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Middle East Crisis and Gender Inequities in Nigeria: Effects on Household Welfare, Employment, and Women's Economic Survival

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between the Middle East crisis and gender inequities in Nigeria with particular emphasis on household welfare, employment, and women's economic survival. The persistent political instability and armed conflicts in the Middle East, especially tensions involving Iran and other regional actors, have generated global economic disruptions affecting oil prices, inflation, food security, and transportation costs across developing nations. Nigeria, despite being a major crude oil producer, remains economically vulnerable to external oil market fluctuations because of its dependence on imported refined petroleum products and fragile economic structures. The study adopted a qualitative review approach using existing scholarly literature, policy reports, newspaper publications, and international development reports to analyze how the Middle East crisis has contributed to widening gender disparities in Nigeria. Findings revealed that women bear disproportionate socioeconomic burdens during periods of global economic instability due to their concentration in informal employment, caregiving responsibilities, and low-income livelihood activities. The crisis has negatively affected household welfare through rising food prices, transportation costs, and declining purchasing power. It has also weakened women's participation in economic activities by reducing business profitability, increasing unemployment vulnerability, and expanding unpaid domestic labour. Furthermore, the study found that women adopt difficult survival mechanisms such as multiple informal jobs, reduction in food consumption, and increased dependency burdens to cope with worsening economic conditions. The paper concluded that the Middle East crisis has intensified existing gender inequalities in Nigeria and exposed the structural vulnerabilities affecting women's economic and social well-being. The study recommended gender-responsive economic policies, social protection programmes, employment support initiatives, and improved investment in women's economic empowerment as strategies for reducing the adverse effects of global crises on Nigerian women.

Keywords: Middle East Crisis, Gender Inequities, Household Welfare, Women's Economic Survival, Employment, Inflation, Nigeria, Women Empowerment

1. Introduction

The Middle East has remained one of the most politically unstable regions in the contemporary global system due to recurring wars, armed confrontations, sanctions, terrorism, and diplomatic tensions involving countries such as Iran, Israel, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen. The recent escalation of tensions involving Iran and its allies has intensified disruptions in global oil supply chains, international trade routes, energy markets, and food systems. Although these conflicts occur outside Africa, their economic and social consequences are deeply felt in developing countries that are heavily

dependent on imported refined petroleum products and global commodity markets, including Nigeria. Rising crude oil prices, inflationary pressure, transportation costs, and food insecurity triggered by Middle East instability have produced severe socioeconomic consequences across Nigerian households [1].

Nigeria occupies a strategic but vulnerable position within the global oil economy. Despite being one of Africa's largest crude oil producers, the country remains highly dependent on imported petroleum products, foreign exchange fluctuations, and externally determined fuel prices. Consequently, geopolitical instability in the Middle East often translates into higher domestic fuel prices, inflation, rising transport costs, and declining purchasing power among Nigerian citizens. Recent studies and international reports have shown that periods of global economic crisis disproportionately affect women because women are more concentrated in informal employment, unpaid caregiving, low-income trading activities, and economically insecure occupations.

Gender inequity refers to the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, power, and privileges between men and women within society [2], [3]. In Nigeria, gender inequality manifests in employment opportunities, income distribution, political participation, access to healthcare, education, ownership of productive resources, and decision-making structures. Although Nigeria has witnessed gradual improvements in women's participation in education and economic activities, structural inequalities rooted in patriarchy, cultural practices, poverty, and weak social protection systems continue to limit women's socioeconomic advancement. Studies have established that economic shocks often widen existing gender gaps because women generally possess fewer economic assets and weaker social safety nets than men.

The relationship between the Middle East crisis and gender inequities in Nigeria can be understood through three major dimensions: household welfare, employment, and women's economic survival. These variables are interconnected because economic crises alter household income patterns, labour market participation, and survival strategies within families [4]. Women frequently absorb the heaviest burden during economic downturns through increased unpaid domestic labour, reduced nutritional intake, expansion of informal survival activities, and withdrawal of girls from school. Previous studies on fuel, food, and financial crises in Nigeria found that women and children experience the greatest socioeconomic vulnerability during periods of inflation and economic instability [5], [6].

Conceptual terms

Concept of Gender inequality

Gender inequity refers to unfair treatment or unequal access to opportunities, resources, and privileges based on gender differences, often resulting in disadvantages against women and girls in social, economic, and political spheres [7]. The World Health Organization defines gender inequities as avoidable inequalities between men and women arising from unequal social arrangements, discriminatory practices, and power imbalances within society (World Health Organization). Adeosun and Owolabi described gender inequity as a condition in which women experience systematic exclusion from economic opportunities, political participation, ownership of productive resources, and decision-making processes due to structural and cultural barriers. According to the UNDP, gender inequity involves disparities in access to education, healthcare, employment, income, and social protection between men and women resulting from institutional discrimination and unequal power relations [8], [9]. Aina defined gender inequity as the unequal distribution of rights, responsibilities, privileges, and access to societal resources between men and women within both public and private institutions..

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative review method based on documentary analysis and systematic examination of existing literature related to the Middle East crisis and gender inequities in Nigeria. The review method was considered appropriate because the study relied on secondary data obtained from scholarly journal articles, textbooks, policy documents, conference papers, government publications, international development reports, and credible media sources discussing the economic and gender implications of global crises in Nigeria.

Relevant materials were sourced from databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus-indexed journals, reports from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Women, Reuters reports, and publications from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The study specifically reviewed empirical and theoretical works addressing the effects of global economic instability, oil price fluctuations, inflation, household welfare, employment conditions, and women's economic survival in developing countries with emphasis on Nigeria.

The reviewed literature was analyzed thematically under major variables including household welfare, employment, and women's economic survival. Content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and socioeconomic implications of the Middle East crisis on women and vulnerable households in Nigeria. The method enabled the study to synthesize existing knowledge, identify gaps in literature, and provide comprehensive explanations regarding how international geopolitical crises contribute to gender inequities within the Nigerian context.

3. Results and Discussion

One major effect of the Middle East crisis on gender inequality in Nigeria is the deterioration of household welfare. Household welfare refers to the living conditions and well-being of family members measured through access to food, healthcare, housing, education, transportation, and basic social services. The disruption of global oil markets resulting from Middle East conflicts has contributed to persistent inflation in Nigeria, particularly in transportation, cooking gas, food commodities, and electricity costs [10]. Reuters recently reported that tensions involving Iran and broader Middle East instability significantly increased fuel and commodity prices in Nigeria, thereby worsening inflationary pressure on households.

Women are particularly vulnerable to declining household welfare because they are traditionally responsible for household management, food preparation, child care, and family survival. In many Nigerian homes, women must stretch shrinking household income to meet rising food and transportation costs [11]. Practical evidence from urban centres such as Abuja, Kano, Lagos, and Port Harcourt indicates that many women now spend longer hours searching for affordable food items, cooking alternatives, and transportation options due to inflationary pressures. Market women, petty traders, widows, and female-headed households have been severely affected by rising prices of rice, cooking oil, flour, kerosene, and transportation fares. Studies on inflation and dietary diversity in Nigeria showed that economic crises significantly reduce household nutritional quality and disproportionately affect women's welfare and food security.

The crisis has widened gender disparities in employment and labour participation. Women in Nigeria dominate the informal sector where income security is weak and social protection is nearly absent. Many women operate small-scale businesses dependent on transportation, imported goods, and unstable market conditions. Rising fuel prices associated with Middle East instability increase transportation expenses, reduce consumer purchasing power, and weaken small businesses run by women. Female traders who

depend on interstate movement of goods often experience reduced profits because transportation costs consume a substantial portion of their capital [12].

The International Labour Organization and gender scholars have repeatedly argued that women are often the first victims of economic contractions because they occupy more vulnerable employment positions. Recent UNDP findings revealed that economic crises linked to global debt and conflict situations disproportionately eliminate women's jobs and increase unpaid care responsibilities. In Nigeria, many women engaged in tailoring, hairdressing, food vending, teaching in private schools, and agricultural processing have experienced declining patronage due to inflation and reduced household spending [13]. In northern Nigeria particularly, many women operating local food businesses and small agricultural enterprises have reported severe declines in profitability because of escalating transportation and production costs.

The Middle East crisis has also intensified challenges relating to women's economic survival. Economic survival refers to the strategies individuals adopt to sustain income, livelihood, and basic living conditions during economic hardship. Nigerian women frequently rely on informal coping mechanisms such as petty trading, home-based businesses, cooperative savings, subsistence farming, and multiple low-income activities to survive periods of economic instability [14]. However, inflationary shocks weaken these survival strategies by increasing operational costs and reducing household purchasing power.

Research on the food, fuel, and financial crises in Nigeria demonstrated that women adopt harmful coping mechanisms during economic shocks, including reducing food intake, withdrawing children from school, increasing child labour, and engaging in exploitative labour conditions. In many rural communities, women farmers face rising fertilizer and transportation costs due to global energy instability linked to Middle East tensions. Urban women increasingly engage in informal street trading, domestic labour, and low-paying survival activities to support household income. These pressures reinforce gender inequities because women bear a disproportionate share of economic adjustment burdens while still remaining marginalized in formal economic and political structures.

Another dimension of economic survival concerns unpaid care work. During economic crises, governments often struggle to maintain adequate social services, healthcare systems, and welfare support. As public services weaken, women absorb additional caregiving responsibilities within households [15]. Women care for sick relatives, manage household food shortages, supervise children, and provide emotional support under worsening economic conditions. The unpaid labour burden reduces women's time for education, entrepreneurship, political participation, and formal employment. Scholars have argued that such invisible labour sustains household survival during crises but simultaneously entrenches gender inequality.

Previous empirical studies support the argument that global economic crises worsen gender inequities in Nigeria. Adeosun and Owolabi found that gender inequality in Nigeria is sustained by unequal economic structures, labour market discrimination, and limited access to productive resources among women. Similarly, Umeh, Onwuka, and Melugbo observed that structural and cultural barriers continue to confine Nigerian women to economically vulnerable positions despite increasing globalization. Studies conducted by the Overseas Development Institute on food, fuel, and finance crises in Nigerian states revealed that women and children suffer the most severe consequences of inflationary shocks and economic instability.

The current Middle East crisis therefore represents more than an international security issue; it has become a significant socioeconomic and gender issue within Nigeria. The crisis amplifies existing inequalities by increasing poverty, reducing women's economic opportunities, worsening household welfare conditions, and intensifying survival burdens placed on women [16]. Since women constitute a substantial proportion

of Nigeria's informal labour force and household managers, understanding how international geopolitical conflicts shape gender relations and economic vulnerability has become essential for policy formulation, gender-responsive governance, and sustainable national development [17].

4. Conclusion

The study established that the Middle East crisis has significant implications for gender inequities in Nigeria through its effects on household welfare, employment, and women's economic survival. Global tensions and conflicts in the Middle East have disrupted international oil markets, increased inflationary pressures, and worsened economic hardship within Nigerian households. These conditions disproportionately affect women because they occupy more vulnerable economic positions within society and carry substantial domestic and caregiving responsibilities. The study further revealed that rising food prices, transportation costs, unemployment, and declining purchasing power have weakened household welfare and intensified poverty among women and female-headed households. Women operating in informal economic sectors face severe challenges due to reduced patronage, unstable markets, and increasing operational costs. The crisis has also expanded unpaid domestic labour and survival burdens borne by women, thereby reinforcing structural gender inequalities already existing in Nigeria.

The paper concluded that international geopolitical conflicts such as the Middle East crisis are not merely foreign policy issues but also socioeconomic and gender-related concerns with direct consequences for developing nations like Nigeria. Without deliberate gender-sensitive interventions, global economic shocks will continue to widen inequalities and undermine women's economic empowerment and social well-being. Based on the findings, the study recommends the following;

- 1) The Nigerian government should develop gender-responsive economic policies aimed at protecting women and vulnerable households during periods of global economic instability.
- 2) Social protection programmes such as conditional cash transfers, food support schemes, transportation subsidies, and healthcare assistance should be strengthened to cushion the effects of inflation on women and low-income families.
- 3) Government and financial institutions should provide low-interest loans and business support programmes specifically targeted at women operating small-scale and informal businesses.
- 4) Investment in women's education, vocational training, and digital entrepreneurship should be expanded to improve women's economic resilience during economic crises.
- 5) The government should diversify Nigeria's economy beyond dependence on crude oil to reduce vulnerability to external geopolitical shocks arising from Middle East conflicts. Labour policies should be strengthened to improve women's access to decent employment opportunities, equal wages, and workplace protection.
- 6) Civil society organizations and international development agencies should intensify advocacy on gender-sensitive economic planning and women's inclusion in national development strategies. There should be increased funding for rural women farmers through agricultural subsidies, improved transportation systems, and access to modern farming inputs.

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