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COVID-19 AND SOCIOECONOMIC WELLBEING OF INHABITANTS OF SOUTHERN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The impact of Covid-19 on socioeconomic wellbeing of Sub-Saharan African district of Southern Cross River State Nigeria has been investigated. The Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected the literacy level due to closure of schools; also, people's livelihoods/food systems and public health were equally affected. The theoretical framework was the sustainable livelihood template. It adopted the methodology of survey research design and drew evidence from 600 respondents. The analysis adopted inferential statistical tools and revealed that the people have experienced reduced income, decreased wellbeing and reduced accessibility to education and health services. People have also experienced increased vulnerability and reduced food security. The paper recommended that healthy school meals, shelter and food relief, support for employment retention and recovery, and financial relief for businesses are necessary for post Covid-19 living.

INTRODUCTION

Background To the Study

Academic interest about sustaining human wellbeing and quality of life has aroused enormous attention. Thus, a considerable body of research about human wellbeing has been promoted in recent times (Nkpoyen, Archibong, Undelikwo, Obeten & Ofem, 2021). Globally, wellbeing remains a significant issue despite the rapid shortfall in industrialization (Nippierd, 2002; Akpan, 2015). The human society has both the social and economic dimensions of wellbeing. The economic component gives prominence to improved income, production of goods, distribution and consumption thereby creating household wealth (Decancq & Lugo, 2013).

The social dimension includes literary level, political awareness and participation, health status, self-employment, life expectancy etc. (Akpabio, 2006). Socioeconomic wellbeing therefore, translates into indices such as improved literacy level, higher political awareness, increased income level and improved food processing. Thus, income and wealth, jobs, earnings, housing etc. are indicators of quality of life. Beyond this, “quality of life can also be expressed in health status, work and life balance, education and skills, civic engagement and governance; social connections, environmental quality; personal security and concern for others” (Fleurbacy, 2009). This implies that wellbeing guarantees improved standard of living and general development of the rural economy. This cumulative impact of these social and economic components is the broadening of people’s opportunities to realize their full potentials through stimulating interest in the achievement of basic needs (Obinna, 2001).

Socioeconomic wellbeing as observed by Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) (2005) considers fundamental necessities of financial living as guarantee and opportunity to claim the crucial ingredients for maintaining security of lives and property. It also involves positive inter and intra-personal relationships with excellent possibilities to understand ecosystem; also, ability to demonstrate good testes, religious beliefs, shared solidarity, community feelings, freedom of choice and action which suggest existence of possibility of accessing available societal services (Freitas, Schutz & De Oliveira, 2007). However, the emergence of this pandemic significantly disrupted the possibility of consistently obtaining socioeconomic wellbeing by subjecting individuals, families, communities and nations to challenges in all fronts. Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization.

The infection is associated with fever, dry cough, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, muscle aches, headache, sore throat or diahorrea, running nose, tiredness (CDC, 2020) foundation for medical education and research (MFMER, 2020). The incubation period last up to 14 days (Gallagher, 2020) and the systems may appear 2-14 days after exposure (Minnesota Department of Health, 2020). Death from this infection has increased around the globe. Several social, political, religious and economic events have been

disrupted or postponed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games was postponed to 2021 as a result of the pandemic.

Africa has had its own share of the Covid-19 challenge as demonstrated by the rising incidence. The number of Covid-19 cases in Africa amounted to 4,842,467 in mid-2021. By the same date, coronavirus cases globally were 196.6 million, causing nearly 3.52 million deaths. South Africa suffered terribly with more than 1.64 million infections. The index case of coronavirus started in Nigeria occurred when an Italian national working in Lagos flew into the commercial city of Lagos from Milan, Italy on February 25, 2020 (Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC)). Nigeria authority is still battling to halt the escalation in the country. In the past, such effort includes a ban on social gathering, shutdown of cities. Other preventive measures included increase in screening at border entry points, self-isolation, social distance, use sanitizing hands, washing of hands frequently and recently vaccination (Obiezu, 2020).

Based on this, the adverse socioeconomic dimensions of Covid-19 pandemic have attracted the attention of government, NGOs and scholars. The country's economy and transportation or movement of people was shut down. The stay-at-home order and total/partial lockdown of cities brought about huge tension in families. Nigeria is a country where 40% or more live below poverty line with almost 70% being daily paid workers. This makes it even challenging in normal period to attain socioeconomic wellbeing. The level of general socioeconomic wellbeing in terms of life expectancy, health, level of education and combined gross enrollment ratio in education as well as access to consumer goods which determine the enlargement of human abilities was equally affected by disease.

Socioeconomic wellbeing has to do with improvement in indices such as literacy, income level, food processing skills, health status and awareness, nutritional status, increased awareness of female rights, use of improved farming methods, increased exposure to micro-credits etc. It is a resultant state of the development process, a process of societal and economic transformation. It admits positive changes occurring in the social sphere and mostly of the economic nature; changes in laws, changes in physical environment and ecosystems alteration (Obinna, 2001; Nyong, 2016). But these have seriously been undermined by Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic affected people's personal dignity, safety and participation in community life. The impact of this outbreak caused a reversal to sustainable development goals benefit in vulnerable rural communities. The specific socioeconomic wellbeing variables considered included education, people's livelihoods/food systems and public health. It was against this background that this research was carried out to investigate the interaction between Covid-19 pandemic and socioeconomic wellbeing of Sub-Saharan Africa district of Southern Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper was divided into the following sections: introduction, statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, review of related literature, methodology, analysis, discussion of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

Socioeconomic wellbeing has become a key challenge. Communities in Southern Cross River State have not been able to achieve transformational economic, social and environmental changes required for improved standard of living. Thus, the continual poor living condition and quality of livelihood has negatively affected the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. The experiences of poor sanitation, disease, hunger, food insecurity, poor literacy status, deprivations are indicators of socioeconomic crisis in communities.

In Cross River State, the Southern Senatorial District is affected by low incomes and living standards. Their earning capacity from the informal sector or non-wage employment is also significantly poor. Additionally, very few assets are owned by households, prevalence of families eating not more than one meal per day; a high proportion of malnourished children, lack of vocational skill acquisition centres to promote self-employment, long distances to nearest produce markets especially during rainy season and all along the year for riverine areas; a huge proportion of children walking long distances to fetch water and to attend school etc.

The Southern Senatorial District has endured serious socioeconomic disadvantages despite the long tradition of Federal, State and Local Government interventions. These conditions have collectively affected socio-economic wellbeing. The overall quality of life is poor. This has been exacerbated by coronavirus pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic has attracted enormous attention from scholars and other concerned citizens. The pandemic has not spared any community or society. The effect of Covid-19 had been turmoil on general conditions of living. This is demonstrated in devastations in areas of income, business, health, education etc. The Covid-19 pandemic is having unprecedentedly social, political and economic effects and economies of Sub-Saharan African societies. Global recession is even projected the longer the pandemic persists, the impact is also disproportionately distributed across communities. The Sub-Saharan African societies because of their small and low-income are facing severe consequences given their relatively weak health system, limited fiscal and monetary options and a relatively strong reliance on external trade.

The Covid-19 crisis causes profound consequences in Sub-Saharan African rural communities. The efforts to curb the spread of the virus are driving societies and economies in a turmoil. There are aggravated impact of Covid-19 crisis particularly for those living on the economic margins; deepening pre-existing inequalities and discrimination, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems. Therefore, its potential socioeconomic impact in Sub-Saharan Africa district of Southern Cross River State has become a major concern.

Objectives of the Study

The study generally investigated Covid-19 pandemic and socioeconomic wellbeing of Sub-Saharan African district of Southern Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Examine the relationship between Covid-19 education (literacy) impact and socioeconomic wellbeing.
- ii. Determine the association between Covid-19 impact on people's livelihoods/food systems and socioeconomic wellbeing.
- iii. Investigate the association between Covid-19 impact on public health and socioeconomic wellbeing.

Hypotheses

1. COVID-19 education (literacy) impact has no significant relationship with socioeconomic wellbeing.
2. Covid-19 impact on people's livelihoods/food systems have no significant association with socioeconomic wellbeing.
3. Covid-19 impact on public health has no significant association with socioeconomic wellbeing.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Covid-19 and Socioeconomic Wellbeing

Conceptually, socioeconomic wellbeing is the cardinal goal of all processes of development. The ability to attain the social and economic wellbeing facilitates the performance of the individual in the community, organizations and group. Thirwall (1994) emphasized that wellbeing is ordinarily tied to the improvement in basic needs. It implies that social and economic progress contribute significantly towards positive self-concept; material advancement of community members must be capable of broadening the range of choices available for its members. Socio-economic wellbeing is the outcome of programmes, policies or strategies targeted at improving life expectancy, literacy, employment, also, personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety, freedom from fear of physical harm and extent of participation in community life (Kumari & Kiwai, 2012). Socioeconomic advancement manifests in new technologies, changes in laws, changes in physical environment and ecosystem alterations (Obinna, 2001). The Covid-19 pandemic has adversely ravaged the socioeconomic wellbeing of the people across the globe.

The worsening scenario is created by the new variants developing and also spreading rapidly. The containment measures of shutting the economy, transportation, and movement of people made things very hard for people. This exacerbated the impoverished condition of people; not everyone is a civil servant or public servant who receives wage monthly. Some people earn their daily living functioning in the informal sector. The shutdown significantly crippled on daily work for survival (Ajibo, 2020).

The social and religious lives of the people were disrupted adversely. At the height of the pandemic, social life was affected. Traditional activities such as wedding and burial where people cluster were restricted. Churches were shut down because of social distancing policy; Muslims, Christians and African

traditional worshippers were not free to worship. This affected religious lives. Elaborating further, Harvey (2020), immense economic and social challenges associated with the spread has affected households. People have lost their jobs especially contract and casual industrial workers. Also, a rise in gender-based violence (Harvey, 2020).

Education and Socioeconomic Wellbeing

Covid-19 has affected all levels of the education system, from pre-school to tertiary education. During the height of the pandemic, measures ranging from complete closure of schools to targeted closure were initiated (UNESCO, 2020). Additionally, most countries imposed a nationwide closure of educational facilities. UNESCO (2020) estimated that close to 900 million learners suffered adversely from this measure. The purpose was to curb the escalation of the virus within institution and prevent carriage to vulnerable individuals. However, Loeb (2020) observed that educational institutions closures had wide spread socioeconomic implications especially through lowering the literacy level and stagnating educational endeavour of the youth.

Covid-19 has an impact on social mobility where schools are no longer able to provide free school meals for children from low-income families, social isolation and school dropout rates. It has also had significant effects on childcare cost for families with young children. In addition, there exist a wide disparity amongst populations with higher income who are able to access technology that can ensure education continues digitally during social isolation. Although, it has influenced education at all levels, it has affected postgraduate research community with research into many non-Covid-19 related topics being suspended.

Schools closure caused interruption to education. Emerging evidence from some of the highest-income countries indicate that the pandemic gave rise to learning losses and increase in inequality. For instance, 45 countries in Europe and Central Asia region closed their schools, affecting 185 million students. Given the abruptness of the situation, teachers and administrators were unprepared for the transition and were forced to build emergency remote learning systems. Despite the supportive remote learning experience, available evidence indicates that school closures resulted in actual learning losses (Donnelly, Patrinos & Greshman, 2021). Research analyzing this outcome from advanced industrialized regions indicate both learning losses and increase in inequality. These losses are found to be higher among students whose parents have less education, findings strengthened by a study that children from socioeconomic advantaged families received more parental support with their studies during the school closure period.

Covid-19 Impact on People's Livelihood/Food Systems and Socioeconomic Wellbeing

Covid-19 was particularly worsened in rural communities of developing societies (Donnelly *et al.*, 2021). The food sector including food distribution and retailing has been put under strain as a result of people panic-buying and

stockpiling food (Jack, 2020). This led to increased concerns about shortages of food products. The high demand on food products affected online food delivery. There is a one percent slowdown in the global agricultural productivity due to the adverse impact of the Covid-19 (Bhat, 2020).

Goring (2021), noted that food security faces several challenges across both production and consumption. According to him, many countries are facing the double burden of hunger and under nutrition. The pandemic increased the proportion of people unable to access food. The emergence of the novel coronavirus brought to the doorsteps of millions globally scores of persons, particularly entrepreneurs with many suffering from loss of incomes (Goring, 2021).

Miles, Bertmann, Morgan, Wentworth and Nesf (2021), commented that supply of food is not available in a reliable, steady, safe and affordable has not been possible because of Covid-19. Covid-19 pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people making them vulnerable into extreme poverty, with huge number of people currently estimated at nearly 690 Million (WHO, 2020). Enterprises are experiencing existential threat. Half of the world's global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihood. Informal economy workers are mostly and particularly vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality healthcare and have lost access to productive assets. Without the means to earn an income, many are unable to feed themselves and their families. For the most of the people, no income means no food or less food and less nutritious food (WHO, 2020).

The waged and self-employed agricultural workers while feeding the world are facing high level of working poverty, malnutrition and poor health; lack of social support, and many of them spurred to continue working in unsafe conditions. Also, when experiencing income losses, they resort to negative coping strategies such as distress, sale of assets, predatory loans, child labour, amongst others (WHO, 2020).

Covid-19 Impact on Public Health and Socioeconomic Wellbeing

Covid-19 crisis have adversely affected, food security, public health, employment and labour issues in particular, health and safety coverage. It has caused unprecedented challenge for healthcare system worldwide in particular, the risk to healthcare workers is one of the greatest vulnerabilities of healthcare system worldwide. The pandemic posed an hindrance for patients accessing essential care through restriction on movement, lack of service provision, stigma, impoverishment from loss of livelihood and avoidance of care due to concerns over contracting the virus (Regan & Chi, 2020).

Bhat (2020), observed that the global society has experienced a dramatic loss of human life alongside unprecedented challenge to public health. The outcome has had a devastating collateral effect on health services utilization. Although some control of the pandemic has been achieved, utilization rates have not returned to the pre-pandemic levels. The Patients deferring or foregoing health services is increasingly high (Delamou, Ayadisidibe, Delvaux, Camera &

Sandwuno, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has affected access and utilization of healthcare for the poorest and most vulnerable. This has affected people's socioeconomic wellbeing and exacerbated existing inequalities in the health system (Donnelly, Patrinos & Gresham, 2021).

Sustainable Livelihood Approach

Livelihood dates back to the work of Robert Chambers in the mid-1980s. A livelihood comprises capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. It is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintains or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in future, while not undermining the natural resources base.

The sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) serves as a tool for the investigation of people's livelihood while visualizing the main factors of influence. In its simplest form, the framework depicts stakeholders as operating in a context vulnerability within which they have access to certain assets. These gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social, institutional and organizational environment.

According to the template, the external environment in which people exist and gain importance through direct impacts upon people's assets status is the vulnerability context (Devereux, 2002). It comprises trends (i.e. demographic trends, resource trends, trends in government, shocks (i.e. human, livestock or crop health shocks, natural hazards, like floods or earthquakes, economic shocks, conflict in form of national or international wars) and seasonality (i.e. seasonality of prices, products or employment opportunities) and represents the part of the framework that lies furthest outside stakeholders' control. This framework views this pandemic as a phenomenon that exist beyond the control of people adversely affecting their socioeconomic wellbeing.

Covid-19 has affected livelihood outcomes such as reduced income, decreased well-being, poor health status, reduced access to services (such as education, health etc.), increased vulnerability by reduced asset status and reduced food security (such as reducing financial capital in order to buy food).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design that was used for the study is survey. It adopted the quantitative approach. Thus, the survey research design enabled the researcher explore the relationship between COVID-19 and socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Study Area

Southern Senatorial District situates in Cross River State. It lies between longitude $9^{\circ}5'$ and $10^{\circ}20'$ East of the Greenwich meridian and latitudes $5^{\circ}16'$ and $4^{\circ}5'$ South of the equator. It is commonly referred to as greater Calabar

district. It is made up of seven (7) local government areas: Biase, Akamkpa, Odukpani, Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Akpabuyo and Bakassi. It has a population of 1,590,200 (NPC, 2016 Population Projection).

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised all the inhabitants of the seven (7) local government areas that constitute the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. Thus, the population according to NPC (2006) are: Akamkpa 200,100, Akpabuyo 363,900; Bakassi 42,300; Biase 224,700; Calabar South 255,999; Calabar Municipality 245,500; Odukpani 275,800 this gives a total population of 1,590,200 (NPC, 2016 Population Projection). Adult citizens of all works of life residing in these communities and comprising those actually involved in various productive activities in these communities constituted the population of the study.

Sample Size

The study was made up of 654 respondents selected from six (6) Local Government Areas (Calabar Municipality was excluded due to its urban status) and eighteen (18) villages.

Sampling Technique

The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study the 3 sub-stratum in each stratum. There were six (6) strata in all. This same procedure of simple random sampling was adopted throughout the 6 strata. Thus, it yielded a total of (3x6 = 18) 18 sub-stratum in the study.

Table 1: Sample distribution by strata and sub-stratum

	STRATA																		TOTAL		
	A			B			C			D			E			F			GT	RES	%
Sub-stratum	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18			
	35	31	34	25	40	35	33	29	38	43	26	31	26	39	35	34	30	36	600	600	100
Total	100			100			100			100			100			100			600	600	100

Source: Field data (2021)

Data Analysis

Hypothesis One

Covid-19 impact on education (literacy) has no significant relationship with socioeconomic wellbeing.

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between COVID-19 impact on education and socioeconomic wellbeing in Southern Cross River State (N = 600)

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal
Covid-19 impact on education				
a. Closure of schools (X_1)	1050	1950	1775	0.878
b. Stagnating educational endeavour (X^2)	1055	1970	1750	0.614
c. No free school meals (X^3)	1040	1945	1780	0.925
d. Digital learning (X^4)	1046	1952	1774	0.860
Socioeconomic wellbeing (y)	950	1650		

Significant at 0.05; critical-r = 0.195, df = 598

Source: Field data (2021).

Table 2 shows that the calculated r-values of 0.878, 0.614, 0.925, 0.860 are greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 0.05 level of significance, with 598 degrees of freedom. This means that COVID-19 impact on education significantly related to socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State.

Hypothesis Two

Covid-19 impact on people’s livelihoods/food systems have no significant association with socioeconomic wellbeing.

Table 3: Chi-square (X^2) contingency analysis of the association between COVID-19 impact on livelihoods/food systems and socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State (N = 600)

Variables	Household income		Total
	High	Low	
Covid-19 livelihoods/food system			
Shortage of food products	55	25	80
Food insecurity	50	45	95
Small retail business threatened	120	30	150
Loss of jobs	60	40	100
Disrupted food supply	32	53	85
Loss productive assets	48	42	90
Total	365	235	600

Source: Field data (2021)

Table 4: Contingency table showing the association between COVID-19 impact on livelihoods/food systems and socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State (n = 600)

Cell	O	E	O - E	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
1	55	48.67	6.33	40.0689	0.82
2	25	31.33	-6.33	40.0689	1.28
3	50	57.79	-7.79	60.6841	1.05
4	45	37.21	7.79	60.6841	1.63
5.	120	91.25	28.75	826.5625	9.06
6	30	58.75	-28.75	826.5625	14.07
7	60	60.83	-0.83	0.6889	0.01
8	40	39.17	0.83	0.6889	0.02
9	32	51.71	-19.71	388.4841	7.51
10	53	33.29	19.71	388.4841	11.67
11	48	54.75	16.75	45.5625	0.83
12	42	35.25	6.75	45.5625	1.29
	600				49.24

Source: Field data (2021)

Calculated (X^2) value = 49.24

Critical (X^2) value = 11.1

Level of significance = 0.05

Degree of freedom = 5

CONCLUSION

Result of analysis in Table 4 show that the calculated (X^2) value of 49.24 is greater than the critical (X^2) of 11.1 at 0.05 level of significance, with 5 degrees of freedom. This means that COVID-19 impact on livelihoods/food system is significantly associated with socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State.

Hypothesis Three

COVID-19 impact on public health has a significant association with socioeconomic wellbeing. Analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Chi-square (X^2) contingency analysis of the association between COVID-19 impact on public health and socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State.

(N = 600)

Variables	Socioeconomic wellbeing		Total
	Increased	Decreased	
COVID-19 public health impact			
Accessibility/utilization of health care	220	100	320
Non accessibility/utilization	125	155	280
Total	345	255	600

Source: Field data (2021)

Table 6: Contingency table showing the association between COVID-19 impact on public health and socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State (n = 600)

Cell	O	E	O - E	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
1	220	184	36	1296	7.04
2	100	136	-36	1296	9.53
3	125	161	-36	1296	8.05
4	155	119	36	1296	10.89
Total	600				35.51

Source: Field data (2021)

Calculated (X^2) value = 35.51

Critical (X^2) value = 3.84

Level of significance = 0.05

Degree of freedom = 1

CONCLUSION

Result of analysis in Table 6 show that the calculated (X^2) value of 35.51 is greater than the critical (X^2) of 3.84 at 0.05 level of significance, with 5 degrees of freedom. This means that COVID-19 impact on public health and socioeconomic wellbeing of Southern Cross River State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of hypothesis one indicates that a significant relationship exists between COVID-19 education (literacy) impact and socioeconomic wellbeing of inhabitants of Southern Cross River State. This in tandem with UNESCO (2020) observation that Covid-19 has affected have suffered adversely all levels of education from pre-school to tertiary education. During the pandemic, many schools introduced various policies to save the educational system from the adverse impacts. Some of these measures included complete closure of schools to targeted closure. According to UNESCO (2020), over 900 million learners suffered negatively from the closure of educational institutions. Although the laudable intention of the authorities towards the closure of schools was curtailing transmission within the institution, the closures had a significant implication for the literacy level of the affected students. In other words, the closure stagnated and lowered the literacy level of the youth.

The findings support the reports of Donnelly *et al.*, (2021) concerning the research outcomes from advanced industrialized nations. These countries experienced learning losses and increase in social inequality. These losses were higher among students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.

The analysis of hypothesis two shows that COVID-19’s impact on people’s livelihoods/food systems adversely affected the socioeconomic wellbeing of inhabitants of Southern Cross River State. The findings support Goring (2021) that food security faces several challenges across both production and consumption. According to him, many nations are facing double burden of hunger and under nutrition with one in three people across the globe currently suffering from some form of malnutrition. The pandemic increased the

proportion of people unable to access food. The emergence of the novel coronavirus brought to the doorsteps of millions globally scores of persons, particularly entrepreneurs with many suffering from loss of incomes.

The findings confirmed WHO (2020) that tens of millions of people have fallen into extreme poverty, with the number of people currently estimated at nearly 690 million. Millions of enterprises faced an existential threat. Informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality healthcare and have lost access to productive assets. Without the means to earn an income many are unable to feed themselves and their families. For the most, no income means no food or less food and less nutritious food.

The analysis of hypothesis three reveals that there is a significant association between Covid-19 impact on public health and socioeconomic wellbeing of inhabitants of Southern Cross River State. The findings are in congruence with Regan and Chi (2020) who averred that the healthcare system worldwide has been affected. The risk to healthcare workers is one of the greatest vulnerabilities of healthcare system worldwide. Additional hindrances occurred for patients accessing essential care through restriction on movement, lack of service provision, stigma, impoverishment from loss of livelihood and avoidance of care due to concerns over contracting the virus.

The findings also agree with Bhat (2020) who observed that the global society has experienced a dramatic loss of human life alongside unprecedented challenge to public health. The outcome had a devastating collateral effect on human services utilization. The findings are consistent with Donnelly *et al.*, (2021), they agree that COVID-19 pandemic has affected access and utilization of health care for the poorest and most vulnerable. They agree further that COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's socioeconomic wellbeing, and exacerbated existing inequalities in the health system.

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