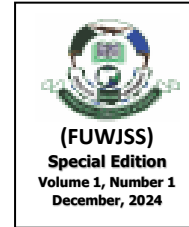


FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HUNGER AMONG ELDERLY PERSONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Since the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, older or elderly persons in Nigeria have expressed concern over the rising costs of living which aggravate hunger and precarious feeding habits among them. Through the lens of the social contract theory of social security, this paper examines fuel subsidy removal induced-hunger as both a human right and public health issue. Evidence for the paper emerged through a systematic review of literature involving accounts of hunger and domestic violence against elderly persons due to fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. The study's findings revealed that the fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria aggravated elderly persons' ability to eat healthily due to high cost of living. Findings also showed that both male and female elderly persons aged 65 years and above, experienced traumatizing adversity and hunger since the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The study concludes that there is poor eating habit among elderly persons in Nigeria since the removal of fuel subsidy and this culminates to domestic violence against them. The study recommends that there is need for better support and care for elderly persons in Nigeria by family members, friends and governments at all levels in this era of fuel subsidy removal.

Keywords: Domestic violence, hunger, perpetrators, elderly persons, fuel subsidy

Introduction

One of the human rights violations that have persisted for all of recorded time in all societies worldwide is domestic violence, especially against elderly persons and children (Tanyi, Andre & Mbah, 2018). Historically, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, domestic abuse against elderly persons has been accepted as typical familial behaviour. Domestic abuse was not officially recognized as a crime until the end of 1970, when criminal justice institutions were required to provide interventional measures and other procedures (Nyataya, 2019).

Tanyi, Andre and Mbah (2018) has noted that there is growing neglect of elderly persons by family and community caregivers and this has complicated the needs of elderly women and men to a distressing level. United Nations Population Division (2015) projects that Nigeria's population of persons over the age of 65 years and above doubled by the year 2020. That of all age groups, the age group 85 years and above considered to being the oldest old is increasing fast in Nigeria. Amidst this demographic reality and the challenges it is unleashing, the Nigerian government at all levels had been hard-pressed to meet the economic, health, psychological, and material well-being of elderly persons, especially as traditional family support systems for the elderly are breaking down and disappearing in the country. Accordingly, domestic violence against elderly persons has become pronounced and usually takes the form of physical, verbal, emotional, economic, and sexual abuse. This ranges from outright neglect to starvation and hunger. In the same way, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized domestic abuse as a widespread problem that primarily affects elderly persons and children (WHO, 2020).

With oil resources as the main stake of Nigeria's socio-economic development and foreign policy (Balouga, 2012); oil resources occupy a prominent place in the nation's power relations, as the struggle for political power is a clear struggle to control oil resources. Despite Nigeria being the largest oil producing country in Africa and sixth in the world, successive Nigerian governments have been unable to use the oil wealth to significantly reduce poverty, provide basic social and economic services that citizens need (Ering & Akpan, 2015). In this

regard, the Nigerian government has always canvassed and lobbied for fuel subsidy removal. Fuel subsidy is a government discount on the market price of fossil fuel to make consumers pay less than the prevailing market price of fuel (Ovaga & Okechukwu, 2022). Although the current government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has successfully removed fuel subsidy, there are disturbing controversies surrounding this removal and this has resulted to mass protests by Nigerians, especially young Nigerians, who regard the fuel subsidy removal as another measure to further subjugate and impoverish ordinary Nigerians. Since after the removal of fuel subsidy, evidence prevail to show that elderly persons in Nigeria increasingly becoming inactive, frail, isolated, abandoned, and exposed to more risks of contracting diseases (Odok, 2023). Even though improved health and sanitary conditions have generally rise life expectancies in recent years (Population Reference Bureau, 2020; United Nations Population Division & United Nations Statistical Division, 2021), the economic, health and general social wellbeing of elderly persons in Nigeria remain uncertain and complicated.

Thus, this paper attempts to improve understanding on the impact of fuel subsidy removal on elderly persons in Nigeria particularly in terms of their eating habits and violation of their fundamental human rights. The paper is divided into three major parts. The first part consists of literature review on themes around fuel subsidy removal and dynamics of hunger and domestic violence in Nigeria. The second part discusses the theoretical framework and methodological approach through which issues in the paper were analysed and examined. The last part of the paper consists of sections wherein findings relating to hunger as a determinant of domestic violence and the prevalence of domestic violence after fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria were presented and discussed. The paper ended with a conclusion section that reiterated that elderly persons in Nigeria have experienced traumatizing adversity and poor eating habits since the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria; and this culminates to domestic violence against them.

Hunger and Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria

Fuel subsidy is a government discount on the market price of fossil fuel to make consumers pay less than the prevailing market price of fuel (Ovaga & Okechukwu, 2022). When subsidies are in place, consumers would pay below the market price per litre of the petroleum product. Globally, there are debates about fuel subsidy because of its huge amount and its effect on citizens' welfare and the fiscal health of a nation. The size of global fossil fuel subsidy is large and is estimated at \$1 trillion in 2022 from \$325 billion in 2018 (International Energy Agency, 2023). This amount is significantly higher than the value of global aid which was estimated at \$204 billion in 2022 and larger than the combined government revenue of developing countries. This has led to calls for the removal of global fossil fuel subsidy so that the saved funds can be channelled to assist the poor and vulnerable in need of humanitarian assistance in developing countries (Couharde & Mouhoud, 2020; Ozili & Ozen, 2021).

However, the removal of fossil fuel subsidy is contentious because there is the argument that fossil fuel subsidy is a form of aid because it makes fuel more affordable for the poor. Despite this favourable argument, the literature documents the negative consequences of fuel subsidy which include increasing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions (Sweeney, 2020), road congestion (McCulloch, Moerenhout & Yang, 2021), road accidents and premature deaths (Parry, Black & Vernon, 2021), foregone tax revenue (Sweeney, 2020) and it increases inequality between the poor and the rich (McCulloch, Moerenhout & Yang, 2021). However, policymakers in many countries are reluctant to remove fuel subsidy and to implement fuel subsidy reforms because such reforms may result in a significant increase in fuel or electricity prices which could lead to economic hardship for low-income and poor citizens, and might lead to massive protests and increase the risk of a revolution or the overthrow of the incumbent government.

In Nigeria, fuel subsidies were first introduced in the 1970s as a response to the oil price shock in 1973 (Adekunle & Oseni, 2021). Fuel subsidies were partially removed in 1986. Since then, the fuel subsidies have been in place. In 2012, the government abruptly removed fuel subsidy. The removal led to massive protests which

were intended for the government to reinstate the fuel subsidy it had removed. The government subsequently reinstated fuel subsidy in 2012 due to the massive protests. Since then, fuel subsidy payment in Nigeria has grown enormously. In 2022, fuel subsidy reached ₦4 trillion (US\$6.088 billion) which amounted to 23 percent of the national budget of ₦17.126 trillion (US\$25.87 billion) in 2022 (Adekunle & Oseni, 2021). As a result, the Nigerian government bemoaned that it could no longer sustain fuel subsidy and the government announced the removal of fuel subsidy in May 2023.

Recent evidence in the literature shows mixed effect of fuel subsidy. Some studies identify some benefits of fuel subsidy and call for transparency in the administration of fuel subsidy while other studies highlight the negative consequences of fuel subsidy and advocate for its removal. For example, Omitogun et al (2021) showed that the removal of fuel subsidy might reduce the amount of carbon emission in the Nigerian economy. Similarly, Adekunle and Oseni (2021) argued that fuel subsidy removal could reduce the growth in carbon emissions through low energy consumption channels even though it could lead to higher energy prices. Asare (2020) argued in support of fuel subsidy removal and that the revenue gained from removing fuel subsidy could provide additional resources for the government to respond with immediate interventions to address the COVID-19 crisis and enable the government to shift resources into more productive spending for long-run post-COVID recovery and resilience (Ozili & Arun, 2023).

Umeji and Eleanya (2021) argue that Nigerian oil wealth has not translated to improved standards of living despite the introduction of fuel subsidy, and that fuel subsidy removal could have severe consequences which can be mitigated by transparency on the part of government in spending the funds saved from fuel subsidy removal for infrastructural development. Also, Ovaga and Okechukwu (2022) argue that fuel subsidy breeds corruption in Nigeria because a group of corrupt people have been working against the functioning of existing refineries and they undermine efforts to build new refineries in Nigeria so that fuel importation would be sustained and fuel subsidy would be retained for the purpose of satisfying their selfish desires. Omotosho (2020) points out that fuel subsidy removal could lead to

higher macroeconomic instability through rising energy prices and inflation in Nigeria. Furthermore, McCulloch, Moerenhout and Yang (2021) showed that many Nigerian citizens oppose fuel subsidy removal or reforms because they believe the government is corrupt and lacks the capability to undertake transparent reforms.

Despite differing views, the fuel subsidy removal has some positive macroeconomic implications such as helping to free up financial resources for the development of other sectors of the economy so that the government can increase spending on education, healthcare, and infrastructure development (Ozili & Arun, 2023). The removal of fuel subsidy could also incentivize domestic refineries to produce more petroleum products, reduce Nigeria's dependence on imported fuel and increase employment. The financial resources saved from fuel subsidy removal can also be channelled to the development of critical public infrastructure, reducing the budget deficit, and generating a budget surplus in the near future, reducing government borrowing and reducing pressure on the exchange rate (Ozili & Arun, 2023). In contrast, fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria has some negative macroeconomic implications which include decreasing economic growth and increasing inflation. Fuel subsidy removal also has some positive microeconomic implications which include the introduction of market-determined pricing mechanisms, curbing corruption associated with fuel subsidy payments, increasing competition, and reinvigorating domestic refineries. In contrast, fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria has some negative microeconomic implications which include increase in poverty, social unrest, and protest, rise in fuel smuggling, rise in crime, increase in the prices of petroleum products and loss of job in the informal sector (Omotosho, 2020).

Dynamics of Hunger and Domestic Violence in Nigeria

The definition of domestic violence varies from place to location and from time to time based on the individual and the goal of the definition, as it occurs in nearly every country on earth (Enemo, 2018). It is astounding, nevertheless, that despite these variations, domestic violence follows comparable patterns throughout the world. While specific numbers may vary geographically, the underlying causes and the nature of the resulting misery are universal. Consequently,

Montgomery (2010) defines domestic violence as the act of abusing someone, particularly an intimate partner, elderly person, children, and/or any other family member, in a domestic environment. Montgomery (2010) goes on to say that the abusers keep an eye on the victim's prescription usage, steal valuable goods from the victim, and threaten the victim and other family members.

According to WHO (2012), the word "domestic violence" refers to abuse between partners, but it can also include abuse of children or elders or abuse by any family member. According to Heise and Garcia-Moreno (2012), domestic violence is defined as any behaviour in an intimate relationship, whether past or present that results in harm to one's physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or financial well-being. In a similar line, Siemieniuk et al. (2010) claimed that there are numerous manifestations of domestic violence, such as threats of physical aggression or assault (biting, kicking, hitting, shoving, restraining, slapping, or throwing objects), emotional abuse, controlling or domineering behaviour, intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse (such as neglect), and economic deprivation. Domestic violence is defined by the Merriam-Webster (2011) dictionary as the inflicting of physical injury on another by one family member or household member; also: a repeated / habitual pattern of such behaviour.

In other words, domestic violence is a fairly common occurrence in today's world and has severe repercussions for both the victim and the perpetrator. It is often classified as a violent crime, but in criminal law, it is viewed as an aggravating circumstance for committing a crime whose actual means of execution is violence (Velkova & Hadjijeska, 2014). Domestic violence, then, is characterized as a collection of behaviours intended to establish dominance over the other by force, intimidation, and manipulation. It is described as the misuse of power in relationships founded on inequality within a family or community.

Domestic violence may take different forms depending on how it is exercised. These include physical abuse, sexual abuse and marital rape, emotional abuse and economic abuse.

- i. *Physical Abuse*: Abuse that involves physical contact with the intention of causing pain, injury, or other forms of bodily suffering

is referred to as physical abuse. As examples of physical abuse, Chhikara et al. (2013) listed slapping, choking, beating, punching, burning, pushing, and other forms of physical contact that cause harm to the victim. He went on to say that acts of physical abuse can also include things like denying the victim access to healthcare, robbing them of sleep or other necessities for survival, or coercing them into consuming drugs or alcohol against their will.

- ii. *Marital Rape (Sexual Abuse)*: Sexual abuse is when a woman, man, elderly person or child is subjected to sexual behaviour or an act of sexuality against their will. Russell (1990) defined marital rape as when a husband or wife uses physical force or intimidation to coerce his wife or husband into having sex against her or his will. Since the beginning of time, marital rape or sexual abuse has been a global issue that has impacted family members, particularly women and children. As noted by Bennice and Resnick (2003), marital rape frequently occurs in conjunction with other violent kinds of control in marriage, such as beatings, torture, sexual abuse, and psychological control. This suggests that marital rape is more common in partnerships that also involve physical violence. This form of domestic violence usually takes place in an isolated or a confine environment where both individuals find themselves.
- iii. *motional/Psychological Abuse*: Psychological or mental abuse can take many forms, such as publicly or privately humiliating the victim, assuming complete control over them, withholding information from them, purposefully causing them to feel less than human, isolating them from friends and family, and subtly threatening to harm others when they show signs of happiness or independence (Chhikara et al., 2013). They also mentioned that depression is a common condition among elderly persons who have experienced emotional abuse, which increases their risk of eating disorders, drug and alcohol misuse, and suicide. Without a doubt, this kind of violence affects how the home develops.
- iv. *Economic Abuse*: When one intimate partner controls the other's access to financial resources, it is considered economic abuse. It makes the victim dependent on the offender for financial support.

According to Weaver et al. (2009), this kind of domestic violence hinders a person's attempts to improve their financial situation and has an adverse effect on their finances. This suggests that the victim will probably wind up in a cycle of poverty. Undoubtedly, all of this research subtly shows that victims of economic abuse are completely dependent on their abusers.

Theoretical Framework

The social contract theory of social security serves as the theoretical foundation of this paper. The theory enunciates that people accept to give up their rights to protect themselves to the state, including the right to public welfare and security, on the basis that the state will provide adequate physical and social security (Dannefer & Feldman, 2017). The theory explains how elderly persons in Nigeria are increasingly becoming inactive, frail, isolated, abandoned, and exposed to more risks of contracting diseases after the removal of fuel subsidy. The explains how the introduction of neoliberal measures and policies in Nigeria has deflated the social contract and worsened the situation of elderly persons in the country. The removal of fuel subsidy and privatization of programmes emasculate the elderly people who have little or no economic means of livelihood. This condition exposes the elderly to diseases and death because it has brought the elderly under the dead weight of privatization, removal of state subsidies, and alienation from social welfare and care (Mbah, 2014). In Nigeria, ageing is perceived as a burden, especially to family members, as the country has failed to provide financial help or benefit from the abundance of experiences that come with old age in the form of wise counsels in the resolution of conflicts or crises in the community. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government seems not to have kept up to this social contract and has reneged on these promises, as most elderly people are not covered by any social policy within the new planned social security scheme, but instead has opted for the creation of employment opportunities for the youth. Thus, the removal of fuel subsidy has intensified the hopelessness of elderly persons in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

Data for this paper emerged through a systematic review of peer-reviewed articles, reports and statutes. In order to achieve symbolic representation, the literature review took an inductive approach and was comprehensive enough to include the full range of dimensions associated with fuel subsidy removal, hunger and domestic violence in Nigeria. This approach allowed for the descriptive and detailed analysis of stories which provided a framework to recognized intersections of lived experiences elderly persons in Nigeria during the period of fuel subsidy removal. Themes from the literature were identified and described through the principle of internal homogeneity.

Fuel Subsidy Removal-Induced Domestic Violence and Hunger among Elderly Persons in Nigeria

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic may not be directly associated with the Nigerian government fuel subsidy removal; however, the COVID-19 is believed to be a contributor to the economic hardship that necessitates governments to cut costs and remove subsidies (UN Women, 2021). Domestic violence against elderly women and girls is believed to have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women, 2021). Comparably, a cross-sectional study using a descriptive design was carried out in Lagos in 2019. The study included 400 adult women, ages 18 to 73, who had been in a close relationship for a minimum of a year. The percentage of intimate relationship violence at the end of the study was 73%. In addition, research from various parts of Nigeria has revealed that intimate partner violence (IPV) affects 42% of the North, 29% of the South West, 78.8% of the South East, and 41% of the South-South (Morohunfola, 2021; Enemo, 2018). From the data above, it shows an unprecedented increase of domestic violence during the Covid-19 lockdown with an adverse effect on the individual, family and the society at large (Morohunfola, 2021).

According to Morohunfola's (2021) study, rising stress and tension brought on by job loss or income loss (80%), misbehaving children (50%), an increase in alcohol and drug use (38%), and disagreements over childcare and housework responsibilities (33%)

were the main causes of domestic violence against women and children during the COVID-19 lockdown. A cross-sectional study using a descriptive design was carried out in Lagos in 2019. The study included 400 adult women, ages 18 to 73, who had been in a close relationship for a minimum of a year. The percentage of intimate relationship violence at the end of the study was 73%. In addition, research from various parts of Nigeria has revealed that intimate partner violence (IPV) affects 42% of the North, 29% of the South West, 78.8% of the South East, and 41% of the South-South (Enemo, 2018). Another study that examined the increase of food prices due to fuel subsidy removal in Taraba State showed that that 88% of the respondents agreed that costs of food has increased due to fuel subsidy removal.

Nigerian customary rules do not seem to have much of an impact on the rising issue of domestic violence. According to Morohunfolo (2021), customary laws in Nigeria that are typically integrated with cultural elements support the continuation of practices that condone violence against women, child marriage, female genital mutilation, detrimental widow treatment, and inheritance practices. Additionally, some cultures lack the necessary legal frameworks to adequately compensate victims of domestic abuse. Igbo women were found to be significantly more likely than Yoruba women to have experienced sexual and emotional violence (Morohunfolo, 2021). In contrast to Yoruba women, Hausa women were considerably less likely to have experienced emotional, sexual, or physical abuse (Morohunfolo, 2021). Supporting this further, Enemo (2018) contended that although there are general laws in Nigeria that protect people from violence, neither men nor women are expressly protected against domestic abuse by the legal system. This identifies the only explanation for the rise in domestic violence against women in developing countries around the world: the absence of strict penalties for offenders from the law or statutory bodies.

In 2021, Morohunfolo delineated a legislative framework intended to safeguard Nigerian states against domestic abuse and these laws include:

- ✓ Violence Against Person's Prohibition Act 2015: this law is only applicable in FCT Abuja, some States which includes

Anambra, Bauchi, Enugu, Kaduna and Oyo states have also passed it into their law.

- ✓ Protection Against Domestic Violence Law (PADVL): the law is only applicable in Lagos State.
- ✓ Ekiti State Gender Base Violence Law
- ✓ The Ebonyi State Protection Against Domestic Violence Law, 2007
- ✓ The Cross River Domestic Violence and Maltreatment of Widows' Prohibition Law, 2014.

Domestic abuse never occurs in a vacuum, affecting simply the victims and their close relatives. In actuality, there are repercussions that spread to the whole community. Future behavioural issues are more likely to arise in children who see violence against one of their parents. In Nigeria, one in four youngsters is exposed to violence on a yearly basis. These kids are probably more hostile, irascible, anxious, and mentally unstable. Imagine for a moment this enormous number of kids growing up and beginning their own families. Abuse in the home is a taught behaviour. Male offspring who observe their mothers being mistreated by their fathers are far more likely to act out against their relationships as adults. Domestic abuse at home soon develops into a chain reaction that spreads widely and doesn't consider who might be its next victim.

It appears that although some people may have healed from seeing the abuse, others will inevitably carry on the abusive cycle inside their own families. Domestic abuse breaks down families over time, generation after generation. Domestic violence, however, has a far more devastating effect on communities and entire societies than it does on the fundamental family unit. Domestic abuse has enormous costs to society. Numerous psychological illnesses originating from marital violence are manifested by African women. According to Umubyeyi, Mogren, Ntaganira, and Krantz (2014), women in Nigeria who experience domestic abuse fit the criteria for psychiatric disorders, with depression being the most common.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria has negative impact on elderly persons as this has led to increase in the prices of goods and

services, especially the prices of food. This condition has exposed elderly persons in Nigeria to diseases and hardship; thus, undermining the very essence why the government exists: to ensure social security for its citizens. It is recommended that the Nigerian government should carefully reconsider the impact of removing fuel subsidy on citizens and provide other institutional welfare initiatives to cushion the effect of fuel subsidy removal on elderly persons in the country. Also, other social protection measures and social safety nets, such as unemployment benefits and cash transfers, can be adopted by the Nigerian government. It is also important for the Nigerian government to introduce economic reforms that lead to a more inclusive society in Nigeria.

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