

FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL WELFARE IN OBIO/AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA) OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study entitled "Fuel Subsidy Removal and Access to Social Welfare in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State, Nigeria" examined the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the residents of Obio/Akpor LGA in Rivers State, with regard to their access to education, transportation, healthcare and affordable housing. Two research questions were posed for study. The study adopted the Descriptive Research Design in its investigation. The population for this study comprised all residents of Obio/Akpor LGA in Rivers State from which a sample of 100 respondents was randomly selected for the study. The selection was done through the use of stratified sampling and accidental sampling techniques. A questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection and this instrument was face validated by professionals in Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. Also, the reliability value of 0.86 Correlation Co-efficient was obtained for the study. The statistical methods used for the study were percentage, frequency tables and pie graphs. Percentage, frequency tables and pie graphs were used to analyze biographic data while percentage and frequency tables were also used to analyze field responses from research questions for the study. The findings showed that fuel subsidy removal has some adverse effects on the residents of Obio/Akpor LGA in Rivers State. Among other things, the foregoing gave rise to children dropping out of school, and lack of concentration on studies. It also caused difficulty in transportation as a result of higher fares imposed on passengers in the study area, and besides, it has caused a lot of preventable and untimely deaths as a result of insufficient money for ailments treatment and/or medication. It has caused many residents of the area to relocate to rural areas where they could afford housing. Based on these findings, the study among other things, recommended that the State Government should provide loan and free text books to students in order to encourage school enrollments and also mitigate the effect of fuel subsidy removal on Nigerians, especially in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State.

Keywords: Fuel Subsidy Removal, Access, Social Welfare.

Introduction

Fuel plays a significant role in the production of goods and services in all sectors of the economy. This is why countries find it necessary to subsidize and ensure that citizens have access to fuel, which is of great economic importance to nations across the world. Governments subsidize fuel to address cases of market failure – more especially in developing countries where subsidies are given to help the poor participate in economic activities. Indeed, Governments provide for or allow fuel subsidy to boost the social welfare of their citizens. According to Hayes (2023), welfare encompasses a range of government programmes designed for individuals and families who do not make enough money to have

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a decent standard of living. Housing, food, medical care, and financial assistance for daily life are all provided by different social welfare programmes (Hayes, 2023). Accordingly, welfare denotes the range of government programmes providing financial or other assistance to individuals or societal groups who cannot support themselves (Annapoorna Scheme, 2023).

Ering and Akpan (2012) correctly observed this, when they noted that social welfare is an organized public or private social service for the assistance of disadvantaged groups. Access to social welfare ranges from access to education, transportation, healthcare to access to affordable housing. The main goal of social welfare policies is to provide a safety net to those who need support due to situations such as poverty, unemployment, poor health and lack of education.

In fact, a major aspect of the Government's social welfare policies in Nigeria has to do with the catering for the cost of fuel subsidy by the Government to cushion the effect of procuring or accessing fuel by its citizen in their day-to-day economic activities and pursuits. This is necessary as fuel, which is being described by Okeke (2010:60) as "...an inelastic product both at demand and supply sides..." does not apparently have reliable alternatives which consumers of the product can readily turn to in the event of its scarcity or any related problems. As a matter of fact, alternatives such as electric operated trains, solar heaters and cookers are not well-developed to cater for the power needs of Nigerians. Moreover, the hydro-power supply from dams is not a dependable source of power supply in Nigeria. So, the removal of fuel subsidy by the Tinubu – led government in 2023 in the morning of his inauguration as President of Nigeria, has affected negatively a lot of social welfare services, and most especially the cost of transportation.

The reality of subsidy is that as the pump price of fuel increases, invariably the cost of everything in Nigeria increases. This is especially so because this increase in the pump price impact negatively on the cost of transportation as well as cost of production of goods and services which about 90% depend on power generated by fuel. These increases in cost of transportation and cost of production of goods and services are pushed over to passengers and consumers of goods and services who are the common masses of this country who suffer the brunt of the heavy burden of the cost of fuel. In fact, any slight increase in the pump price of fuel without a palliative measure in place has always inflicted economic hard time on Nigerians, and of course, instances of this situation have generated, and would always generate resistance and protests from the organized labour, civil society coalition and the masses in general. This is so because the removal of fuel subsidy has been a nightmare to many Nigerians and besides, according to Ering and Akpan (2012), the fuel subsidy is the principal way ordinary Nigerians benefits from the country's oil wealth.

Statement of the Problem

It is quite obvious that fuel subsidy was totally removed in the current administration in Nigeria without provision of efficient infrastructural facilities, and other forms of energy which can all serve as close substitutes for fuel, to make life comfortable. Although, fuel subsidy removal has been said to be a policy on its own, that is analytically based, economically sound, politically acceptable, it is not well-planned for and executed at the time it was implemented. Its continuance and sustainability would continue to pose

economic threats on the lives of the citizens of this country as the pursuit of this policy does not conduce to the social welfare of the greater majority of Nigerians.

In fact, because of the sensitive nature of the issue of the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, some scholars have conducted some studies on its removal, as it affects other activities and people in the country. Also, Stephen (2015) did a study on Impact of Fuel Price Increase on the Nigerian Economy and found out that there is a significant relationship between the recent increase in fuel prices and economic growth in Nigeria.

Apart from these studies, Sambe *et. al.* (2013) conducted a research on the Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Food Security in Nigeria. These researchers reported that the removal of fuel subsidy has detrimental effects on food security in Nigeria, and, as well, asserted that the gains advocated by classical political economy have not been actualized in respect of fuel subsidy removal vis-a-vis enhanced food security.

These three studies carried out on the impact of the removal of fuel subsidy investigated the influence of such removal on single variable respectively and appeared to have revealed impacts that did not follow a uniform or similar trend – the first study on the impact of the remove in relation to foreign investment reported a negative impact; the second study which has to do with the impact of increase in fuel prices on Nigerian economy reported that the increases in the prices resulted in economic growth; this means such increases had a positive impact on the Nigerian economy; and then the third study which investigated the impact of the removal of fuel subsidy on food security in Nigeria reported that the removal of the fuel subsidy has a deleterious effect on food security in the country.

Based on the seeming conflicting reports of these investigations, coupled with non-holistic approach to these studies, the present researcher decided to undertake a study that investigates the impacts of the removal of fuel subsidy on access to education, transportation, healthcare and housing by residents of Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State, Nigeria. This comprehensive approach was intended to fill the gaps created by the other studies. Moreover, this is intended to find out what is the trend.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the influence of fuel subsidy removal on access to education by residents of Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State.
2. To ascertain the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the access to transportation by residents in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State.
3. To examine the influence of fuel subsidy removal on access to healthcare by residents of Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State.
4. To explore the influence of fuel subsidy removal on access to affordable housing by residents of Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated for this research work:

1. How does fuel subsidy removal affect residents' access to education in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State?

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2. How does fuel subsidy removal affect residents' access to transportation in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State?
3. How does fuel subsidy removal influence the residents' access to healthcare in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State?
4. How does fuel subsidy removal influence the residents' access to affordable housing in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State?

Literature Review

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Access to Education

Education is not just a mere legacy but a key to self-reliance, self-independence, and personal freedom. It shapes individuals, communities, and societies as well. Aregbesola (2014) said that it is a pivotal instrument for social, political, and economic development. For individuals, education goes beyond excellent academic performance to include personal growth and character development. However, it is important to note that education responds to changes in societies. This means that as societies and technologies change, education must, of necessity, change to adapt to the needs of students, teachers, and society at large.

Quite often, Government initiates these changes, most of the time, with good intentions for the populace. But sometimes, some government's decisions and policies inadvertently come to affect education and its processes very adversely. One of such policies by the Government of Nigeria, though not strictly related to education, is the policy of fuel subsidy removal by the Tinubu-led administration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2023.

Fuel subsidy is the financial assistance provided by the government to reduce the cost of fuel for consumers. The government does this to keep the prices of fuel within the reach of the greater number of consumers in a country. This means that what consumers pay for fuel is below the international prices; and then the government which fixes the price of the gasoline below the international prices uses its resources to pay for the balance for what the consumers ought to have paid, if they were buying at the internationally fixed prices. By this, it translates to the fact that federal government subsidizes or reduces the cost of petroleum products to assist consumers to procure the products at lesser costs.

Thus, the policy of the government to remove this fuel subsidy means that users and consumers of fuel product must pay full to procure the product in order to use the product. In other words, they are paying at the internationally fixed price(s). This means a greater financial burden on consumers. Thus considering the importance of fuel in the production of goods and services, and more especially in transportation, it means Nigerians will pay higher prices for everything they consume, including their access to education. This situation is most likely to increase the burden on parents and guardians to send their children and wards to school. Concordantly, Charles (2015) noted that fuel subsidy removal has a very strong relationship with school dropouts as parents find it difficult to pay tuition fee and procure other educational resources for their children.

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Access to Transportation

As a matter of fact, the importance of transportation, as far as human beings are concerned, cannot be over-stressed. Transportation is very pivotal in the activities of humans around the world. Transportation, according to Anyanwu (1997) referred to the process of conveying or moving of goods and people from place to place. Good and Jebbin (2015) also added that transportation is a system for carrying passengers, materials and goods from one place to the other both internally and internationally, often through power-driven machines. Also, Good and Jebbin (2015) emphasized the importance of transportation in the distribution of goods when they averred that transportation service is the part of physical distribution activity which is concerned with the actual movement of goods to their various consumers. Tying transportation to production, they observed further that production is not achieved until what is produced (goods) get to the final consumers. Also in a brief and pointed definition, Okefor (1998) noted that transportation is commonly said to refer to the movement of people and goods from one place to the other.

From the foregoing definitions, it is very obvious that transportation is very central in the transactional activities of people as they move from one place to another in search of means of earning their living. Of course, it is important to note that Good and Jebbin's (2015) definition of transportation is very germane to the discussion as it emphasizes the means by which transportation is effected with the tag, "often through power-driven machines". This phrase explains the importance of gasoline or fuel in powering many types of engines used in moving vehicles especially in Nigeria. Fuel in Nigeria has very few substitutes as a source of power. It is obviously the most available source of moving a lot of automobiles.

It is therefore, very clear that the removal of fuel subsidy would negatively impact many aspects of life and the economy especially the transportation system and its patronage. Fuel subsidy removal would obviously entail more money needed to produce goods and services and, equally more money to convey passengers and goods and services from more point to another. For individuals, it is more likely that their access to transportation services would be reduced compared to when government was subsidizing the cost of fuel. The increase in the pump price of fuel would be carried over to passengers and added to the costs of goods and services which the final consumers would now bear. Companies would increase cost of production per unit and struggle to break even as they sell their goods to wholesale businessmen and women.

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Access to Healthcare

Good health is very important to individuals in any society. Health has more to it than just the absence of diseases. In fact, the WHO (1948) averred that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being of an individual, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Of course, it is important to point out that human beings do not remain in good health all the time. From time to time human beings break down or fall sick. At such a time individuals seek healthcare services so that they recover and be active once again. Sometimes, people secure healthcare service at centres close to them. At other times, they travel far from their places of abode to seek healthcare or medical services where they do not have such facilities close to them. Where there is some distance they board vehicles to go to the health centres or hospitals. Even when they get to the health centres, they spend money to procure the needed treatment. Sometimes, the treatment last for some days,

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making these individuals to keep going to and from the hospitals to be given treatment for the number of days prescribed. In all this, money is spent as fares and as cost of treatment.

In accessing healthcare services, therefore, money is very important. However, with the withdrawal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria recently, the cost implication for accessing healthcare services would be very grave for a number of people as this fuel subsidy spells higher cost of production of drugs and even higher fare to and from healthcare centres and hospitals. Even the healthcare personnel who are also affected by the impact of fuel subsidy removal in many ways would also demand higher fee for treatment. The majority of people cannot afford health centre services as it is today.

The economic crisis facing Nigeria as a result of fuel subsidy removal continues to deteriorate and prevent many households from gaining access to basic healthcare since the salaries of workers are not upgraded; they find it difficult to provide food for their immediate families and also take care of health issues (Nolan, 2014). This situation may reduce the family's demand for healthcare, and thus introduce adverse implications on health care spending. The access to healthcare system would be seriously hampered as a result of the withdrawal of fuel subsidy which has introduced a lot hard time for the average Nigerians. Omotayo (2016) is right when he observed that, the access to healthcare system has drastically reduced due to the high rate of poverty and deprivation in Nigeria. Eko (2017) also shared Omotayo's (2016) view, when he noted that, the Nigerian health sector is still striving to provide basic healthcare services with the collaborative efforts of the three tiers of government, but efforts to achieve this seem impracticable due to the current state of the economy.

At the moment, it appears very obvious that access to essential healthcare services is affected as household disposable incomes fall and households have to delay treatment as they juggle between competing basic needs, especially food and housing.

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Access to Affordable Housing

It would be necessary for us to understand what is meant by "affordable house" for a proper grasp of the discussion that follows. What then is "affordable housing"? "Affordable housing" is any housing that a household can pay for, while still having money left over for other necessities like food, transportation and healthcare. Put differently, affordable housing refers to housing units that are affordable by that sector of society whose income is below the median household income. This is, to say, that affordable housing is housing which is deemed affordable to those with a household income at or below the median as rated by the national government. Of course, the median household income is the number in the middle when the incomes of every household from the poorest to the richest are listed according to Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (FMHUD).

From the foregoing explanations, it is apparent that "affordable housing" is meant for a household of income earners and also, it is accommodation that is for not-so-rich and no-so-poor families or those slightly below the middle or median position. This means an average income earning family could afford or access this type of housing without much hassles or financial inconveniences.

Now the question is: How has the removal of fuel subsidy affected the access of the not-so-rich income earners to affordable housing? With the increasing costs in every aspect of the economy as a result of the withdrawal of fuel subsidy there are indications that times are really hard for income earners. Bond (2014) even observed that a growing number of low-income tenants are leaving the city centres in Nigeria for the suburbs as house rent and inflation continue to surge, adding to the pain of rising cost of living in the country due to fuel subsidy removal. This, of course, should be expected as the prices of construction supplies including cement, steel, and other building materials are increasing as a result of the elimination of fuel subsidies. Real estate development projects have become more expensive as a result of this cost increase. It is difficult for developers and builders to strike a balance between expenses and profit margins, which naturally has caused development projects to be delayed or housing prices to rise. A rise in home prices could result from higher building costs and rising living expenses.

In fact, the issue has become complicated as prospective homeowners find it more difficult to afford homes due to the price increase, especially those in the middle- and lower-income brackets. In most cities, especially those of Lagos, Abuja and Kaduna, some locations that were affordable in terms of rent are no longer so as they have gone out of the reach of low-income renters due to the removal of fuel subsidy. This situation has made the number of renters or tenants to swell without any restraints.

Also, property conversion has added to the night-mare of tenants and prospective tenants. As landlords have embarked on changing many houses from residential to commercial houses for companies, this has reduced the supply of residential accommodation for individual tenants. Moreover, the high cost of building materials which has limited the ability of developers to put more property on the market has combined to make situations for tenants more excruciating. Thus, these conditions, combined with the ever-rising inflationary trend are forcing landlords to increase their rents so that they could pay their bills, maintain their houses and respond to the rising cost of living generally. Over the years, it is known that rents normally rise as a result of limited supply and high demand for both residential and commercial property, but recently, high inflation that came in the wake of the withdrawal of the fuel subsidy, has contributed to a poor economy, unfriendly economic policy and inadequate employment, and these equally have resulted in reduced productivity and erosion of earning power of many Nigerians.

As a matter of fact, according to the latest figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2003:12), the Bureau observed among other things that:

The yearly inflation rate in Nigeria accelerated to 21.91 per cent in February from 21.82 per cent in January. House rent, soaring food prices and weaker currency were some of the main drivers of the further rise in inflation rate. This is so because the cities are centres for higher cost of living, higher property taxes, increase in cost of building materials and utility costs. In this instance, landlords are finding it difficult to offer affordable rents, more so when the costs of building materials such as cement, roofing sheets, sticks and paints, have risen by over 150 per cent in recent years.

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Apart from the above situation, more and more dire conditions have contributed to make access to affordable housing difficult for people. The recession experience in Nigeria which has continued to take its toll on the country has cause the nation to witness a massive crash in the price of stocks and shares in the stock exchange market. Of course, the real estate sector is not exempt from this economic situation. It is common knowledge that one of the most notable hallmarks of a recession is the scarcity of funds. This scarcity of funds is further complicated by the fluctuation in the value of the Naira against the Dollar/Pounds. Then, as a fall-out from this fluctuation, a lot of people find it very difficult to afford or access affordable housing at this time. The effect of fuel subsidy removal has resulted in numerous challenges; with one of the most pressing needs is the need for affordable housing in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population for this study comprised all residents in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State. The sample for this study is 100 respondent residents in Obio/Akpor LGA in Rivers State. Stratified sampling and accidental sampling techniques were used for the study. In stratified sampling technique, the researcher stratified the LGA into Obio and Akpor. In Obio, all communities were listed and wrapped in papers and put into a basket for picking of one particular community. In the course of this, the researcher picked Rumuokoro. The same scheme was applied to Akpor, and Choba was picked as well.

Thereafter, accidental sampling technique was used to accidentally administer 50 copies of questionnaire each to residents in Rumuokoro and Choba respectively. With this, 100 copies of questionnaire were administered and later retrieved for analysis in the study area. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire was made of two sections (Section 'A' and Section 'B'). The Section 'A' is on biographic data of the respondents; it contains data like sex, age, educational qualification and marital status. The Section 'B' is on information relating to the purpose of the instrument. It was organized in a Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree and (D) Strongly Disagree (SD) format to enable the respondents to supply the needed information. The content validity was used to confirm whether the research is in line with it. This instrument was validated by two experts from the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. They assessed the instrument in line with the objectives of the study to confirm their appropriateness in providing accurate responses needed for the study. Reliability of the instrument was ascertained through the use of test- retest reliability method which established 0.84 Reliability Co – efficient for the study. The responses of data collated were analyzed using percentage and frequency tables and pie graphs.

Results

Table 1: Biographic Indices of Respondents

ITEMS	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Sex		
Males	60	60%
Females	40	40%
	100	100
Age		
15-19 years	14	14%
20 – 25 years	18	18%
26 – 30 years	25	25%
31 and above	43	43%
	100	100
Educational Status		
First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)	14	14%
West African Senior Secondary School Certificates (WASSC)	18	18%
Bachelor Degree Certificate	43	43%
Master's Degree	16	16%
PhD	9	9%
	100	100
Marital Status		
Married	60	60%
Single	40	40%
	100	100

Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

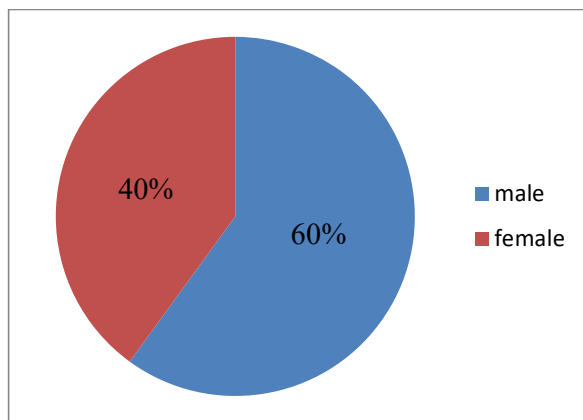


Figure 1: Sex Results of Respondents

Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

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The sex results in Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate that 60 respondents, representing 60% of the study population are males, while 40 respondents, representing 40% of the population are females.

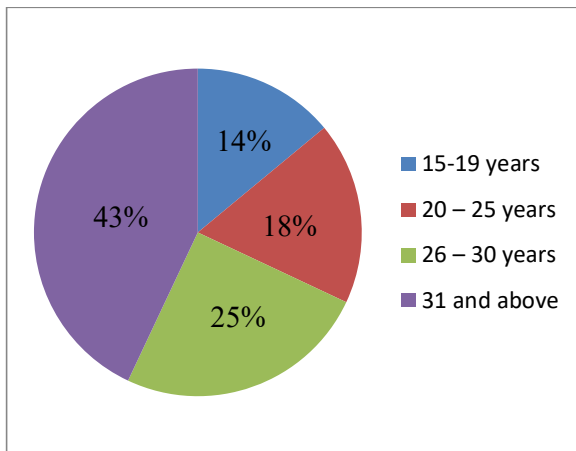


Figure 2: Age Results of Respondents
Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

Also, the age results in Table 1 and Figure 2 show that 14 respondents, representing 14% of the population are between 15-19 years, 18 (18%) are between 20-25 years, 25 (25%) were between 26-30 years, while 43 (43%) were between the age bracket of 31 years and above.

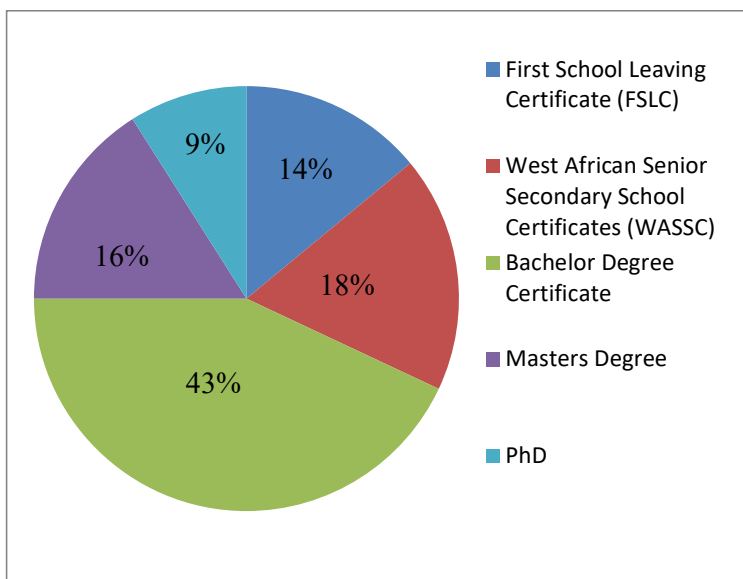


Figure 3: Educational Status Results of Respondents
Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

Also, the results for educational status in Table 1 and Figure 3 indicate that 14 respondents, representing 14% of the study population are First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) holders, 18 respondents, representing 18% of the study population are West African Senior Secondary School Certificate (WASSC) holders, 43 respondents, representing 43% of the

study population are Bachelor Degree Certificate (BSc) holders, 16 respondents, representing 16% of the study population were Masters Degree Certificate holders, while 9 respondents, representing 9% of the study population are PhD holders.

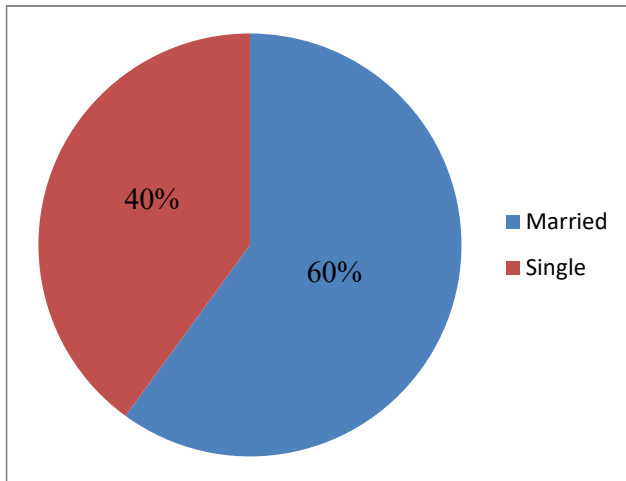


Figure 4: Marital Status Results of Respondents
Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

The marital status results in Table 1 and Figure 4 indicate that 60 respondents, representing 60% of the study population are married, while 40 respondents, representing 40% of the population are single.

Table 2: Influence of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Access to Education

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to school drop out	40	50	0	10
		40%	50%	0%	10%
2.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to delay in payment of school fees	30	50	10	10
		30%	50%	10%	10%
3.	Fuel subsidy removal is responsible for lack of concentration among students	40	50	0	10
		40%	50%	0%	10%
4.	Fuel subsidy removal causes absenteeism in classes	60	20	20	0
		60%	20%	20%	0%

Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

The responses to item 1 in Table 2 show that 40 respondents, representing 40% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to school dropout while 50 (50%) A, 0 (0%) D, and 10 (10%) SD. Also, the responses to item 2 indicate that 30 respondents, representing 30% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to delay in payment of school fees, while 50 (50%) A, 10 (10%) D, and 10 (10%) SD. Again, the responses to item 3 of the same table indicate that 40 (40%) respondents, representing 40% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal is responsible for lack of concentration among students, 50 (50%) A, 0 (0%) D, while 10 (10%) SD. Finally, in Table 2, the responses to item 4 indicate that 60 respondents, representing 60% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal causes absenteeism in classes, 20 (20%) A, 20 (20%) D, while 0 (0%) SD.

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Table 3: Influence of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Access to Transportation

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	D	SD
5.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to high cost of transportation fare	70 70%	20 20%	10 10%	0 0%
6.	Fuel subsidy removal causes hard time due to high cost of transportation	50 50%	20 20%	20 20%	10 10%
7.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to difficulty in movement	20 20%	60 60%	20 20%	0 0%
8.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to trekking and lateness of workers in getting to their offices	60 60%	10 10%	20 20%	10 10%

Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

The responses in Table 3 illustrate that 70 respondents, representing 70% of the study population SA to item 5 that fuel subsidy removal leads to high cost of transportation fare, while 20 (20%) A, 10 (10%) D and 0 (0%) SD. Also in this same Table 3, responses to item 6 indicate that 50 respondents, representing 50% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to hard time due to high cost of transportation, while 20 (20%) A, 20 (20%) D and 10 (10%) SD. Again in Table 3, responses to item 7 indicate that 20 respondents, representing 20% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to difficulty in movement, while 60(60%) A, 20(20%) D and 0 (0%) SD. Furthermore, in the same Table 3, responses to item 8 indicate that 60 respondents, representing 60% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to trekking and lateness of workers to their offices, while 10(10%) A, 20(20%) D and 10(10%) SD.

Table 4: Influence of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Access to Healthcare

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	D	SD
9`.	Fuel subsidy removal deny access to the care of chronic illnesses	70 70%	10 10%	20 20%	0 0%
10.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to untimely death as a result of insufficient money for access to medication and treatment	60 60%	20 20%	10 10%	10 10%
11.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to depression and hopelessness for who cannot access healthcare	40 40%	40 40%	10 10%	10 10%
12.	Fuel subsidy removal adversely affects the access to healthcare for health outcomes of citizens	30 30%	40 40%	20 20%	10 10%

Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

The responses in Table 4 illustrate that 70 respondents, representing 70% of the study population SA to item 9 that fuel subsidy removal deny people access to the care of chronic illnesses, while 10 (10%) A, 20 (20%) D and 0 (0%) SD. Also in this same Table 4 responses to item 10 indicate that 60 respondents, representing 60% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to untimely death as a result of insufficient money to access medication and treatment, while 20 (20%) A, 10 (10%) D and 10 (10%) SD. Again in Table 4, responses to item 11 indicate that 40 respondents, representing 40% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to depression and hopelessness of patients who cannot access healthcare, while 40(40%) A, 10(10%) disagree and 10 (10%) SD. Also, in the same Table 4, responses to item 12 indicate that 30 respondents, representing 30%

of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal adversely affects the access to healthcare for health outcomes of citizens, while 40(40%) A, 20(20%) D and 10(10%) SD.

Table 5: Influence of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Access to Affordable Housing

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	D	SD
13.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to embarrassment by landlords as tenants find it difficult to pay their rents	50 50%	20 20%	20 20%	10 10%
14.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to debt as a result of high cost of house rent	20 20%	60 60%	20 20%	0 0%
15.	Fuel subsidy removal makes people to relocate to rural areas in order to access affordable housing	30 30%	40 40%	20 20%	10 10%
16.	Fuel subsidy removal leads to loss of shelter due to high cost of housing	60 60%	10 10%	20 20%	10 10%

Source: Oriji (2023), Field Survey

The results in Table 5 illustrate that 50 respondents, representing 50% of the study population SA to item 13 that fuel subsidy removal leads to embarrassment of tenants by landlords as tenants find it difficult to pay their rents, while 20 (20%) A, 20 (20%) D and 10 (10%) SD. Also in this same Table 5 responses to item 14 indicate that 20 respondents, representing 20% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to debt as a result of high cost of house rent, while 60 (60%) A, 20 (20%) D and 0 (0%) SD. Again in Table 5, results of item 15 indicate that 30 respondents, representing 30% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal makes people to relocate to rural areas in order to access affordable housing, while 40(40%) A, 20(20%) D and 10 (10%) SD. Also, in the same Table 5 responses to item 16 indicate that 60 respondents, representing 60% of the study population SA that fuel subsidy removal leads to loss of shelter due high cost of housing, while 10(10%) A, 20(20%) D and 10(10%) SD.

Discussion of Findings

This study critically examined fuel subsidy removal and people’s access to social welfare in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State. In the research question one, the findings of the study revealed that fuel subsidy removal leads to school dropout, delay in payment of school fees, poor concentration to studies and absenteeism due to hard time. These findings are supported by Charles (2015) who noted that fuel subsidy removal has a very strong relationship with school dropouts as parents find it difficult to pay tuition fee and procure other educational resources for their children.

Also, in the research question two, the findings of the study revealed that fuel subsidy removal leads to high cost of transportation, causes hard time, difficulty in movement, leads to trekking and lateness of workers in getting to their offices. These findings are in consonance with the submission of Ezeh (2012) who observed that high cost of transportation affects all aspects of economy in Nigeria as prices of commodities are going up due to high cost of transportation. Also, this is in tandem with Good and Jebbin’s (2015) view that high cost of transportation leads to poverty and hard time in the land.

For the research question three, the findings of the study showed that fuel subsidy removal leads to poor access to the care of chronic illnesses, results in untimely death because of

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insufficient money to access medication and treatment, leads to depression and hopelessness of patients who cannot access healthcare for themselves, and affects adversely the access to healthcare for health outcomes of citizens. These findings agree in part with the position of Omotayo (2016) when he observed that access to health system has drastically reduced due to high rate of poverty and deprivation in Nigeria.

Finally, for the research question four, the findings revealed that fuel subsidy removal leads to embarrassment of tenants by landlord as tenants find it difficult to pay their rents, leads to debt as a result of high cost of house rent, makes people to relocate to rural areas in order to access affordable housing, and causes loss of shelter due to high cost of housing in the study area. These findings are consistent with the position of Bond (2014) who observed that the prices of construction supplies including cement, steel, and other building materials are increasing as a result of the elimination of fuel subsidies, and that housing has become more expensive.

Conclusion

Based on the field results, and in the light of reviewed studies, the study established that fuel subsidy removal among other issues, has given rise to school drop-out, lack of students' concentration to studies due to hardship and high cost of living, difficulty in affording high transportation fares imposed on passengers, untimely death as a result of insufficient money for medication and treatment and relocation of people to rural areas in order to access affordable housing. The study suggested further researches on fuel subsidy removal and the need for efficient palliatives, as well as, fuel subsidy removal and the level of sustainable revenue in the study area in order to appreciate further implications of the removal of fuel subsidy. These should also be replicated in the other states of Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

1. The State Government should provide loan and free text books to students in order to encourage school enrollments. Such effort by the government would mitigate or douse the negative effects of fuel subsidy removal in the state and more especially in Obio/Akpor LGA.
2. The State Government should increase salaries of workers in order to mitigate the impact of fuel subsidy removal in the state. Also, the State Government should provide buses at subsidized transport fare (cost) for legitimate movements of people, not free, in order to sustain its continued operation in the study area.
3. The State Government should make provision for subsidized medical treatment in order to save the lives of people and restore hope to people suffering one ailment or the other, to cushion the effects of fuel subsidy removal. More attention should be given to nursing mothers and infants who are most vulnerable in the state, in order to save their lives.
4. The State Government should embark on building more housing units and make them affordable to tenants in order to mitigate the negative effects of fuel subsidy removal. The government should also check and control the rate of increases in house rent in the state, and more especially in Obio/Akpor LGA. These efforts or steps could reduce or checkmate the migration of low income earners unto the rural

areas in their search for affordable accommodations. By so doing, people will reduce the rate of migration to the rural areas in search of affordable housing.

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