restrictions at the time, the labourers could not work, and this slowed down the entire building project (KII, 48 years old Businessman).

Another key informant narrated his personal opinion thus:

> I was building a house in the village before the lockdown, so I had to momentarily pause the project. I have not been able to continue the project since we came out of the lockdown. Because things have not changed for the better in the country. As I speak, prices of building materials have skyrocketed, as the current market prices cannot be compared to what they used to be before the lockdown. Also, I had plans to purchase a plot of land, which I had to discontinue. The owner of the land even called me during the lockdown to ascertain if I could make part payment for the land. But I had to tell him I could not, he even offered to reduce the initial price of the land (KII, 48 years old Businessman).

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on incidents of criminal activities on urban families

The period of the Covid-19 lockdown was accompanied by criminal activities in different neighbourhoods in Mararaba. The rate of criminality took a higher dimension, which resulted in recurrent theft, household burglary and even night armed robberies. According to one informant:

> In actual fact, insecurity was on the high side. There were a lot of incidents like theft, burglaries and armed robberies. This became recurrent because lots of people were redundant and were not doing anything. Idleness became the devil's workshop for many young people (KII, 45 years old Medical Practitioner).

Another informant admitted that armed robbery became a constant during the lockdown.

However, a female informant in her early forties agreed on the contrary thus:

> Apart from a few petty incidences of stealing household

items people kept outside their houses, there were no cases of robbery in my neighbourhood. This was because the lockdown made people stay in their homes. And there was much vigilance among residents during the night hours (KII, 45 years old Public Servant).

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on Mental health of urban Families

The lockdown in Nigeria was due to public health challenges that threatened the physical, social and economic well-being of families. However, the mental state of most individuals manifested in the contagious nature of the Covid-19 virus, and coupled inability of people to regularly carry out their daily endeavours increased mental health challenges. Most key informants admitted that the forceful lockdown had an adverse effect on their mental health. A particular male informant opined thus:

> Covid-19 no doubt affected the mental health of most families. This is because once you stop doing your daily activities, it must affect your mental health. I must say, its effect was not all that severe for me, because we adopted the Covid-19 lockdown situation within a short time (KII, 38 years old School Teacher).

Also, another informant has this to say:

> With the forceful lockdown imposed by the Federal Government, everybody including myself experienced some kind of depression. This was because staying indoors (in one place), and not doing anything created a feeling of idleness (KII, 35 years old Civil Servant). A particular key informant avers that:
> The news of lockdown no doubt came with some form of trepidation, fear of the future of humanity and sudden death. All of these affected one's emotional, and psychological well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic came with a strong feeling of anxiety, hopelessness and frustration if I may put it this way. This was even aggravated by no regular income by many workers. The fear of scarcity of resources to cater for the family created some kind of feeling of depression too (KII, 45

> years old Public Servant).

Despite the foregoing submissions by some key informants, there were few instances when some family members displayed optimism in the future during the period the lockdown lasted. An estate agent reported that:

> I decided to resort to prayers and fasting for God to help me and my family overcome the trying moments of the lockdown. Through total submission to God Almighty, it helped me to overcome any mental health challenges (KII, 47 years Estate Agent).

Effect of Covid-19 Lockdown on coping strategy of urban families

According to most key informants from the data collected, the Covid-19 lockdown in Nigeria came so suddenly. Although, many of them as an individual in their families never expected the lockdown to last so long and coupled with the excruciating economic implications. The Covid-19 lockdown was associated with the self-isolation of families, especially in many urban settlements including Mararaba the study area. The lockdown no doubt seriously affected many families economically, emotionally and mentally. In the early days of the lockdown in Mararaba, many family members to some extent did cope with their daily feedings and expenses. Findings from the study revealed diverse opinions of key informants on coping strategies with the Covid-19 lockdown. An illiterate informant captured the situation thus:

> You know markets were not regularly opened, and the little foodstuff we had was carefully managed. My family had to resort to eating two square meals per day. No doubt, the Covid-19 virus and the lockdown that accompanied it brought untold hardship to the country (KII, 40 years old Housewife).

One other key informant explained that:

> We were able to buy and stock some basic food items

because with the announcement of the lockdown many of us were doing panic buying and storing much food in our homes. Since it was not curtained what might come next following the pandemic (KII, 35 years old Civil Servant).

In the aspect of family expenditure during the Covid-19 lockdown. Another informant expressed her opinion this way.

> During the early days of the lockdown, we were able to have our regular meals, because e always buy food in bulk anytime we receive a salary. So, it was not unusual for us at that early time of the lockdown (KII, 45 years old Caterer).

When asked how the family coped during the Covid-19 lockdown? A young man in his late thirties opined that:

> My family had to reduce the daily consumption of food to two square meals daily. Although, the situation did not go down well with my children. They were constrained to adapt to the economic realities of the lockdown KII, 35 years old Civil Servant).

Also, another key informant had this to say:

> Before the lockdown, my family purchased some food items with the intention that they will serve the family during the lockdown. Unfortunately, it was difficult to predict that the lockdown will end. The lockdown period lasted beyond our expectations, which made my family run a shortage of food items. Notwithstanding, the supply of food items to nearby grocery shops in my neighbourhood was not regular too for the families to purchase. This was coupled with the issue of keeping social distance and restrictions for people (KII, 40 years old Housewife).

Similarly, another key informant opined thus:

> The lockdown compelled my family to reduce our food consumption, it is better to have a moderate daily intake of meals and have leftovers than to have nothing at home to survive shortly. In fact, for my family, we had to reduce the quality and quantity of food for each

> person and each passing day during the period of the lockdown lasted (KII, 45 years Business Man).

From the above explanations the Covid-19 lockdown no doubt brought untold hardship to many families in Mararaba.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on urban family life in Mararaba, a suburb in the Karu local government area of Nasarawa State. The study found out that during the early days of the lockdown most families favourably coped with the movement restriction and physical distancing ordered by the government. However, as days passed by, things began to deteriorate socially, economically, mentally and even security-wise. During the early weeks of the lockdown many businesses, like market stores were under lock and key. During this period state and local government officials were going around to clamp down on local businesses that defied the lockdown order. Few business owners who defied the lockdown order were fined for defaulting. For most informants in the study, the lockdown came with new coping strategies for many families. For example, most families had to cut down their daily consumption of food rations. However, while many scholars have discussed the general hardship faced during the covid-19 pandemic, not much attention has been given to the enforcement methods adopted by the covid-19 task force in Nigeria, especially in Nasarawa State. Much of the hardship felt by families in the study area was partly from the movement restriction but most importantly, the enforcement pattern used has sent many families far below the poverty line. The local task force activities in Mararaba and Karu LGA severely impacted family income with huge social and psychological implications in the area. This finding corroborates Durankus and Aksu (2020) who note that the Covid-19

pandemic was accompanied by difficulties that have thrown many societies into various social and economic, challenges which further affected livelihoods in all ramifications.

Similarly, the lockdown adversely affected family expenditure and income. The study revealed that most families' expenditures were forced to be reduced. It further revealed that family expenditure preferences during the lockdown were basically on basic foodstuffs, medication and, toiletries. The thought of buying new wears was not considered during the period of the lockdown. The lockdown for most families was a period of survival of the fittest in the country. So, the focus was on what to eat and how best families can manage their little resources and health. On the other hand, while families struggle for survival under the covid-19 restriction in the Mararaba suburb in the Karu LGA, the socio-demographic character of many families changed as procreation and unplanned pregnancy increased among both married and unmarried persons in the study area. This was due to the closure of medical shops where contraceptives like condoms and other essential drugs and services relating to family planning were being sold. Thus, there were demographic changes in the population in the study area. These findings align with Adigun's (2021) findings that the strategies implored like lockdown and curfews have proven to affect healthcare delivery and accessibility besides, the increased risk for contracting Covid-19 in the hospitals was another factor that affected how women access maternal health facilities. Pant, Koirala and Subedi (2020) further support that movement restriction, transport problems and anxiety over being exposed to Covid-19 are acting as barriers to persons who are trying to access maternal health care during the pandemic.

Furthermore, concerning insecurity and robbery during the Covid-19 lockdown. Most informants admitted that the lockdown brought hunger

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and scarcity of resources for many people. Salaries were not paid regularly, shops were locked, and trading activities were at their lowest ebb. Therefore, for many young persons, the desire to survive became the order of the day. At dawn and dusk in many neighbourhood, incidents of burgling and armed robbery became common. Lives were threatened, and people began to live in constant fear of being victimized; this motivated residents to form neighbourhood security watches to guarantee human safety during the lockdown. This agrees with Oche (2021) who found that economic stressors associated with the lockdown measures lead to increased crime such as rape, drug and substance abuse while Fawole *et al.,* (2021) reiterated that it led to increased intimate partner violence (IPV) in Nigeria. More so, part of the impact of the covid-19 lockdown was the spread of cybercrimes among the young population in the study area which many studies are oblivious of the level of youth involvement in borderless crimes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The spade and scale at which COVID-19 spread across the globe, and the rapid adoption of across-the-board measures to contain the disease, have collectively produced sudden and severe shocks in the urban families, some of which include a decrease in household income, increased domestic violence, unemployment and general economic hardship that calls for inclusive policy to cushion the impacts of the lockdown on families. Therefore, the study recommends that since food insecurity was one of the worst impacts of lockdown on both urban and rural families, extensive farming in the post-covid-19 period should be encouraged by the government and international bodies through efficient distribution of farm inputs (fertilizer, herbicides and insecticides, etc) at very subsidized rates.

Grants for farmers should also be channelled to farmers especially those who are genuine farmers to boost food production in Karu LGA; this will increase Nasarawa State's capacity to reserve food in preparation for future uncertainties. Finally, there is the need for urban families to create social security for themselves in form of increasing savings in the bank and investment in small-scale businesses such as poultry, fish and animal farming as alternative sources of livelihood in times of pandemic like the Covid-19.

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