

## **FIRST WAVE OF COVID-19 AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN BENIN METROPOLIS, EDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The study made attempt to empirically investigate the challenges of entrepreneurship during the first wave of Covid-19 with reference to Benin metropolis, Edo state, Nigeria. The study used a cross-sectional survey design. Questionnaire was used to generate data from the entrepreneurs, covering a total of 400 respondents across the four LGAs that made up Benin metropolis. The study used 100 respondents from each local government area comprising: Egor, Oredo, Ovia North East and Ikpona Okha. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to analyze the socio-demographic variables and the objective of the study. Results show that some of the major challenges entrepreneurs faced during the lockdown due to Covid-19 were in areas of limited operation hours, low demand, and low revenue which negatively affect entrepreneurship in Benin municipal. Conclusively, the study shows that first wave of Covid-19 adversely affected entrepreneurship in Benin metropolis; due to the lockdown which restricted movement of people, goods and services. The study recommends that the state government should improve infrastructure, reduce taxes, levies and provide friendly environment in-order for the entrepreneurs to recover from the losses arising from the lockdown during the first wave of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Covid-19, Entrepreneurship, Pandemic, Wave.

### **1. Introduction**

Historically, necessity has been the mother of invention, and most times crisis generates necessity and this is what Covid 19 has brought to the world and is helping advance health-care systems of the world especially Nigeria, where there was/is no empirical health service. A cluster of pneumonia of unknown etiology popularly known as Coronavirus (Covid-19) appeared in Wuhan in December 2019 (Bouey, 2020, Karunathilake, 2020). On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the situation a public health emergency of global anxiety. The Covid-19 spread rapidly to Europe, North America and even Africa in early 2020. In 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, the incident case was recorded in Nigeria (Nigeria Center for

Disease Control (NCDC) 2020), after which the disease incidence grew in major three states, namely: Lagos and Ogun, and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja and later spread to other states and communities of Nigeria within a very short interval. The incidence of the pandemic in Nigeria led to the lockdown of the national borders and subnational borders in March 27<sup>th</sup> same year leading to a shutdown of business activities in the country except for those providing essential services. The lockdown almost led to the crippling of business activities in the private sector which entrepreneurship holds sway. Private and public businesses were significantly shut-down which might have affected the cash flows of most entrepreneurs because of restriction of movement and business hours, especially in Benin city which is the capital of Edo state, Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship is vital and significant in facilitating economies get through an economic crisis and in generating improvements that shape economies after a crisis especially one like Covid-19. Entrepreneurship is critical to the development of societies and the world. Entrepreneurs however, cannot work in isolation; they need a friendly environment to thrive. So any distress or disruption challenges entrepreneurship just as the first wave of Covid-19 did.

Every crisis brings challenges and threats to mankind and also to entrepreneurs and their businesses, whether initiated by human behaviour, natural disasters or economic mechanisms (Doern, Williams, & Vorley, 2019). As a response to mitigate coronavirus spread and save lives, governments in affected states imposed desperate measures of social distancing, widespread lockdown, and restrictions on travelling, movement, and people gatherings. Entrepreneurship was however affected by the policy. Some entrepreneurs started moving their business activities online. However, not everything could be solved conveniently online and not every entrepreneurs could do their businesses online. Some entrepreneurs had to close their businesses temporarily as a result of governmental restrictions; others had to impose precautions and to run their activities in reduced extent. These acts posed some challenges to entrepreneurship in Benin metropolis. This study therefore tends to investigate some of the challenges faced by entrepreneurs during the first wave of Covid -19 in Benin metropolis especially in the areas of hours of operation due to the lockdown, customers demand and entrepreneurs' revenue.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

#### **2.1.1 Concept of Entrepreneurship**

According to Gartner in Ofili (2014), an entrepreneur is a person, working within an

existing organization or independently, who identifies a business opportunity within a given market and sets up an enterprise or subsidiary to take advantage of the opportunity. Entrepreneurs identify new markets; alter existing processes and ways of doing business in order to create something new, with improved value to the community within which the entrepreneur carries out his/her business (Hitt, Ireland, Camp & Seton, 2001). The entrepreneur is quick to identify opportunities within a given market (Sull, 2004), having identified these opportunities, he/she devises ways of curbing all potential and existing obstacles within the market environment (Kouriloff, 2000) and make a living through it. Even though entrepreneurs derive pleasure in identifying opportunities to satisfy personal aspirations, they also seek to get commensurate financial reward for his/her efforts. Entrepreneurs are a vital source of a country's economy. They boost the economy by introducing innovative technologies, services, products, and by providing new opportunities and jobs that contribute to the economy (Liu, Yipeng, Jong Min Lee, & Celia (2020). Entrepreneurship is an essential driver of societal health and wealth. It is also a formidable engine of economic growth. It promotes the essential innovation required not only to exploit new opportunities, but promote productivity, and create employment.

According to Ratten (2020) entrepreneurship is a process of designing a new business or running an already existing business that was previously initiated on a small scale. The promotion of entrepreneurship has been and will continue to be pivotal to several governments for the foreseeable future, especially considering the significant negative impacts on economies due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Entrepreneurship holds the key for creating employment in times of any crisis. According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2020) Entrepreneurship needs to be supported to help economies around the world address the economic disruptions caused by COVID-19.

### **2.1.2 How Global Health Crisis (Covid-19) Impacted on Entrepreneurship**

Unarguably, Covid-19 has greatly affected entrepreneurship. The argument is on the side of the effect which is either positive or negative. There is an argument stating that these effects are perceptual and act as a double-edged sword (Shane 2011). In the future, these effects might be more negative and will have a negative impact and discourage new entrepreneurs, whereas, some suggest that these effects might have a positive impact, and can be a source of advancement by providing learning opportunities and new business tactics (Brown & Rocha 2020). Covid-19 has also enhanced the sense of competition among entrepreneurs and existing businesses (Sterk & Sedlak 2020). Some of the challenging effects of Covid 19 are in the areas

of productivity and employment which are discussed below.

***Decline in productivity:*** With facilities being shut down temporarily, or permanently, some entrepreneurs were compelled to terminate their employees or send them on unpaid leave, and even a slight decline in the number of employees has led to decreased productivity and serious issues in businesses (Nicola, Maria, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Ahmed , Ahmed, Christos, & Maliha, 2020a). During this extraordinary time, staff also experienced mental stress due to work or family pressures, which had a cumulative impact on their productivity over these months, making it difficult for the entrepreneurs to meet up demands amid competition in the world (Ozili & Arun 2020).

***Loss of employment:*** Activities of entrepreneurs elevate the productivity of firms which in turn boosts the economy, but in the first wave of pandemic of Covid-19, an extensive structural change has been observed across the globe, by exhibiting replacement in established and sclerotic firms (Nicola, Maria, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Ahmed, Ahmed, Christos, & Maliha ,2020b). These changes at the micro level have resulted in an overall recession on the economies of the world, due to the decrease in activities of entrepreneurship. Many established entrepreneurs were compelled to reduce their production or number of operation hours causing a drastic decrease in the demand for labour which led to increase in unemployment (Fernandes, 2020).

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Imanche, Tian, Tasinda and Salisu (2020) studied effect of covid-19 pandemic on small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria. The focus of the study was to examine the effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on SMEs in Nigeria. The implication of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria's economy, and measures that have been put in place to minimize these effects were addressed. The study used secondary data and content analysis. The study revealed that the cessation of movement, the reduction in consumer spending power, and decrease in imports is negatively affecting Nigerian SMEs. However, there are government policies set in place to protect SMEs, but there is a need for more efforts and interventions to enable them to survive the consequence of the pandemic.

Fairlie (2020) studied the impact of covid-19 on small business owners: evidence of early-stage losses from the April 2020 current population survey. The study provided the first analysis of impacts of the pandemic on the number of active small businesses in the United States using nationally representative data from the April 2020 CPS – the first month fully capturing early effects from the pandemic. The number of active business

owners in the United States plummeted by 3.3 million or 22 percent over the crucial two-month window from February to April 2020. The drop in business owners was the largest on record, and losses were felt across nearly all industries and even for incorporated businesses. African-American businesses were hit especially hard experiencing a 41 percent drop. Latinx business owners fell by 32 percent, and Asian business owners dropped by 26 percent. Simulations indicate that industry compositions partly placed these groups at a higher risk of losses. Immigrant business owners experienced substantial losses of 36 percent. Female-owned businesses were also disproportionately hit by 25 percent. These findings of early-stage losses to small businesses have important policy implications and may portend longer-term ramifications for job losses and economic inequality.

Aderemi, Ojo, Ifeanyi and Efunbajo (2020) studied the impact of corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic on small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria: A critical case study. The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on selected small and medium enterprises in Nigeria, with a view to ascertaining the impact of lockdown on SMEs engaging in three essentials- food and consumables, pharmaceuticals, oil and gas in Sango-Ota industrial area of Ogun state, Nigeria. Data were collected with the administration of structured set of questionnaire on 100 SMEs which were selected purposively. Findings from the analysis showed that the enterprises experienced moderate reduction in production and sales during the lockdown. However, the surveyed enterprises experienced a spike in reduction of contracts and deliveries.

### **3. Data and Methods**

The study used a cross-sectional survey research design conducted among entrepreneurs in Benin city metropolis comprising of Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba-Okha and Ovia North East local councils, Edo state. For the study, a questionnaire was developed using face validity to elicit information from the entrepreneurs. The face validity was used to determine the validity of the instrument while Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the study which gave a value of 0.75 (75%) which means that there is consistency in the instrument (questionnaire). The questionnaire has two sections. The first section contains the socio-demographic details of entrepreneurs while second two covered the research objective. A total of four hundred (400) entrepreneurs were purposively selected across the four local government areas that make up the Benin City metropolis of Edo state (one hundred from each local government area). The questionnaire is based on Likert scaling as this proved to be most appropriate for the study because it is one of the most frequently used numerical scales to measure attributes and behaviors in an organizational

research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) was used to analyze the socio-demographic variables and the objective of the study.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Discussions

A total of four hundred (400) copies questionnaires were administered and three hundred and eighty (380) questionnaires were duly completed and retrieved back after careful monitoring and supervision.

**Table 1: Socio demographic result**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender:</b> Male	143	37.6
Female	237	62.4
<b>Age:</b> 21-30	88	26.6
31-40	90	27.3
41-50	164	36.4
above 50	38	9.7
<b>Education:</b> No Formal Education	3	0.8
Primary Six	8	2.1
WAEC	59	15.5
NCE/OND	150	39.5
HND/B.Sc	119	31.3
Master and Above	41	10.8

**Source:** Authors' computation 2021

The result in table 1 revealed that out of the three hundred and eighty (380) entrepreneurs who returned their questionnaire, two hundred and thirty seven (237) representing 62.4% are female while one hundred and forty three (143) representing 37.6% are male entrepreneurs. This indicates that there are more female entrepreneurs in Benin city metropolis , Edo state, when compared to their male folks.

The result also revealed that entrepreneurs within the age bracket of 21-30 are eighty-eight (88) representing 26.6%, those within the age bracket of 31-40 are ninety (90) representing 27.3% , those within 41-50 years of age are one hundred and sixty four (164) representing 36.4% while those above 50 years of age are thirty eight (38) representing 9.7%.This indicates that most of the entrepreneurs in in Benin city metropolis are within the age bracket of 41-50 years of age.

For education, the result revealed that entrepreneurs with No formal education are

three (3) representing 0.8%, Primary six holders are eight (8) representing 2.1%, SSCE/WAEC are fifty nine (9) representing 15.5%, OND/NCE holders are one hundred fifty (150) representing 39.5%, HND/B.Sc have one hundred and nineteen (119) representing 31.3% while Masters and above are forty one (41) representing 10.8%. The indicates that most entrepreneurs in Benin city metropolis are NCE/OND holders.

**Table 2: Challenges of entrepreneurship during 1<sup>st</sup> wave of covid-19**

s/n	Questions	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	lockdown due to COVID - 19 pandemic has reduced my revenues	204 (53.7)	133 (35.0)	43 (11.3)	0 (0)
2	lockdown due to COVID - 19 pandemic has led to difficulty in paying workers salaries	154 (41)	187 (49)	39 (10)	0 (0)
3	lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has reduced my sales	212 (55.8)	133 (35.0)	35 (9.2)	0 (0)
4	lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has increased my losses	204 (53.7)	95 (25.0)	81 (21.3)	0 (0)
5	lockdown due to COVID -19 pandemic has led to a drop in customer demand	137 (36.1)	130 (34.2)	113 (29.7)	0 (0)
6	lockdown due to COVID - 19 pandemic has led to shortage in cash flow leading to loss of revenue	167 (43.9)	145 (38.2)	68 (17.9)	0 (0)
7	COVID- 19 pandemic has led increase of expenses because of the provision of personal protective equipment for workers	137 (36.1)	134 (35.3)	109 (28.7)	0 (0)
8	lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has led limited operation hours	167 (43.9)	156 (41.1)	57 (15.0)	0 (0)
9	lockdown due to COVID -19 pandemic has reduced production	161 (42.4)	137 (36.1)	82 (21.6)	0 (0)
10	There is shortage of workers in my business because of fear of infection	137 (36.1)	130 (34.2)	113 (29.7)	0 (0)

**Source:** Authors' computation (2021)

The result of Table 2 revealed that 53.7% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID- 19 pandemic has reduced their revenues, 35% agreed, 11.3% disagree and none strongly disagreed. This means that Covid-19 negatively affected the revenues of entrepreneurs in Benin metropolis. This affirms the studies of Imanche, et al (2020) who found that cessation of movement during the lockdown period reduced consumers spending thereby reducing revenues for entrepreneurs and

Aderemi, et al (2020) who found that the lockdown made businesses to have a moderate reduction in production and sales. These reductions in production and sales have direct effect on the revenue of entrepreneurs. Also, it was revealed that 41% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID- 19 pandemic has led to difficulty in paying workers' salaries, 49% agreed, 10% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means that Covid-19 negatively affected the ability of entrepreneurs to pay salaries to workers in Benin metropolis. A reduction in sales, production and consumer spending will definitely affect entrepreneurs' ability to pay salaried.

Therefore, this study supports that of Imanche, et al (2020) and Aderemi, et al (2020). In same vein, 55.8% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has reduced their sales, 35% agreed, 9.2% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means that Covid-19 negatively affected the sales of entrepreneurs in Benin metropolis This finding is an affirmation with Fairlie (2020), who found that businesses dropped by 22% in the first two months of the lockdown in United States and Aderemi, et al (2020), who found that businesses in Nigeria experienced moderate reduction in sales. For loses, of the entrepreneurs 53.7% strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has increased their losses, 25% agreed, 21.3% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means that Covid-19 negatively affected the revenues of entrepreneurs which led to losses in their businesses in Benin metropolis. This is in-line with the study of Fairlie (2020), who found that businesses in US dropped by 22% and owners of immigrant businesses experienced losses up to 36%.

For drop in demand, of the entrepreneurs revealed that 36.1% strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has led to a drop in customer demand, 34.2% agreed, 29.7% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means entrepreneurs in Benin metropolis experienced drop in demand. This is in-line with the study of Imanche, et al (2020), Fairlie (2020) and Aderemi, et al (2020). For cash-flow, the result revealed that, 43.9% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has led to shortage in cash flow leading to loss of revenue, 38.2% agreed, 17.9% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means that Covid-19 negatively affected the cash flows of entrepreneurs in Benin metropolis. This is in-line with the studies of Nicola, et al (2020a), Aderemi, et al (2020) and Fairlie (2020). The result also revealed that 36.1% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that COVID-19 pandemic has led increase of expenses because of the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers, 35.3% agreed, 28.7% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. On operating hours, the result revealed that 43.9% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has led

limited operation hours, 41.1% agreed, 15% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means that the lockdown led to reduction in operating hours.

This is in-line with the studies of Aderemi, et al (2020) who found that a moderate reduction in production and Fernandes (2020) who found that many established entrepreneurs were compelled to reduce their production or number of operation hours. On reduction in production, the result revealed that 42.4% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has reduced production, 36.1% agreed, 21.6% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This means there was reduction in production during the lockdown in Benin metropolis. This is in-line with the study of Aderemi, et al, and Fernandes (2020) who found that many established entrepreneurs were compelled to reduce their production or number of operation hours causing a drastic decrease in the demand for labour which led to increase in unemployment. And for reduction in work force, the result revealed that 36.1% of the entrepreneurs strongly agreed that there was shortage of workers in business because of fear of infection by COVID-19, 34.2% agreed, 29.7% disagreed and none strongly disagreed.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact are evolving rapidly, with the impact of the crisis not only driven and shaped by the repercussions of the spread of the virus on the broader economy and Edo state in particular but also the nature of the government response in terms of movement restrictions and other emergency measures. These restrictions and other emergency measures have challenged entrepreneurs in Benin metropolis especially in the areas revenue, payment of salaries, drop in sales, and demand, drop in cash flows, reduction in operating hours and production and even workforce as proved by the study. This study has investigated the challenges of entrepreneurship during the first wave of Covid-19. The study covered Benin metropolis, Edo state, Nigeria. The results of the study suggested that the pandemic, as well as governmental mobility restrictions (i.e. partial and total "lockdowns"), have both had significant effects on entrepreneurship as reported by entrepreneurs in the sample. Specifically, the study showed clearly that Covid-19 negatively affected entrepreneurs in Benin metropolis in the areas of revenue, payment of salaries, drop in sales etc. It is obvious that Covid-19 will open a new chapter of entrepreneurship because they need to find ways to continue to provide their customers with the goods and services they need; to figure out ways to adapt and help others adapt to the challenges associated with maintaining physical distance; and to seek to solve current problems.



Given entrepreneurship critical role in economic development at a broader level and business start-ups at the micro level, it is imperative that a conscious effort be made to popularize entrepreneurship as a career option in Benin metropolis so that pandemics like Covid-19 will not have a long serious effects on the youths and the community in general. There is a need to create an entrepreneurship friendly environment by militating against pandemics like this .Also, since, entrepreneurship is the outcome of a dynamic interaction between the person and the environment, in this rather, the government should create and flourish the environment to be entrepreneurship friendly by improvement in infrastructure, reduction in taxes, rates, levies and so on, so that entrepreneurs can bounce back quickly, entrepreneurs should try and develop of new technologies within business model to advance their businesses in-order to reduce the effect of the second wave of Covid-19 and lastly, Edo state government/policymakers/well-meaning individuals should come up with programs that will help entrepreneurs survive the setbacks and shutdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic.



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