

## YOUNG WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: ZIMBABWE PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** Globally, COVID-19 pandemic is a devastating blow which had affected young women and adolescent girls' daily experience. The research findings noted that the effects the coronavirus are causing psychological and physical shortcoming to women making them vulnerable in the short as well as in the long run. The lockdown measures have made women be more vulnerable leading unwanted pregnancy, school dropout, sexual abuse, intimate partner abuse, child marriages and child prostitution. These abuses were precipitated by the lack of basic goods and services during the coronavirus lockdown. On the positive note, the coronavirus lockdown has reinforced the intimate partner relationship. This study was conducted with an aim of exploring the effects of the implementation of restrictive measures of COVID-19 pandemic to young women and adolescent girls in Bulawayo District. The phenomenological research design was used to study individuals in their natural setting and the population in the study is the young women and adolescent girls who reside in Bulawayo which is the second-largest city in Zimbabwe. The convenience random and purposive sampling was used to select the participants and data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. Data was collected through an anonymous open-ended interview question on social media platforms. The COVID-19 lockdown has confined women and adolescent girls in a cage with their perpetrator hence creating more chances of abuse.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Intimate Partner Abuse, COVID-19, Lockdown, Women Zimbabwe

**Research Area:** Social Science

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a devastating blow to the whole world. The world is rightly focused on measures to suppress COVID-19 transmission and protect the most vulnerable. The coronavirus is a strenuous threat hence the entire world was placed on restrictive measures of lockdown, social restriction, travel restrictions and many more. The COVID-19 pandemic is already having a devastating effect on the vulnerable population such as young women and adolescents girls. SARS-CoV-2 was identified as the causative agent of an outbreak of viral pneumonia emerged in Wuhan, Hubei, China. The disease caused by this coronavirus is called COVID-19. WHO (2020b) assess that the pandemic era is always characterized by extreme inequality, the COVID-19 pandemic is a fundamentally gender blind. In support of that Weir (2020) posits that the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is rolling in a world that is largely beset with structural inequalities that disadvantage women, girls, and other marginalized groups in economic, social, educational, and political realms. Peterman et al

(2020) phrase that a pandemic of this nature will present unique challenges that can increase child marriage, unwanted pregnancies, child prostitution, sexual exploitation of women and gender-based violence (GBV) both in the acute and recovery phases. Disease outbreaks affect men and women differently, and pandemics worsen existing inequalities and discrimination of marginalized groups. The transmission of COVID-19 is asymptomatic, and the outbreak is global (Hallgarten, 2020). This proposition asserts that most nations are failing to have a gender lens in response to COVID-19. Peterman et al, (2020) opines that pandemics are linked to a myriad of risk against women and adolescents girls. The covid-19 pandemic lockdown provides an enabling environment that may exacerbate or spark diverse forms of violence in Bulawayo District.

Currently, studies predict a rampant increase in cases of violence against women and children during or post-pandemic era. This is precipitated by the findings of the Ebola outbreak which hit West Africa, an “epidemic” of “rape, sexual assault and violence against women and girls” was reported to have been largely undocumented as collateral damage (Yasmin, 2016). In the current novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19), as of mid-March 2020, there are already reports from Australia, Brazil, China and the United States suggesting an increase in violence against women and children. In the United States, the National Domestic Violence hotline issued a statement in early March 2020 on “Staying Safe” during COVID-19, including anecdotal evidence of how perpetrators were using the virus as a scare tactic to threaten or isolate victims, and urging those at risk to make a safety plan, practice self-care and reach out for help (National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2020). Therefore the coronavirus is not spared to the wide range of distinct violence typologies which includes sexual violence, exploitation and violent discipline, abuse and maltreatment of children and women. This is weird in areas like Bulawayo where the business had been halted and people are surviving on informal trading.

The abuse against women and adolescent girls carry regional variations, with the prevalence being higher in Africa (37%) and South-East Asia (38%) than in Europe (25%) and the Americas (30%) (Peterman, 2020). In Zimbabwe, the research conducted from a Demographic Health Survey (DHS) in 2015, reveals that 35% of women had experienced physical violence from the age of 15 and 14% had experienced sexual violence once in their lifetime (Mukamana, Machakanja and Adjei, 2015).

Bulawayo is the second largest town in Zimbabwe. The city is struggling to provide the residents with adequate services such as safe water. The Rail industry and the Cold Storage Commission (CSC) were the key notable companies which used to employ the residents in of Bulawayo. The slow operation of these companies had caused high unemployment rate in the city making women be more vulnerable. The vulnerability of women had attracted different organizations such as Musasa Project, Women’ Affairs, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers’ Association and many more to offer social services of enlightening the Bulawayo community of women abuse. Most women in Bulawayo are living in poverty and most of them had cross Limpopo to seek for employment and those who remained in the country have opted to be cross boarders and to be vendors. Therefore the COVID-19 lockdown which closed all borders and restricted informal trading had confined women in abusive environments. This means women are trapped in a double tragedy of

protecting themselves from the novel coronavirus and looking for food to feed the family. Women and adolescent girls are fractured and fluid vulnerable population hence are prone to abuse so as to feed themselves and the family.

Worldwide, there is still a paucity of literature on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of young women and adolescents. The literature used for this study is based on the pandemic that had hit other countries before especially the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in East Africa. COVID-19 outbreak proves to be much more difficult to control and might potentially further exacerbate tensions. Therefore, women and adolescents are on the lime line of all forms of abuse as a result of COVID-19. Adolescence itself is a period of rapid physical, psychological and social development (Collins, 2011). Adolescence is a transitional time characterised by positive self- image, strong sense of self-identity and high socialisation with friends, family and society as a whole (Chizana, 2011). Baker et al (2000) insist that adolescence is a turbulent period of development marked by identity formation and self-definition, a period when an individual pay particular attention to peer norms and beliefs. Adolescents begin to engage in social activities in preparation for employment and relationship building which precursor to their life independence. Due to physical and hormonal changes, adolescent girls tend to be experimental with their body which makes them be more vulnerable to abuse especially when they are confined indoors during the COVID-19 lockdown. According to WHO (2020), menstrual hygiene tends to be compromised in situations of self-isolation and reduced access to sexual and reproductive. Therefore adolescent girls have unique sexual and reproductive needs that often go unmet which make them susceptible to all forms of sexual abuse. The hormonal secretion triggers adolescent girls to behave in a certain manner which could lure the abusive lens of would be perpetrators.

COVID-19 is amplifying inequalities and power disparities. Lockdown is a luxury that the poor cannot afford – women experiencing poverty and fragility are less able to avoid crowded spaces and are therefore at greater risk of contracting and transmitting the disease (Generation Equality, 2020). Research from past pandemics has also shown that people who have low literacy or proficiency in the national language tend to face higher rates of the disease and women make up more than two-thirds of the world's illiterate population (ibid). These barriers to information are exacerbated by lockdown measures and the prohibition of gatherings, making person-to-person information sharing more difficult. Generation Equality (2020) propound violence against women and girl has intensified due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus internationally. COVID-19 lockdown measure emerged unintentionally and it has created precarious environments to key marginalized populations by causing economic depression, hunger and poverty. The restrictive measures of lockdown in Zimbabwe, especially in Matebeland which is a drought prone area, is more like putting people in a cage. Of interest, women constitute two-thirds of the world population but they are not involved in the decision-making process of COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). In line with the above explanation Pereira et al. (2020) postulate that this COVID-19 pandemic is shining a bright light on the structural inequalities in our societies, especially gender inequality.

This study noted that there is a gap on issues of violence against vulnerable groups such as women, disabled and adolescents. Scholars might ask why this study chose to focus

on the effects of COVID-19 lockdown among young women and adolescent girls. Inequality against women is a global issue which can be rated at par with the coronavirus pandemics. The best available evidence suggests that globally, one in three women of reproductive age have experienced physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime, and more than a third of female homicides are committed by an intimate partner (Devries et al., 2013a; Stockl et al., 2013). The prevalence of violence against children cum adolescents is also widespread globally with half of the children aged two to 17—the equivalent of one billion children—experiencing past-year emotional, physical or sexual violence from a range of perpetrators (Devries et al., 2018; Hillis et al., 2016). The interesting issue of the effects of coronavirus lockdown can be short and long term. Chances are high that cases of violence that emerged during the lockdown might be underreported due to accessibility of services, shame, stigma, and fear of repercussions, among other reasons. Research indicated that one result of factors of underreporting is coiled around the limited understanding of how violence against women and adolescent girls responds to pandemics—in contrast to other types of violence and criminal activity where data is more readily available (Palermo et al., 2014; Pereira et al., 2020; Palermo and Peterman, 2011). Shining a light on these gaps in knowledge has triggered this study be conducted in Bulawayo. Therefore COVID-19 pandemic has garnered greater support and attention than the pandemic of marginalization and vulnerability of women.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every country globally, offers an opportunity to revisit the literature linking pandemics to violence against women. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is drastically changing the way that millions of women, men, girls and boys around the world lead their lives adolescent girls are worried about their future ambitions as their mobility, ability to go to school, and social connections have been turned upside down in a short period of time., and the loss of mobility and personal power places them at risk to fall under the greater control of men and boys and others who make decisions for them. According to Ellsberg & Heise, (2005), women and girls risk losing control over their bodies, a reality that is not only very scary for girls and young people, but which in turn equates a loss of control and agency over their lives and futures. In short, the rights of women, girls, and young people are profoundly threatened by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is harming health, social and economic well-being worldwide, with women as the yoke of the burden. OECD (2020) express that women face multiple burdens which includes overworking, face high risks of economic insecurity, and face increased risks of violence, exploitation, abuse and harassment during restrictive measures of lockdown pandemic. The pandemic has had and will continue to have a major impact on the health and well-being of many vulnerable groups (OECD, 2020). The coronavirus lockdown situations exacerbate risks of violence, exploitation, abuse or harassment against women, as has been seen from previous crises and from the early case of China during the COVID crisis (SH HO, YI Chee & CHO, 2020).

According to UNESCO (2020), 180 countries had implemented nationwide school and university closures by the end of March 2020. This affects over 87% of the world's student population. If schools are closed, girls in development or humanitarian settings may be at increased risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and child marriage. According to UNICEF in

WHO (2020a), school closures during the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa contributed to spikes in child labour, neglect, sexual abuse and teenage pregnancies. Peterman et al. (2020) highlight that in Sierra Leone, cases of teenage pregnancy more than doubled to 14,000 during the outbreak. Zhou (2020) shared that same sentiment when he pointed that there was also a “sharp increase” in teenage pregnancies and early marriages in some affected areas, due to girls’ increased school dropout rates. Pereira (2020) asserts that school closures will also have long-term impacts on girls’ futures –particularly for poorer and more remote families –if they are unable to return after a prolonged absence, as education may become unaffordable due to economic distress or due to girls being married or becoming pregnant.

Universally a young woman is an active individual who is productive and reproductive. COVID-19 strike young women with a multi-edged sword of fear of the disease, worries of future as well as feeding and of protection of the family. The pandemic like the COVID-19 force women to make difficult decisions of how to use their limited resources, and may be forced to resort to negative mechanisms – as they did during the West Africa Ebola crisis – such as reducing food consumption, engaging in transactional sex, or borrowing money or going into debt to pay for food (OECD, 2020). The effects of existing gender inequality, marginalisation and poverty were already devastating during the Ebola era in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries in the West of Africa. COVID-19 threatens to exacerbate this, as epidemics can also be a driver of increased insecurity, violence and stigmatization. Generation Equality (2020) posits that social distancing and increased restrictions on gathering can be a hindrance to the transmission of information on coronavirus since not everyone can access vital information digitally. In that social gathering serves as psychological therapy to curb stress and depression, therefore cutting social gatherings fuel tension at home causing rampant abuses to women from intimate partners and children. Therefore in Bulawayo women facing violence at home due to the lockdown, are afraid to report it due to cultural ethics. Women may also be at risk of other forms of violence such as sexual exploitation, abuse and child marriage. Peterman et al (2020) argument that the measures to contain COVID-19, such as social distancing, and the diversion of financial resources may also lead to a reduction in the availability of vital services, including those providing sexual and reproductive healthcare. This also results in a shortage of important medications, such as contraceptives, sanitary pads, antiretroviral and safe abortion care.

Research has statistically pointed out that, 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or another perpetrator in their lifetime. There is already growing evidence that some of the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 –including staying at home and physical distancing –whilst essential from a public health perspective, can place girls and women at greater risk of sexual abuse (National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2020). The adolescent’s girls, due to their physical make up can experience sexual, physical, psychological and emotional violence from family members and intimate partners. Paraire et al. (2020) comment that Domestic violence is also increasing due to lockdowns in Asia. Perpetrators take advantage and use restrictions brought in to manage COVID-19 to exercise power and control over their partners to further reduce access to services. Life-saving care and support services during the Ebola era were not accessible due lockdown and this put the lives of women and adolescents in danger. The dynamics of

pandemic outbreaks require effective engagement, coordination and cooperation among a wide range of sectors and actors.

Consistently low conviction rates, in turn, create a positive feedback loop, wherein malfunctioning systems discourage women from reporting incidents of violence, thus shielding perpetrators—particularly in low middle-income countries like Zimbabwe where access to formal legal services and systems is extremely limited (Mueller et al., 2019; Larcombe, 2011). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, court officials across countries have been advised to stay home, and hearings have been postponed in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere (Reynolds, 2020; Zou, 2020). Pandemics may also have effects on law enforcement operations, which may, in turn, have consequences for the survivors. In the context of COVID-19, there was a limited number of people detained in an effort to curb the exposure of prisoners to the disease (ACLU, 2020). This dynamic was also observed during the Ebola outbreak, especially as police officers were hesitant to enter homes and conduct thorough investigations out of risk of disease exposure (UNDP, 2015). Such action would be consistent with and compound many police officers' decision to leave issues of domestic violence in particular as a "personal" or "family" matter outside of pandemic contexts (Wolf et al., 2003). In the current COVID-19 outbreak, the American Civil Liberties Union advises that parole officers should prioritize social distancing and communicate via voice or video call, which may limit their ability to fully assess chances of recidivism, including those that may put women and adolescents victims at increased risk (ACLU, 2020).

Postmus et al, (2009) points there are organizations which serve as the first point of call, intermediaries linking women to legal channels, crisis and safety planning and above all offer financial assistance to depart from abusive environments. Due to the restrictive measure of COVID-19, these organizations were also restricted to move hence they were less active and unable to support young women and adolescents' girl.

### *2.1 Potential Forms of Abuse Faced by Young Women and Adolescent Girls*

Zimbabwe is still interweaved with the history of traditional African patriarchy society despite the legal convections and protocols implemented by the Zimbabwean government to eradicate forms of women abuse. There are a series of factors that led to women's abuse and they range from poverty, unemployment, economic dependency, patriarchy, food insecurity, cultural beliefs and the environmental conditions. For instance, the COVID-19 lockdown environment is trapping situation which can trigger women and adolescent girls' abuse. The most recorded different forms of abuse against women are physical, sexual, emotional and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner. Violence against women has been associated with increased risk of HIV infection among women. In 2018, 243 million women and girls globally were victims of intimate partner violence. The UN Women has called violence against women and girls as the "shadow pandemic."

The abuses faced by women and young adolescent girls erode their self-esteem, causing injuries, disabilities, depression, and drug and alcohol abuse (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). Sexual abuse, for instance, can result in unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and miscarriages. Other scholars refer to intimate abuse as "Family violence" which refers to all forms of abuse within the family. A lot of terminologies are used to describe this kind of abuse, other conceptualise is as gender-based violence. This type of

abuse is very common during the outbreak of pandemic like the recent coronavirus pandemic. Ellsberg & Heise, (2005) explain sexual exploitation as a current wave-like COVID-19 in all communities. It refers to all sexual acts that occur between an adult or adolescent and a child, and any nonconsensual sexual contact between the child and a peer. The effects of this violence are serious health challenges, mental health disorder, adverse pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and many more.

## **2.2 AIM OF STUDY**

To explore the effects of the implementation of restrictive measures of COVID-19 pandemic to young women and adolescent girls who reside in Bulawayo District in Zimbabwe.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology section includes research design, participants and setting, instruments, data collection and analysis procedures. The research employs qualitative methods to understand the effects of COVID-19 on young women and adolescent girls during the implementation of restrictive measures of lockdown.

### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A phenomenological design was used in this research to amplify the effects of the implementation of COVID-19 lockdown restrictive measures to young women and adolescent girls who reside in Bulawayo district. Phenomenology is an effective research tool for revealing the qualitative aspects of inequalities (Mudhovozi, 2012). This design was used to describe essential factors that constitute non-traditional academic experience. Phenomenology seeks to gain an understanding of the essential “truths” of the lived experience (Byrne, 2011). The research is used phenomenology to gather information from participants’ natural setting.

### **3.2 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING**

This study involves young women, adolescent girls and the women support groups in Bulawayo district. The information was gathered until the researcher noted that the information was saturated. The convenience random and purposive sampling was used in the study to select young women and adolescent girls in Bulawayo district.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

The researchers gathered data through an anonymous open-ended interview question in which the participant answered social media platforms of WhatsApp and Facebook. The research also employed the use of interactions with participants via text and audios. Responses were recorded in a document form. The researcher avoided movement since it was illegal to move without the approval of the law enforcement agents and it also risked hence vulnerable to the transmission of coronavirus.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. The researcher grouped all the response transcripts into interesting phrases and themes. Data familiarization is a key to

thematic analysis as it is used for qualitative methods. Howitt and Cramer (2010) describe that the process varies according to circumstances including the researcher's expectations about the direction in which the analysis proceeds.

### **3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Stopher (2012) indicates that ethics create a morally acceptable research behaviour which is far from human abuse. Ethical consideration promotes respect and dignity of research participants. The principle of respect for research participants forms the base of this current research. The other key ethical principles observed during the study are informed consent, autonomy, competence, confidentiality and anonymity. Since the study was carried during the COVID-19 lockdown anonymous interview questions was delivered to participants.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The effects of COVID-19 lockdown has proved to be hanged around the human right abuse of women and adolescent girls. The following themes were creamed down from the response of the participants. 1) lack of basic goods, 2) intimate partner abuse, 3) sexual exploitation, 4) unwanted pregnancy, 5) high rise of sexually transmitted infections (STI), lack of sexual reproductive health services,

### **4.1 Theme one: lack of basic goods**

Most participants indicated that women and adolescent face a double sword of looking after the family and protecting children can expose them to be more infectious agents of the coronavirus.

This resonates with Zhou (2020) who narrates that women are primary care givers both at home and workplace. This means that women are responsible for cleaning, laundry, caring and cooking for the family from an African point of view. The other response pointed out that women in Zimbabwe are seen as second class citizens. They are not involved in decision making hence they are marginalized and vulnerable. Participants pointed out that the lockdown has caused food stocks in the market to decline, and forcing the prices to increase. Bulawayo is a drought-prone area, food is the most challenge. This shares the same views with OECD (2020) when he indicated that reduction of food consumption, engaging in transactional sex, or borrowing money or going into debt to pay for food cornered women to be abused. All the responses pointed out that they face shortages of food and prices are hiking every day and the available basic goods are being charged using foreign currents such as Rands, Pula and United State dollars. The lockdown has isolated individuals from their sources of income such as informal trading. The COVID-19 lockdown had confined people at home and it caused higher consumption of food. However, due to the continual skyrocketing of prices and lower incomes drive people under the lockdown to seek alternative cheaper food options thus increasing lower nutritional quality. The lockdown which paralysed trading of and accessibility to food has caused high demand leading to prices of basic goods and services to go higher.

*“I’m a single mother and I survive on trading small items in town, now I can’t feed my family”.*



*“Basic commodities such as cooking fat, has disappeared in the market, I cannot go to work, and my family is starving”*

*“Everything is now being charged in foreign currents and I cannot access it. As a single mother who look after the whole family the burden of food rest on my shoulders”*

#### **4.2 Theme two: Intimate partner abuse**

The COVID-19 pandemic can worsen the already high prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) due to greater economic stress in households in times of crisis coupled with increased social isolation. One participant indicated that the COVID-19 lockdown has caused social instability. This means the lockdown had crippled social interactions such as the inability to move outside the household and this alone precipitates intimate partner abuse. The other participant noted that: imagine spending all day indoor with children who are hungry. Therefore violence is mainly caused by a lack of basic needs such as food, soap and basic services. Lack of basic goods such as food causes multifaceted problems in the home. According to Peterman et al (2020), the financial problem in the household leads to increased stress and this financial crisis which was caused by the unprepared lockdown may force victims to remain with their abusers. This was also supported by Devries (2013) who postulates that panic may lead to violence. Therefore the panic of coronavirus exacerbates the unjustified abusive behaviours between the partners. However, the domestic violence, committed by men, is deeply rooted in patriarchal masculinities that lead to power and control of men over women. The coronavirus lockdown has increased episodes of violence, perpetrators under this crisis might want to reassert their control and express their frustrations. This is in line with WHO (2020) which reports that women and girls are experiencing heightened emotional and physical abuse as a result of coronavirus lockdown.

#### **4.3 Theme three: Reinforce intimate partner relationship**

Some participants pointed out that the lockdown is a blessing in disguise. They indicated that prior to the lockdown measures most women lacked enough time with their partners. The business was indicated as being given priority over love. The participants narrate that:

*“As a married, my partner did not have time with his family and on that my sexual right was infringed. Most of the time children could not see their father due to business commitments”*

*“The lockdown had given me time to be close to my parents”*

*“My mom, is a vendor and she used to go and sell her stuff at night so that she could not be victimized by the police, and I could only see her during the weekend when I did not go to school”*

Therefore the suggestions above indicated that the COVID-19 lockdown had strengthened the family relationships that women and adolescent girls had lacked for a long time. In line with this, it clearly shows that coronavirus had caused positive effects on the life of adolescents and young women in Bulawayo.

#### **4.4 Theme four: Sexual exploitation**

The coronavirus has caused sexual exploitation to young women and adolescent girls. Poverty caused by the lockdown has pressed women to resort to transactional sex so as to meet the basic needs. Adolescent girls are at an increased risk of sexual abuse as they are

locked down with ‘would be perpetrators’ daily. The perpetrators spent more time doing nothing, therefore abuse can be rife, which has the effect of increasing HIV infections among adolescent girls. The use of media pornography was mentioned as the key, to lure and exploit the adolescent girls. One participant has to say:

*“My form three daughter was sharing pornographic video with our neighbor and I suspect that they are in an affair”*

This is an indication that staying idle at home enable people to consume more media, hence can result in sexual exploitation. The effects of the COVID-19 lockdown are either short-term or long- term. The closure of schools precipitates high risks of early marriages, sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancy and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases. Schools serve as safe spaces for many vulnerable children where they can be empowered of sexual education. The other participant indicated that:

*“The lockdown has created the high rise of child prostitution, some houses here in Bulawayo are used as lodges for the adolescents. Other people are making money out of this lockdown. For us to inform the law enforcement agents we don’t have letters to travel to the police”*

This indicates that the restrictive travel measure has caused more harm to the adolescents that good. The referral protocols to care as well as to protect girls and women are disrupted. This entails that sexual and gender-based violence is a silent pandemic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### ***4.5 Theme five: Unwanted pregnancy,***

Other participants had predicted the long term effect of unwanted pregnancy within married, unmarried and the adolescent girls.

*“Pregnancy can only be visible after probably five months, this lockdown might have caused a lot of unintended pregnancy”*

This means the adolescent's pregnancies are likely to increase as adolescent girls are sexually exploited and are forced to turn to risky strategies to feed themselves and their families. Adolescent girls may engage in relationships as a channel for financial support, particularly with older men. This will put them at high risk to have unprotected sex leading to unwanted pregnancy and infected with HIV and AIDS.

*“Contraceptive methods are not accessible, hence we are resorting to withdrawal method”*

Most adolescent girls are school-going age. The closure of schools as a mitigating measure to curb the spread of coronavirus may cause girls who had already experienced sex before to be under pressure to drop-out to and stay out of education permanently. This means their vision might be halted.

#### ***4.6 Theme six: lack of sexual reproductive health services,***

The COVID-19 pandemic is already having adverse effects on the supply chain for contraceptive commodities. Most participants raised that contraceptive tablets and condoms are no longer accessible. The other participant highlight that they are deterred from seeking medical care due to fear of contracting the coronavirus. Lack of access to routine maternal and child health services, including pregnant women being denied access to clinics as a result of travel restrictive measures have caused them to resort to riskier homebirths.

*“As you can see I’m pregnant but I’m afraid of being arrested and I cannot go and seek medical assistance due to the lockdown”*

*“This is my second pregnant, I’m not feeling well, I need regular pregnant check-ups but I cannot go to the hospital because I’m afraid to be infected with the virus, and there is no transport to go there”.*

Another response pointed out that the female body undergoes major changes during pregnancy, which go in hand with changes in the immune system, and some diseases are particularly severe during pregnancy. This indicates that they need rapid medical checks. The coronavirus lockdown had disrupted the health-seeking behaviour. Pregnant women are at high risk and some are a force to resort to traditional methods which are detrimental and can cause cancer. The findings noted that the coronavirus lockdown led adolescent to use unhealthy sanitary pads during menstrual cycle. This is in line with WHO (2020a) which point that menstrual hygiene tends to be compromised in situations of self-isolation and reduced access to sexual and reproductive.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

COVID-19 has changed every aspect of human life. Women and adolescent girls are shouldering a double burden lingering on inequalities and harmful gender stereotypes. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified vulnerabilities faced by young women and adolescent girls. Due to the coronavirus lockdown young women and adolescent girls are exposed to all forms of abuses such as sexual, emotional, and physical and neglect. These abuses are precipitated by lack of basic goods and services and this can cause unwanted pregnancy, school drop-outs, sexually transmitted infections, child prostitution and more. Future research should focus on the possible ways to addressing injustice faced by women and adolescent girls during a pandemic. The study recommends to have disaster prepared plan and to plan with the vulnerable group in mind as well as to re-prioritizes the funds towards the welfare of women. There is a need to empower the communities over human abuse and its consequences. The study recommends training and monitoring of frontline workers of sexual exploitation and women’s abuses during pandemics.

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