

## **Gender Dimension of the Meaning of Work in Contemporary Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Work is as old as man but the very experience of work has changes from the earliest times to the present. While work can be perceived as an activity people engage in within an organization to earn some form of benefit, which can be monetary or otherwise, in order to meet basic needs of life, the richness of the experience people can easily relate about their work is enormous. Using the social survey method with questionnaire as instrument for data gathering, this paper examined the gender dimension of the meaning of work in contemporary Nigeria. It was discovered that to both gender work means a mean to earn money, that the reason why people work is to have a source of living, that both gender get committed to their work to earn promotion and can frequently change their jobs for the propose of better pay. That harsh economic situation in Nigeria makes retired worker to work on contract. The paper recommends that worker pay should be improved to be able to prepare adequately for life after retirement.*

**Keywords:** Gender Dimension, Work Place, Contemporary Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Work is as old as the human species itself. Even the earliest bits of recorded history about our ancestors are basically accounts of the work they did. Most work in the earliest times was devoted to the purpose of keeping the individual alive. Often, such work was in the line of gathering food, capturing prey, attacking or defending against enemies and obtaining safety from the elements in the form of an appropriate shelter (Dex, 1985). However, the very experience of work has changed from earliest times to the present Prior to the industrial revolution, work was extremely physical with the advent of other sources of energy, work became mechanized and standardized.

Most of us spend over fifty percent of our working life engaged in some form of work. And like other human activities essential to our very existence such as eating sleeping and socializing, work is well known experientially. Yet, if we ask for the meaning of work, we are, likely to hear that work is something one does in an organization for money. While this basic conceptualization is true to most of us, it seems pretty bare in contrast to the richness of the experience people can so easily relate about their work. To Damachi (1986) work has held several dominant meanings and oppositions to the generations of western workers, and has tended to acquire its significance as a function of cultural and environmental situation which incidentally change, ever so often, with each passing generation wither

as a reaction to environmental realism, cultural changes (norms and values) or as a fact. Each generation evolves its acceptable meaning of work, which therefore determines how work is to be done, including hours of work who should work, what wages for work etc. This paper attempts to examine the gender dimension of the work in contemporary Nigeria.

Wage labour according to Olugbile (1997) was not a common thing in some parts of the country; there were systems of collective labour which made it possible for work especially farming with to be done on a fairly large scale. Traditional work - culture developed outside the atmosphere in which work is today situated and was an essential part of people's way of life. However with colonialism and the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates came a burgeoning civil service and a private sector that was initially substantially based on the commerce created by the activities of such organizations as the Royal Niger Company. On the other hand, Nigeria is a country with a very large public sector, with six States and Federal Capital Territory, each state government operates its own civil service apart from that of federal government. There are also parastatals established by the federal government which also have offices in almost all the state capitals employing serves of people.

Various expositions on the attitude of work of the Nigerian workforce have painted a rather negative picture of an apathetic uncommitted men and women who are equally unresponsive to traditional techniques. Popoola, (1992) stated that Nigerian workers have therefore, been described as "indolent", apathetic, unresponsive to motivation and generally, not willing to put forth maximum productive efforts. The understanding of the meaning of work is therefore central to the issue of improved attitude to work, to government as the largest employer labour and management of human resources. This is because; the meaning men give to their work determines their attitude towards it. What meaning do people give to their work?

It is commonly observed that most people, if asked the meaning of work would imply that work provides them with a means of livelihood. While this may be true, it however, neglects many crucial aspects of the meaning of work. Moreover, our views of work have changed considerably over the past decades to a point where people expect more from work than sheer economic reward. The expectation people hold for work than sheer economic reward is indicative of an area of further studies.

## **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

According to the oxford dictionary of economics by Black (1997), works are activities involving physical mental efforts. It was further noted that, a greater part constitute paid employment or working for economic gain, while some are self-employed. This work could be voluntarily done for charities; other people receive payment for work. Work therefore is synonymous with labour which is one of the factors of production. The consent of labour should be obtained before rendering a service because labour has a mind of its own (Lawal, 1982). Additionally, Labour is distinct from other factors of production such as Land and Capital due to its human attributes.

### **2.1.1 Work Orientation**

In the philosophy of instrumental orientation, workers conceive and define work in terms of a means workers are not involved in their job and thus conceive of work as a means to an end. The bureaucratic orientation on the other hand defines work as involving service to an organization return t career. These workers have positive involvement in work and with the organization. For the solidaristic rrientation, it defines work as an activity. Workers here identify more with workmate social relationship in some cases form the basis of occupational communities outside work. Martin and Fryer's (1972) in their study of redundant men hold the view that there is no reason for having a job. If you have enough money without

working but that more women than men declared that friendly and helpful relations with their fellow worker was important and women's priorities about work differ from those of men.

Fraiser (1968) noted that among factory workers women are much happier than men because they can chatter all day long about their homes, their holidays, who is in the family way and anything else unconnected with work. This view was also shared by Atif (1984) who observed that for women, the work space is an area for individually selected relationship in a place for exchange of information that is an ideal condition where women value the environment of work which encourages relationships and communication. However Brown (1984) and Jepcott (1962) work for women means the desire to escape boredom and loneliness at home and to gain companionship at work. But Dex (1985) and Parker (1977) refutes this position and stated that women work for money. Hunt (1968) also agreed with Dex and Parker (1977) that women work for economic reasons.

## **2.2 Empirical Preview**

Lawal (1982) identified various incentive schemes that can encourage workers increase their happiness and make them contented in order to discharge their duties effectively. These schemes are benefits, profit-sharing schemes and retirement benefits. They are reward for service rendered by labour.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.3.1 Structural/Functionalist Perspective (Marxist Theory of Gender)**

In due view of functionalist, society is like a living organism in which each part of the organism contributes to its survival. The perspective emphasizes the way that parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability such as Emile Durkheim's analysis on religion. The approach is concerned with how structure guide's the functions of anyone assigned to an office. It also sees to the distribution of power in both society and organization as the only legitimate and rational goal. It views the factory and organization as an enclose entity not affected by development outside the work situation like industrial conflict as bad it also emphasized consensus shared values and industrial peace.

Therefore work is functional and contributes to the progress of society especially when men and women play their roles. Marxist theory of gender differs from the functionalist theory through agrees that work is functional but the Marxist theory is rooted in the historical materialist theory which Karl Marx developed (1930) According to Idyorough (2005) the theory is premised on the fact that human beings must produce their food, clothing and shelter and must also and independent of their will (Marx, Engles & Benin, 1972). In this theory, Marx posits that the historical development of societies is made possible through the relations of production. The relations of production in this case refer to reproduction of human species and how produces socially and social classes) To Marx, it is the development in the forces of production (i.e Kinship relationship in the forces of production (i.e developments from implements such as species, bows, arrows to the invention of the steam engine and the mechanization of production processes that has led to several social changes in the society, including formation of social classes, exploitation, oppression and subjugation of women. In this case men and women sell their labour for basic need and are exploited by owners of means of production. Work here is for the sole basis of money and exploitation men and women go into paid work for the money that is why they sell their labours.

## **3. Methodology**

As posited earlier, work is an old as man but they very experience of work has changes from the earliest times to the present. While it is assumed to be an activity something one does in an organization to earn money and to meet basic needs, the richness of the experience people can easily relate about their work is enormous. Therefore, this study employed the use of the social survey method with questionnaire as instrument for data gathering.



**4. Result and Discussion**

Results of the administered questionnaires are subsequently tabulated and discussed below:

**Table 1: Meaning of Work**

Sex	A means of earning money	A way interacting with co-workers	Satisfaction from getting something done	Total
Male	71.2% (84)	5.1% (6)	23.3% (28)	100% (118)
Female	64.6% (64)	8.1% (14)	27.3% (27)	100% (99)
Total	148 (68.3)	14 (6.4)	55 (25.3)	217 (100)

Source: Field Work 2016

The table above shows the differences by sex for the main reason why people work, from the above table (1) findings show that 64% of female say they work mainly to earn a living while 71% of male also work to earn a living. These findings may be explained by this fact that the responsibilities of caring for families and dependents rest more on women in our societies. Although on gender difference, only a slightly greater tendency is seen in women who see work as providing a milieu of interaction with co-workers. This provides support for Brown et al (1964) and Jephcott (1962) that for women, work means the desire to escape boredom and loneliness at home and gain companionship at work. However the harsh economic situation in the country has increase push many women into wage labour to payment family income.

**Table 2: Main Reason for working by Sex.**

Sex	To earn a living	To take care of my family	To interact with co-workers	Total
Male	74.2% (84)	15.1% (19)	10.2% (12)	100% (118)
Female	67% (66)	21.2% (21)	12.2% (12)	100% (99)
Total	153 (70.5)	40 (18.4)	24 (11.1)	217 (100)

Source: Field Work 2016

Majority (67%) of female respondents work mainly to earn a living while 74% of male respondents gave the main reason why they work is also to earn a living, this may be explained by the fact that the responsibilities of caring for families and dependents now rest more on both due to the global economic downturn which encourages dual career families. We also examined the relationship between the reasons for commitment and sex and our findings in Table 3 shows female respondents feel more secure in their jobs than their male counterparts and are not committed to work for fear of being sacked.

**Table 3: Commitment to Work**

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Sex	To earn promotion	To avoid being sacked	It's just part of me	Total
Male	38.1% (45)	31.3% (37)	30.6% (36)	100% (118)
Female	39.1% (38)	23% (22)	38.3% (37)	100% (97)
Total	83 (38.7)	59 (27.4)	73 (33.9)	215 (100)

Source: Field Work 2016

The table above shows that commitment to work is essentially because of the desire to be promoted and because it is part of them to be committed while males are committed to work so as not to be sacked. In Nigeria the entry of women into the modern workforce is relatively recent. They are yet to enter into the mainstream occupations and consequently are not perceived as threats in terms of competition. For this reason an examination of major retrenchment exercise is likely to reveal a preponderance of male workers over female workers on the list of workers laid off. On the question of how frequent respondents change jobs, we also compared the responses of male and female workers and the findings are shown in table 4.

**TABLE 4: Frequency of Job Change**

Sex	Once	Twice	Thrice	Total
Male	7.% (8)	3% (3)	90.8% (107)	100% (118)
Female	35.3% (35)	1% (1)	12.2% (12)	100% (99)
Total	43 (43.9)	4 (1.8)	118 (54.3)	21.7 (100)

Source: Field Work 2016

The findings show that 90% of male workers have changed jobs three times while 63% of their female counterparts have done so. This finding may be explained by the pressure which may come upon male workers to move in search of more paying jobs and better condition of service to shoulder more adequately family responsibilities. Another possible explanation is that male workers as we explained earlier in our discussion on the relationship between commitment to work and sex may be more vulnerable to lay off which could be one reason for job change.

When asked to explain why they think workers work on contract after retirement, 355 of female respondents say lack of planning is the reason why people work after retirement while only 19% of their male counterparts advance the same reason as shown in Table 5.

**TABLE 5: Why People Work on Contract after Retirement**

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Sex	Lack of Planning	Economy/ money	Impact on Money?	Avoid Idleness	Total
Male	19.4% (23)	64.4% (76)	6.7% (18)		100% (118)
Female	35.3% (35)	55.5% (55)	4% (4)		100% (99)
Total	58 (26.9)	131 (60.3)	12 (5.5)		21.7 (100)

Source: Field Work 2016

As indicated above, 64.4% of male respondents as against 55% of female respondents say that unfavorably economic environment accounts for retirees return to contract work. The difference in gender response here may be due to the saying that women are more careful with resources and better managers. In other words, "being so described, they feel that lack of planning while in service accounts for why retirees return to work on contract. This view however fails to take into account the fact those workers wages are meager and that saving is almost impossible.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In general, it was found that workers see work as a means of earning money to obtain material needs and to care for family. This general finding provides support for earlier studies as well as Coleman, Goldthorpe (1968) and Bennelt (1978) who stressed material gain as the very reason for working. In other words, idleness, the need to interact with co-workers and other variables measuring the relational and expensive orientation to work do not account for why majority of people work in Nigeria. This finding is reflective of Nigeria's prevailing economic hardship and high level of poverty among the citizenry worker's inclusive. On gender or sex difference only a slightly greater tendency is seen in women to see work as providing a milieu of interaction with co-workers. When asked why they work, 73% of males as against 66% of females said they worked to earn a living.

It was found that 90% of male workers changed jobs only 63% of female workers did so the main reason given was search for better pay. Therefore it can be safely asserted that people work in Nigeria mainly for instrumental reason and see work as a means of earning money. It follows from this conclusion that effort geared at effective human resources mobilization and management in institutions, organizations and industries in Nigeria must first and foremost centre on adequate monetary reward. Also to retain the needed personnel therefore it is recommend that careful review of workers' pay should be a regular exercise. It is also recommend that in addition to improving the pay of workers a deliberate policy focusing on the post service life of workers be evolved to ensure that they can meet their basic needs. The recent, increase in retirement benefits by government is a step in the right direction. Such policies would be more rewarding if they take into account prevailing inflationary trends and living standard.

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