Social work undergraduates students and COVID-19 experiences in Nigeria

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Abstract
Following the highly contagious nature of the coronavirus disease and the increase in confirmed cases, the Nigerian government, imposed lockdowns, quarantines, and various social distancing measures to curb the rate of infection. Schools were closed, and examinations were postponed indefinitely. Students of private schools were able to resume academic activities online. However, most public schools could not do so, due to lack of infrastructure. This study aimed to qualitatively investigate the impacts of the novel coronavirus on final-year students of social work, at the University of Nigeria. Data was collected from 20 undergraduates using in-depth interviews. Findings showed that the pandemic had negative effects on different aspects of the students’ lives. It was also revealed that some of the students were resilient and were able to use various coping strategies to avoid being overwhelmed by the situation. A policy implication of this study is the need for revitalization of Nigerian public universities, as the continued lockdown of schools shows how public universities are poorly managed in the country.

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This poor management of public schools has made it impossible for a switch to virtual learning.

**Keywords**
Social work, undergraduates, University of Nigeria, COVID-19, resilience

**Introduction**

The novel coronavirus, a severe form of pneumonia, was first reported in late December 2019 in Wuhan, the provincial capital of Hubei, China (Zhu et al., 2020). As indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020b), COVID-19 is an infection brought about by another strain of coronavirus, connected to a similar viral group as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and some forms of the common cold. The rate of spread of the disease informed the WHO’s decision to declare it an international public health emergency on 30 January 2020 (Aker and Midik, 2020). Cases of infection have been reported in nearly all countries of the world, such that as of December 13, 2020, there were 7,21,61,821 coronavirus cases, 5,05,28,539 recoveries, and a death count of 16,12,738 globally (Worldometer, 2020). Following the highly contagious nature of the disease, and the increase in confirmed cases, governments in various countries imposed several measures to curb the rate of infection. Such measures included lockdowns, isolation, and quarantine (Li et al., 2020), and the use of face masks (WHO, 2020). Consequently, businesses, schools, and other social gatherings were shut down to ensure that individuals (both symptomatic and asymptomatic) maintained social distancing.

In Nigeria, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was on Friday 28 January 2020 (Agbawodieizu et al., 2021). Over eleven months after the first confirmed case, the number of cases had increased to 72,757 with 1194 deaths by 13 December 2020 (National Centre for Disease Control, 2020). By the end of March 2020, the government of Nigeria had imposed lockdowns, closed schools, stopped international flights, and banned gatherings in a bid to reduce the rate of infections in the country (Ekoh et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Although the measures countries adopt for reducing the spread of the virus have been shown by studies to be effective, concerns have been raised about their psychological (Ekoh et al., 2021), social, and economic (Ekoh, 2021) impacts. Scholars (Goothy et al., 2020; Grubic et al., 2020) have recently called for research attention on students, given that this population worldwide, has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Goothy et al. (2020) noted that the mental health of students has become an important topic globally, as students’ academic performance depends on their mental health. Prior to the lockdown in different countries, students were in various stages of their academic pursuits. In Nigeria, school
examinations, including entrance examination into higher institutions, were postponed indefinitely and a new date has yet to be set (Adebowale, 2020).

While some private educational institutions in Nigeria launched emergency online methods of learning, most students in public institutions in the country were idle at home, as they were not able to engage in online learning. Moreover, in Nigeria, as observed by the representative of the National Universities Commission (NUC), many students, especially those in public institutions, cannot afford the cost of buying internet bundles and even laptops for online learning, if that becomes an option (Adedigba, 2020). The NUC representative also averred that public educational institutions are ill-equipped for online learning, and that only a few private institutions are equipped for this method of learning. As a result of the lockdown measures, all lectures and practicum in all public universities were suspended indefinitely and the information was communicated through the class representatives. This puts students and their families in a state of uncertainty about the students’ future, thereby increasing their stress levels.

Given the stress and challenges posed by the pandemic, it will be helpful if students can develop coping mechanisms to prevent them from being extremely overwhelmed. The place of the social work profession, therefore, becomes increasingly important, especially in the low and middle-income countries context, where the COVID-19 forecast has even more adverse and ripple effects on the population (Isangha et al., 2021; Mahler et al., 2020). This raises the importance of the resilience approach in social work practice, especially at this time. Social workers, while helping clients to discover personal strengths as resilience, are also expected to be resilient when faced with adverse conditions (Palma-Garcia and Hombrados-Mendieta, 2013). In the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, students undergo four-year training before graduation. During this period, they are made to take 8 sessions of fieldwork practicum, with each session lasting for 12 weeks, which is outside other courses they take in different areas of social work (Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2015; George and Ekoh, 2020). The students go to different agencies including hospitals, prisons, schools, etc., to enable them to gain mastery of the resilience approach in social work practice, through in-class and field training using strengths-based perspectives, models, and theories. This is in line with the minimum benchmark set by the National Universities Commission (NUC), which is the body that regulates university education in Nigeria. The NUC makes it mandatory for students to take these courses before they can graduate (NUC, 2007).

**Theoretical lens**

This study is conceptually rooted in the resiliency theory. This theoretical framework explains the phenomenon of strengths and positive adaptation in the face of various traumatic events and adverse life conditions, as demonstrated by people and systems (van Breda, 2001). This theory, has historically been used by researchers to study children and adolescents in vulnerable life situations, who later turned
out to become functional adults despite their limiting backgrounds (Zimmerman, 2013). In recent times, however, the theory has increasingly been used in working with adults to enable them to overcome adverse life situations. The resiliency theory, focuses on the positive, social, individual, and contextual variables, also known as promotive factors in the life of an individual, which interfere with developmental trajectories from risk to negative personal outcomes. These promotive factors, according to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), may manifest in the form of assets or resources. These assets can be individual qualities such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, while resources can be regarded as external variables such as adult mentors, parental and family support, and other external sources of strength and support services. A prior study by Baruch and Stutman (2006) had argued that resilience is an ordinary and universal ability that can be developed by anyone, and thus, social work students and social work professionals are considered potentially resilient. To further prove this, Palma-Garcia and Hombrados-Mendieta (2013) used a combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, to explore resilience in social workers and social work students. They revealed that resilience increases in social work students as they advance in their professional training, given that resilience is not associated with age, but with training and experience over time (Saavedra and Villalta, 2008; Salanova, 2009). Therefore, based on this theoretical framework, we argue that social work students of the University of Nigeria would be resilient amid the challenges and adversities posed by the coronavirus pandemic, given the use of this theoretical approach in their training, and the experiences they have acquired during the professional training (Palma-Garcia and Hombrados-Mendieta, 2013; Saavedra and Villalta, 2008).

Aims of the study

Until date, the bulk of studies on students have tended to quantitatively examine the psychological impact of the pandemic on students. A survey by Li et al. (2020), on the changes in the mental health status of 555 college students in China, revealed an increase in negative affect, anxiety, and depression symptoms among the students two weeks after confinement. In Spain, a cross-sectional survey of 2530 members of a university community, which included postgraduate and undergraduate students and members of staff (academic and administrative) revealed a moderate to severe level of anxiety, stress, and depression among the respondents respectively, two weeks after the pandemic induced lockdown (Odriozola-Gonzalez et al., 2020). To the best of our knowledge, no study has investigated the impact of the pandemic on students in sub-Saharan African countries. Little is also known about the coping strategies adopted by students, to avoid the overwhelming impact of the pandemic in their lives. Our study, therefore, aims to fill the existing gap, by qualitatively investigating the impacts of the novel coronavirus on final-year social work students at the University of Nigeria. The study will also explore students’ views about the pandemic, how they have been coping with
school shutdowns, and then make recommendations for the academic and mental wellbeing of the students.

Materials and methods

Participants

Twenty undergraduate final year students in the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka were purposively and conveniently selected for the study, using the class list. As of the current session (2019/2020), the department of social work has about 422 undergraduate students, spread across the four levels of study (first to final year). The final year class has 72 students. However, because of the qualitative nature of this study, we believed the sample size provided enough data to reach theoretical saturation (Nelson, 2017). As can be found in other universities teaching social work, the final year students have spent over three years learning social work and they look forward to graduating and going into the labour market as social workers. Being in their final year, the students have received adequate training and gathered enough experiences. Thus, we evaluated how their training and experiences have helped them build resilience (Saavedra and Villalta, 2008; Salanova, 2009) during this pandemic. The criteria for selection were that they were willing to participate, and their phones rang when they were contacted. From the class list, 10 willing males and 10 willing females were selected to participate in the study. The rationale behind the equal number of males and females was to ensure balanced views across genders.

Material and procedure

The instrument was an unstructured interview schedule made up of eleven questions that were meant to answer the research questions. Some of the questions were geared towards getting a description of their feelings about their continued stay at home with no academic activities, especially with the graduation date long gone, and how the lockdown affected their emotional, financial, academic, and spiritual lives. These questions were developed by the researchers jointly. As a result of COVID-19, phone interviews were adopted. The research team was made up of social workers and lecturers from the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with years of experience in conducting social research, and teaching social work students. Two of the researchers conducted the interviews. During the interviews, Android phones with call-recording features were used.

Data analysis

Data were transcribed verbatim. In line with phenomenology in qualitative research design, we reflected on the interviewees’ narratives by conducting multiple reads of both individual transcripts and the entire interview as a single text, to make meaning of their shared experiences and interpretations. Thematic categories
were generated after transcription, as suggested by Cresswell (2013). These the-
monic categories were then used in organizing the data into an MS Word Excel
spreadsheet. The emphasis of this analysis is on the context of the text; “what” is
said, more than “how” it is said, the “told”, rather than the “telling” (Riesman,
1993). Cain (1991) and Williams (1984) were early scholars who exposed in their
studies how narratives organized by themes do help to bring out the messages the
respondents want to pass on. Themes that were identified by one author but not
others, were discussed and debated based on the transcripts, and either accepted or
discarded, depending on the evidence other authors saw or did not see from the
research. This helped build trustworthiness of the study, as it made it difficult for
the results to be influenced by the biases and interpretations of any single author.

Ethical considerations
The instrument and research proposal were duly approved by the faculty research
and ethics board, as required by the University. In consideration of the respond-
ents’ sense of safety, the male researcher interviewed the male students, while one
of the female researchers interviewed the female students. The consent of the
students was sought before the interviews were recorded. Although the students
were known to us, we assured them that their responses would be used for research
and academic purposes only, and that their identities would not be in the report.
The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted at the conve-
nience of the students.

Results
Three main themes emerged from our study. They are; 1) the effects of the pan-
demic on the students, 2) support and coping with the lockdown, 3) the impact of
social work education on the students’ coping abilities. The themes are reported
below after the presentation of the participants’ socio-demographics.

Socio-demographics of the participants
A total of 20 final-year students were interviewed for the study, including 10
males and 10 females, and their ages ranged between 21 to 27 years. All the par-
ticipants were still single at the time of the study, and they were all adherents of
the Christian religion, as the school is located in the Christian dominant geopo-
itical area.

Effects of the pandemic
The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown have had several effects on the final year
students. The analysis shows its negative effects to include negative emotions
(anger, fear, anxiety, and frustration), academic drawbacks, financial strain, and
religious hindrances, while some students cited positive effects such as an
opportunity to learn new skills, and spending quality time with family. The negative emotions reported by the students also stemmed from the fact that they or their family members may contract the virus.

They felt frustrated because the lockdown had kept them at home for seven months (at the time of the interview), and they were not sure about the resumption date for academic activities in the university. Many of the students were looking forward to graduating from the university, and moving to the next phase of life. However, the pandemic and its accompanying lockdown hindered their academic progress. They used such terms as ‘sad’, ‘feel bad’, ‘depressed’, and ‘frustrated’ to describe their emotional state. One female student reported having suicidal thoughts because the lockdown affected her fiancée’s business and led to a transfer of misplaced aggression towards her, from him. Explaining this, she said:

As a student and in the final year for that matter, I feel very frustrated because it was an unexpected situation that just caught up with us. I feel depressed because I think this is the time, I’m supposed to be in school to finish my exams and graduate. Actually, I’m engaged and I’m yet to do my wedding. It was supposed to hold in May, but because of the coronavirus, my husband couldn’t come back to Nigeria for the wedding. Now things are beginning to be difficult for him over there because of COVID-19. So sometimes, he pours his anger on me when we talk on the phone, and I feel like committing suicide (Participant 1).

On hearing the suicidal comment from the participant, the interviewer requested the participant’s permission for further exploration of her feeling after the interview session: “Can we talk about your suicidal thoughts after the interview, I think it is important and I might be able to help”. In addition to feeling frustrated due to their inability to complete their tertiary education, many of the students had also lost the zeal to continue studying during the lockdown. They felt discouraged and argued that not knowing when school would resume, made them stop studying at home. The students felt that the lockdown halted their academic progress, while some others stated that their interest in academics waned during this period. Two students narrated thus:

Can we ever graduate? It has halted my progress in life, and I am going to incur double expenditure because I have to pay extra rent in my off-campus accommodation. I have stopped studying because whenever I want to read, I remember that I don’t even know when school is resuming. There is simply no motivation again. (Participant 11).

I haven’t been studying because there is no zeal anymore. The motivation is not there anymore...I feel bad, I don’t feel happy, because by now we are meant to have graduated, but one is not sure if we will ever graduate. Now everything is just at a standstill. Who knows when we will graduate again? Yes, I feel really frustrated. (Participant 3).
The analysis further showed that the pandemic led to an increased financial burden on students. Their responses revealed that the major sources of income for them, were allowances from their parents, guardians, and the part-time jobs some of them were doing while in school. This financial strain was more prevalent on students who engaged in income-generating ventures while in school. Such income-generating activities include hair plaiting, nail decoration, photocopying, printing assignments, and food vending. Many of them stated that the closure of the university had affected their financial situation because the lockdown had left them with no income generating opportunities. Findings also showed that the male students appeared to be more vocal about their experiences than the female students. This could be related to the traditional Nigerian notion, that males are expected to be enterprising, while females should be taken care of. Thus, while more male students blamed their financial strain on the pandemic induced economic slowdown, many of the female students stated that the lockdown and pandemic had affected the finances of their parents and guardians, and they felt the ripple effect as they were no longer receiving pocket money (allowances):

I am stressed in terms of finance. Since the pandemic started, I am now staying at home. There is nothing I can do because everyone is at home, and everybody is complaining about the lack of money. Things are difficult and this makes me sometimes depressed because I’m not really engaging myself in any way (Participant 17).

Some time ago, I asked my sister who is living outside the country for money, and she said that I’m no longer in school, therefore, I don’t need money. I told her I was still doing a literature search concerning my final year project, so I need money to buy an internet data bundle. But she still insisted and said I don’t need money for now (Participant 9).

Two of the female students further indicated that the pandemic and the accompanying lockdown had affected their spiritual lives. They argued that the lockdown, which led to the closure of churches, affected their spiritual lives and now that the churches have reopened, the protection guidelines such as social distancing and the use of face masks in the church, made religious gatherings less enjoyable for them. A respondent indicated:

Not going to church affected my emotional and spiritual life. During the lockdown, no one was going to church and life was unbearable, and right now after the main lockdown, everybody now goes to church with face masks which makes people uncomfortable. Truth be told I don’t go to church every Sunday now because the mask makes breathing difficult (Participant 14).

From the analysis, the relationship between the students and their families and friends had been negatively affected by the pandemic. Some of the students indicated that they were no longer able to visit their friends because of the lockdown.
Also, their communication with their friends was reduced due to the financial strain caused by the lockdown, which limited their ability to make long-distance telephone calls. Two respondents stated that the lockdown affected their relationship with their family members negatively. According to them, because they had spent a lot of time together, they experienced frictions and misunderstandings in their relationships. They argued that relationships are better when “there is a little distance”. A participant narrated:

Yes, sometimes there will be frictions, you know. Emotional attachment and bonding are more appreciated when one is a little bit scarce. You know, it is just like when someone is there 24/7, you do not really appreciate the person until they go away for a few days. I had disagreements with my siblings, especially over chores. Somehow my mum had to develop a chore schedule at home, to limit the disagreement. The disagreement was not good and made everyone uncomfortable each time they occur (Participant 7).

On the positive side, some of the participants stated that the pandemic and the lockdown provided their families with an opportunity to spend quality time together. Thus, they experienced more bonding, and understood each other better:

One good thing is that we now have a deeper family bond. My dad does not normally stay at home, but now, he is home all day and seeing things for himself. It was during this COVID-19 lockdown that my dad told us the story of the Nigerian civil war (Participant 19).

**Support and coping during the lockdown**

All the students reported that the support they received during the lockdown, came largely from their family and friends. Such support included receipt of encouraging messages and phone calls:

Well as a student, I only received family support. My family members provided little financial support. They also provided huge emotional support by encouraging me not to give up hope, especially since they are aware that I was supposed to graduate this year, and things have turned out this way (Participant 2).

Another participant added:

I did not benefit financially from anyone. The only support I received is the support we give to ourselves as friends. We send text messages to friends or maybe close associates to ask how they are doing, and they, in turn, return the favour (Participant 6).
Given the belief that men should be hardworking and enterprising in Nigeria, predictably, many of the male students reported that they were able to learn new skills to cope with the lockdown. Some started learning data management, fish farming, computer skills, and technical skills. According to one of them, “I started learning how to repair phones during this lockdown and I am doing well” (Participant 13). However, some female students indicated that they learnt new languages and skills like fashion designing and baking. Others stated that they started physical exercises, while two of the students stated that the lockdown allowed them to broaden their perspective and think about how to make the world a better place, beyond the four walls of the university. One of the students said:

During the initial phase of this lockdown, I was able to learn other languages. I used an app called Duolingo, to learn some basic words in other languages. I also learnt some other skills like tailoring. Although, I am not yet perfect in it. (Participant 10).

Other coping mechanisms identified by the students include the use of entertainment, like playing the piano, and playing indoor games with their family members: “Each time I feel down emotionally, I play the piano. I also play chess and draughts/checkers” (Participant 4). They also reported listening to music and engaging in conversations on social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and most recently, Tiktok:

I started watching movies alone on my phone. Social media was a good coping strategy. Currently, I think I am now addicted to Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. I wasn’t like that before the lockdown but now I know all the trending issues because I’m always there (Participant 16).

The students also adopted assisting others as a coping strategy, they argued that assisting other people kept them busy and took their minds off the current situation. Another stated that contentment is the key, arguing that if one is contented with what they have, including the gift of life, they will find happiness. Furthermore, some of the students used avoidance, preventing themselves from thinking about the situation since they were not the only ones affected by the pandemic. A student summarized the feeling like this:

I try not to think about it too much because when you think about something especially something you cannot deal with, or you can’t handle…your frustration increases and that’s depressing on its own. COVID-19 lockdown started, I tried and limited the way I move about. I read, talk to people. I talk to my friends whenever I feel down. (Participant 20).

Finally, religion and spirituality were also recognized as important coping mechanisms adopted by some of the females, as some of the students insisted that their
dependence on God helped them cope with the situation. One of the students captured it this way:

One of the major strategies I use is that I try to leave everything to God and believe that all his promises in the Bible are true, and he will protect us from harm. That helped me to cope as I surrendered everything to him (Participant 2).

**Impact of social work training**

The impact of social work education in the lives of the participants, ranged from counselling to research for information and coping with the pandemic and lockdown. The analysis of their responses showed that although the students were not yet certified professionals, the majority of them who believed that COVID-19 existed, provided counselling to people, encouraged, and advised them on protective measures such as the washing of hands, social distancing, and use of facemasks. They also educated people who did not take the pandemic seriously due to skepticism about the existence of the virus in Nigeria. A student explained:

Studying social work has helped me during this period in educating some persons because so many people had the belief that there’s no COVID-19. And as such, they just violate the rules of wearing facemasks, washing their hands, and the rest of them. I try as much as possible to educate them in my little way, when I come across such persons (Participant 8).

One of the female students took up assisting indigent people and referring them to resource systems, so that they could get palliatives (relief materials) during the lockdown. According to her:

I was able to refer some persons to people that will help them. I also gave moral and emotional support to people that I know I was better than. I recall having over five clients within this season of COVID-19. And I was able to reach out to people that I knew, and I did refer some persons to where they can get help (Participant 6).

The students also indicated that social work education acquired in school, helped them to cope with the pandemic and lockdown. They counselled themselves, encouraged themselves, and turned themselves into service users and providers. They recognized that they would not have been able to provide help to other persons if they as social workers-in-training needed such help. They, therefore, tried to deal with their fears and anxiety first by giving themselves the advice they would have given to service users. Many of them mentioned ‘depression’, arguing that they would have plunged into depression, if not for the fact that they were studying social work. One of the participants stated that social work
education exposed him to the practical importance of social support, thus he maintained good communication with his family and friends which helped him cope with the lockdown:

My social work training so far has helped me a lot. I had to start telling myself those kinds of things I tell clients. Such as “don’t just sit at home, because an idle mind is devil’s workshop. Engage in learning a new skill, etc.” (Participant 9).

What happened during the lockdown made me understand systems theory more, and the interconnectedness of society. We were taught this in some of our social work lectures. I understood better, the importance of family and relationships, and I tell that to people (Participant 20).

**Discussion**

This study was aimed at exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work students in their final year at the University of Nigeria. Findings revealed that many of the students experienced various negative effects from the pandemic, especially as there was no support from the government, only that provided by their family and friends. Such effects included feelings of depression, frustration, fear, and anger. Several factors may have triggered such feelings among the students. One important factor concerned the religious lives of the students. For some of the students, this feeling was aggravated by their inability to attend their places of worship for prayers. Some prominent (mainly Christian) religious leaders in Nigeria downplayed the pandemic, arguing that the virus outbreak and lockdown was a ploy by the government to shut down Christian religious institutions in Nigeria. Consequently, many people believed that the time of the pandemic was the best time to be in their places of worship. Given the strong religious inclination of some of the students, the closure of their churches could further have bred in them the already existing religious rivalry between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Many students felt that the President of Nigeria as a Muslim, had closed the churches, notwithstanding that all places of worship in Nigeria were closed. This could have potentially made the students perceive any further health safety measures by the government to be anti-Christian, thus refusing to comply with those measures.

The closure of all public schools and the stoppage of face-to-face learning in all schools in the country due to the pandemic, also contributed to the adverse feelings earlier identified among the students. Our finding revealed that one of our respondents contemplated suicide, due to the impact of the pandemic on her relationship with her potential spouse. Although our study’s theoretical framework assumes that our respondents ought to be resilient amid the adversities posed by the coronavirus outbreak, this record about a suicidal feeling implies that the attribute of being resilient varies among individuals, albeit professionals-in-
training. While resilience may be high in some individuals, it could be low or even non-existent in some others, depending on the level and quality of assets or resources available to the individuals when faced with a crisis (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). One must also not lose sight of the submission of Afifi (2018), that environmental factors, personality, socialization process, available resources, and social relationships are very crucial in determining resilience in individuals. The finding also means that the training of the students based on such strength perspective as resilience, by the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, may to some extent, be insufficient for them to face severe adverse situations. This hence suggests the need for the Department to reappraise its curriculum and methods of training students, and bear in mind the views of Afifi (2018), on the factors that could influence resilience in individuals. This result also, is a wake-up call on the need for lecturers in the Department of Social work, to build informal relationships with their students, by reaching out to them, to know how well they are faring, as well as provide them with emotional support when necessary, and if possible, make referrals.

Goothy et al. (2020) opined that the mental health of students has become an important topic globally, as students’ academic performance depends on their mental health. With our findings showing that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in emotional and psychological effects on our respondents, such feelings may have severe consequences on the academic performances of the students when schools resume academic activities. This would likely be so because many of the students have identified that their zeal for academics has waned during the lockdown. Given that the students would commence their first-semester examinations immediately after academic activities resume, our findings suggest the need for lecturers to give the students adequate time to detox from the accumulated negative emotions and make available mental health support, to help revive their zeal to study, and to make good grades, especially as they are in their final year in school.

Still drawing from the theoretical perspective of resiliency theory, our results showed that some of the students were able to display strengths and positive adaptation in the face of the adverse life condition posed by the pandemic. Many of the sampled students revealed that they used the opportunity to acquire new skills, as well as engage in tasks for personal development, which helped to serve as a coping mechanism for them. These demonstrated the use of available assets or resources as promotive factors to build resilience and turn adversity into growth opportunities (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). Assisting other people who were suffering from the impact of the pandemic, also helped the students cope with the pandemic. This aligns with Palma-Garcia and Hombrados-Mendieta’s (2013) assertion, that social workers while helping clients discover personal strength as resilience, are themselves, also expected to be resilient, when faced with adverse conditions. However, this, according to Afifi (2018), may not be true for everyone, bearing in mind the different factors that can influence resilience in individuals. The students, as future professional social workers, saw themselves as service users, and were also involved in helping other people affected by the pandemic.
**Recommendations and conclusion**

Our study revealed that the students were resilient in the face of the pandemic-induced challenges, despite receiving very little support from within their close network of relationships. Thus, they were able to cope with the situation through various strategies. However, we do not rule out the fact that some students used negative coping strategies such as avoidance. While such a coping strategy proves effective in the short term, it may be ineffective in the long term, if the current pandemic-induced challenging situation in Nigeria does not improve within a short period. Consequently, there are chances of the adoption of other negative coping mechanisms which could be to the detriment of the victim. Based on this, a major implication of our findings concerns social policy. The government should set aside special support in form of palliatives for university students who are unable to go back to school due to the pandemic. Such palliatives should be made accessible to the students through transparent means. Following the evidence of negative psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the students, practical implications are also suggested. It would be helpful, if professional social workers such as the lecturers in the Department, reach out to the students of the Department at different time points, to know how well they are faring. This would help maintain the good mental health of the students, as they are assured that they are not alone.

In all, our study found that the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic had negative impacts on different aspects of the lives of the students in our study. Nonetheless, the students coped with the difficult situation, mainly due to the influence of their training in social work. The social work students at the University of Nigeria, are trained based on diverse models and theoretical perspectives, for practice. This includes the resilience theory, which comes from the strength perspective. This is important, given that social workers are expected to be resilient while also working with clients to help build their resilience in the face of adverse situations. Although our findings add to the literature on the impacts of COVID-19 on students, a limitation of the study, is that the findings are limited to the views of twenty final year students of the Department of Social Work. While these findings may to a significant extent, be generalizable to the general population of social work students due to the homogeneity of the sample (in terms of their internalization, and practical application of some theories, and vital social work skills as resilience for practice), the findings may not apply to students of other Departments in the University of Nigeria, or students of other Universities in Nigeria. Hence, it is important for further studies to be conducted, to reveal the perspectives of students in other Departments of the University of Nigeria, as well as students of other disciplines, in various Nigerian Universities, as regards COVID-19.

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