

# **Precarious Working Conditions and Exploitation of Workers in the Nigerian Informal Economy**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Situations in the informal economy expose workers to dangers without opportunity for hazard pay, thereby reflecting exploitation. Based on the Marxist theory of conflict, this paper examines the extent of precarious working conditions and exploitation of workers in the Nigerian informal economy. A total of 500 respondents randomly selected from various informal economy organizations participated in the survey conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (76.4%) had worked for up to five years consecutively, followed by a few (18%), who had worked for up to ten years consecutively. Their monthly income ranged from 10,000 naira (\$60) to 80,000 naira (\$485). Their mean monthly income was 30,000 naira (\$182). Most of them (73.5%) worked for 10 to 12 hours daily, while 26.5% worked for seven to nine hours daily. The experience of low pay with relatively long daily working hours shows the extent of exploitation in the Nigerian informal economy. Several background characteristics, such as gender, age, level of education, and marital status influenced the workers' experience of precarious working conditions and exploitation. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a progressive workplace policy that can ensure decent work and adequate protection for workers in the Nigerian informal economy.

*Keywords:* alienation, exploitation, hazards, informal economy, working conditions, Lagos

The work environment has become partly dysfunctional in Nigeria, given the scourge of precarious work and lack of social security for workers in the Nigerian informal economy. The International Labor Organization (ILO) Resolution of 2002 considered and adopted the concept of the informal economy to describe all economic activities not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements (Akinwale, 2012). What is at present known as the informal economy has gained international recognition since the 1970s and it is generally visible in many countries (Chukuezi, 2010; Kayode-Ajayi, Adeniji, & Adu, 2008). However, precarious work has become a major feature of the informal economy in developing countries.

The European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) describes precarious work as nonstandard employment that is poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and insufficient to support a household (ILO, 2012). A precarious work emanates from undesirable working conditions, such as underemployment, ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection, low pay, and insufficient or even a total absence of trade union rights. The World Health Organization (2006) defines working conditions as the combination of compensation, nonfinancial incentives, and workplace safety.

Similarly, scholarly explanation of working conditions has focused on a combination of factors, such as remuneration, training, supervision, recognition, and transparency in human resource management (Songstad, Rekdal, Massay, & Blystad, 2011). Contrary to normal working conditions, many workers are exploited in the capitalist society.

The description of exploitation is evident in a Marxist analysis of different forms of alienation, such as alienation from productive activity, alienation from product of labor, alienation from fellow workers, and alienation from self (Wallace & Wolf, 1995). Tipples (2011) observed that workers in the informal economy encounter a lot of dangers in the course of their work, owing to several factors, such as job insecurity, lack of social security, and crisis of underdevelopment. These factors reveal experience of exploitation or injustice.

An observation of situations in the informal economy in Nigeria shows that the capitalists' interest in the accumulation of more capital usually results in the exploitation of workers. Unfortunately, the majority of Nigerian workers are in the informal economy, which is excluded from the coverage of the Labour Act (Agomo, 2011). In this way, workers in the Nigerian informal economy may not experience labor standards, given the lack of legal protection from unsafe working conditions or workplace abuses.

This article is therefore designed to examine some aspects of the work environment in the Nigerian informal economy, with a focus on the following research questions: What is the nature of the working conditions in the Nigerian informal economy? Do working conditions reinforce or hinder workers' experience of protection or exploitation in the informal economy? What are the likely outcomes of workers' experience of protection or exploitation in the Nigerian informal economy? The above questions were examined through a systematic analysis of primary and secondary data.

The focus on the informal economy is due to its connection with higher magnitude of vulnerability and social exclusion, compared with the formal economy which is relatively well protected by the Labour Act. Besides the introduction and conclusion, the article is presented in six sections as follows: clarification of the informal economy in Nigeria, existing dimensions of precarious working conditions, exploitation of labor in the informal economy, theoretical framework, methods, and findings and discussions.

### **THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN RELATION TO THE NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT**

Nigeria operates a mixed economy due to its heterogeneous population and a complex social structure. The Nigerian economy basically comprises the private and the public sectors. The private sector of the Nigerian economy is derived from either formal or informal organizations, depending on the registration or the degree of regulation by the state. This suggests that most organizations in the public sector constitute the formal economy, while the informal economy includes many organizations in the private sector. The Nigerian informal economy is so broad that it flows into the private and the public sectors of the economy.

For instance, various nonformal employment relations in the formal sector are essential elements of the informal economy. A separate study is required for an elaboration of nonformal employment relations in the formal sector of the Nigerian economy. Such study will clearly show the dichotomy and linkages between the formal sector and informal economy of the Nigerian society.

Studies show that the informal economy comprises different unofficially arranged private organizations, including agriculture, craftwork, micro enterprises, small-scale enterprises (SSEs), and medium-scale enterprises (MSEs). The informal economy has attracted the majority of the labor force in Nigeria, as is the case in many countries (Chukuezi, 2010; ILO, 2010; Kayode-Ajayi, Adeniji, & Adu, 2008).

As shown in the report of the ILO (2010), the informal economy has been credited with more than half of all employment in Latin America, more than 70% of all employment in sub-Saharan Africa, and 65% of employment in Asia. Various studies have shown that the informal economy is hidden from official scrutiny (Arimah, 2001; Walsh, 2010). This is partly due to the imposition of modern capitalist structure and the government's preference for investment by multinational corporations, high-class individuals, and organizations with huge capital structure.

This brings forth an ideological basis for the neglect of the informal economy in Nigeria, as described below:

Consequently, the extent of foreign interests in the control of the Nigerian economy became unprecedented, especially with visibility of multinational corporations (MNCs) in various sectors, including oil industry, construction, manufacturing, telecommunication, and conglomerates. With the visibility of the MNCs and the organised private sector (OPS), the demarcation of the formal and informal sectors became heightened. (Akinwale, 2012, p. 318)

As a result, the government and allied organizations have sidestepped a number of indigenous initiatives, thereby showing little or no interest in entrepreneurial development opportunities in the informal economy. Also, workers in the informal economy failed to attract the necessary attention from the government and corporate organizations despite their vulnerability and continued exposure to a precarious situation in which labor standards are either low or nonexistent.

The existing international recognition of the informal economy was renewed and revalidated during the international workshop on “undeclared work, informal economy and labour administration” which was held in Turin from May 4 to 6, 2005. Based on available evidence in the literature, the striking features of the informal economy were reviewed and harmonized by Akinwale (2012) as follows:

Ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, small-scale operations, labor-intensive and adapted technology, skills acquisition outside the formal school system, low wages, longer working hours, and unregulated competitive markets [...] Its persistence is driven by a number of factors including unemployment, poverty, and migration (Akinwale, 2012, p. 322).

The above description shows the opportunities and challenges of working in the informal economy where social protection is required to ensure workplace safety. In his recognition of the need for protection of workers in the informal economy, Chukuezi (2010) called for further studies on the sector. As my recent study of the informal economy showed, the majority of workers in the Nigerian informal economy remain vulnerable to the precarious work in the sector; this situation is exacerbated by unprecedented levels of underdevelopment coupled with lack of social security in Nigeria (Akinwale, 2012).

While many people are aware of the dangers of precarious work in the informal economy, it appears that they are helpless because the need for survival, in an environment with lack of adequate support from the government, has further

sustained their interest and participation in the sector. The lack of adequate support from the government and the relatively low socioeconomic background of the majority of the workers in the Nigerian informal economy show why many of them cannot escape from the dangers of precarious work on which they depend for their survival.

The continued existence of precarious work in the Nigerian informal economy is a symptom of the crisis of underdevelopment, which is rooted in colonialism and mismanagement of the country's resources by various political leaders, including several military administrators and their civilian counterparts. Nigeria has experienced a mixed economic performance, ranging from reliance on local sources of funds during the colonial era to an unprecedented boom in the post-independence period. Specifically, Nigeria gradually moved from a relatively stable economy in the early 1970s to an economic crisis since the 1980s (Akinwale, 2012). Consequently, many Nigerians resorted to the informal economy in a bid to cushion adverse consequences of the economic crisis in Nigeria. The majority of workers in Nigeria have been subjected to precarious working conditions in the process of struggle for survival.

### **EXISTING DIMENSIONS OF PRECARIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS**

Precarious work can be regarded as vulnerable employment. The ILO (2010, 2012) has developed some indicators of vulnerable employment, including lack of formal work arrangements, lack of access to benefits or social protection programs, and exposure to risk of economic cycles. Even in regions like East Asia where wage and salaried employment has increased rapidly in recent years, access to a secure job with social protection remains an aspiration for the vast majority of workers.

Precarious work is often classified as contingent work or nonstandard work. The scope of precarious work includes different forms of employment relations, such as temporary work, casual work, outsourced work, part-time work, and informal work (Quinlan, Mayhew, & Bohle, 2001). In their study in the United Kingdom, Dex and McCulloch (1995) offered a comprehensive description of precarious work in terms of different forms of employment relations, including self-employment, part-time work, temporary work, fixed-term contract work, zero hours contracts of employment, seasonal work, home working, teleworking, Sunday work, and job sharing.

Workers in the informal economy are more frequently affected by precarious working conditions compared to their counterparts in the formal sector (ILO, 2012). There is no doubt that the informal economy is rife with precarious work in most countries

(ILO, 2010). The frustration of young people who lack decent jobs and with little optimism for the future leads to flaming riots (Mansel & Heitmeyer, 2010). General frustration occasioned by the prevalence of precarious working conditions has provided a motivation, among other factors, for an unprecedented increase in the tempo of youth-led social uprisings in different regions, especially in Northern Africa, the Middle East, Ecuador, Spain, Italy, Greece, Chile, the United Kingdom, and Israel (ILO, 2012).

The menace of precarious working conditions provides a basis for the Nigerian case of Boko Haram Militancy. The astronomical increase in the spate of terrorist attacks in Nigeria is linked to a clandestine group of irate youths known as “Boko Haram Militants,” whose activities have resulted in monumental destruction of lives and properties, including several churches and the United Nations Office in Abuja, Nigeria.

Available records show that precarious work has become a norm in Africa, especially when it is analyzed from a high degree of uncertainty of employment, erosion of trade union rights, low level of regulatory protection, and low level of income (ILO, 2012). Precarious work threatens trade union membership. Precarious workers are usually being exploited in their unstable position but only a few feel confident enough to organize and bargain collectively (Brophy, 2006). Precarious work is also associated with poor health conditions. As job insecurity increases and social benefits decrease, workers face increasing pressure to accept job offers that put their health and safety at risk.

The availability and the quality of work have dramatically affected workers across the world. In their reflections on the rates of unemployment and underemployment, Heymann and Earle (2010, p. 1) submit that “the number of people who lack work is far exceeded by the hundreds of millions who are employed but lack decent working conditions.” Temporary employment has also increased steadily in countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since the 1980s. While overall permanent wage employment increased by 21 per cent in OECD countries during that period, temporary work for its part increased by 55%.

Most countries in Western Continental Europe have experienced an increase in temporary forms of employment ranging from about 3% for Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany to 16% for Spain, with Portugal, France, Italy, and the Netherlands standing between 5% and 9% (ILO, 2012). With the exception of Sweden, Scandinavian countries experienced stable or slightly declining rates of temporary employment over that period.

The above situation has resulted in an international movement for decent work agenda as shown in the ILO's declaration on social justice for a fair globalization (ILO, 2008), which seeks to contribute towards achieving productive employment and decent work for all. The declaration reinforced the ILO's interest on decent work agenda, which comprises four interrelated areas: respect for fundamental worker's rights and international labor standards, employment promotion, social protection, and social dialogue (Donado & Wälde, 2012).

The operational definitions of decent working conditions were reviewed and revised by Lott in terms of the following minimum guarantees to workers:

[P]aid sick leave, paid annual leave, at least one day of rest per week, limits on night work, and overtime with additional compensation. Other protections needed for conditions to be considered humane include paid leave for both women and men for the birth or adoption of a child, time during the workday to breastfeed an infant, and paid time off to care for family health needs. (Lott, 2010, p. 344)

Studies have shown that certain basic conditions of work are necessary for healthy and productive lives for individuals and families worldwide (Heymann & Earle, 2010; Lott, 2010). As argued by Heymann and Earle (2010), decent work and good working conditions are particularly important to people of every race, class, gender, and nationality including the poor and the marginalized. What does the decent work agenda suggest for Nigeria, given her multitude of unprotected workers, especially those in the informal economy?

Heymann and Earle (2010) recognized the need for minimum humane working conditions, following their examination of labor law policies in 190 countries, gathering of data on working conditions from 55,000 households in seven countries on five continents, and in-depth interviews with about 2,000 adult employees and employers in 14 countries. It was shown that "some of the nations with the best working conditions have the lowest unemployment rates" (Heymann & Earle, 2010, p. 13).

However, abysmal records of working conditions were found in many countries despite their unequal levels of technological development. The experience of workers in the United States of America (USA) is instructive in this regard. Many workers in the USA, as in many countries of the world, have been subjected to inadequate protections.

Some illustrations on the abysmal working conditions in the USA can be summarized as follows: lack of guarantee for paid annual leave, lack of mandate for paid sick leave, lack of guarantee for breastfeeding break, lack of guarantee for a weekly day of rest, lack of guaranteed compensation for overtime work, and only 12 weeks of unpaid leave for new mothers. This situation reinforces the continuity of precarious working conditions with adverse implications for the health and safety of workers. A further analysis of the situation in the USA shows that only 57% of workers in the private sector are entitled to pay for sick days, and less than one-third of the workers are entitled to pay for days off to care for a sick child.

In her reaction to the literature on working conditions, Lott (2010) concluded that:

The conditions of labor shape the daily lives of workers and those who depend on them, as well as their future opportunities and possibilities. Education and training, health, and housing are all related to working conditions. Study of the antecedents and correlates of human behavior is woefully incomplete without understanding the consequences of the conditions under which people work (Lott, 2010, p. 345).

As shown above, the conditions under which income is earned are central to the consequent health, welfare, and opportunities of workers and their families. This implies that maintenance of good working conditions would result in a number of positive outcomes, such as a healthier labor force, increase in the rate of productivity, decrease in the level of inefficiency, and sustainability of competitiveness.

In contrast, one of the most important trends over the past decades is undeniably the growth of insecurity in the world of work. Worldwide, unimaginable numbers of workers suffer from precarious working conditions. In their cross-sectional epidemiological study among healthcare professionals in Brazil, Vegian and Monteiro (2011) found that 42.1% had additional employment, 48% performed overtime, and 25.3% worked more than 70 hours per week.

A recent empirical study of working conditions among Chinese immigrants in the textile, garment, and leather sectors in the Veneto region of northern Italy, shows a significant relationship between poor working conditions and vulnerability of Chinese migrant workers; their social isolation from local community was equally related to the poor working conditions they experienced in Chinese-owned organizations (Wu & Sheehan, 2011). The problems of poor working conditions, including vulnerability and isolation from the local community were more prevalent among new migrants, and this situation was aggravated by a strong dependence on Chinese employers in a variety of manufacturing enterprises in Italy.



It was noted that the main source of the vulnerability of Chinese migrant workers in Italy is their isolation in a “closed community” and a lack of effective communication and interaction with the local Italian community. The nature of their isolation relates to the type of premises in which they work rather than the geographical region. The isolation of Chinese migrant workers was clarified by Wu and Sheehan:

The vast majority of Chinese immigrants are recruited by ethnic Chinese businesses which are widely known for having poor working conditions. This is particularly true for those in the textile, garment, and leather industries [...] where the high walls of workshops and the self-contained nature of enterprises make them susceptible to labour abuse and exploitation (Wu & Sheehan, 2011, p. 136).

Harsh and exploitative conditions and a lack of social support and advocacy for workers in the textile, garment, and leather sectors have been fairly well documented within both foreign-owned and Chinese-owned factories in areas such as Guangdong and Fujian (Chang, 2001).

Consistent with the precarious working conditions in various regions of the world, a study of the working conditions and productivity in Uganda showed that increased productivity was driven by intimidation of workers rather than improved working conditions, given that:

Workers were afraid of the employer. Supervisors were more interested in making sure that output increased irrespective of how it was obtained. Poor working conditions could be reversed by the government setting and implementing both practical rules and provisions regarding employment regulations (Balimuni, Kaboggoza, Abeli, Cavalli, & Agea, 2011, p. 232).

The above situation is evident with the rising spate of unemployment. Further observation on the abovementioned Ugandan experience showed lack of strict adherence to technical know-how and easy replacement of workers owing to availability of human resource. An assessment of safety at work showed that half of the workers had experienced some accidents and none of the workers were given first aid services (Balimuni, Kaboggoza, Abeli, Cavalli, & Agea, 2011).

In a Tanzanian study, an experience of unsatisfactory working conditions as well as a perceived lack of fundamental fairness dominated the focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted by Songstad, Rekdal, Massay, and Blystad (2011). Informants reported unfairness with reference to factors, such as

salary, promotion, recognition of work experience, allocation of allowances and access to training as well as to human resource management. The study also revealed that many health workers lacked information or knowledge about factors that influenced their working conditions (Songstad, Rekdal, Massay, & Blystad, 2011, p. 1).

Following their investigation of the types of work that Cambodian migrants are undertaking in Thailand and the conditions in which they live, Walsh and Ty (2011) reported that:

The Khmer people have had to strive considerably in order to survive. The land is not uniformly beneficial for wet paddy rice agriculture, and in the event of drought or flood or unanticipated expenses such as medical bills and starvation, indigence might follow (Walsh & Ty, 2011, p. 23).

The state regulations permit Khmer workers to work in certain provinces in Thailand and in certain occupations only. Moving beyond the specified and permitted provinces is illegal. The purpose of legal immigration into Thailand is for workers to take jobs that Thai workers do not wish to take at the level of wages offered. This includes plantation and fisheries work, both of which are low paid with minimum wage rates. Illegal migrants are more likely to find employment in the low paid service sector, especially in petty trading or the burgeoning karaoke bar industry (Walsh & Ty, 2011). Workers do not always find the work they expected or that was advertised to them and have little power over when employment ends; formal recruitment does not necessarily offer better opportunities or conditions, and the system is not properly regulated.

It is clear that the majority of migrants interviewed came from poor, agricultural background families which had insufficient ability to feed and support all family members. However, there were common problems with being paid. Some respondents had salaries several months in arrears and others had their pay docked for “mistakes” such as damaging stock or equipment, or being late for work. If they wanted to have a day off or were obliged to be absent for some reasons, then their wages would also be reduced on a pro-rata basis. All the respondents noted that they did not receive regular days off in any month, and they often faced the problem of being required to work excess unpaid hours (Walsh & Ty, 2011).

Considering the prevalence of precarious work, the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV) organized a symposium in 2011 with a focus on “Policies and Regulations to Combat Precarious Work.” The ACTRAV Symposium aspired to channel the voices of struggling workers and citizens whose working and living conditions had taken a

sharp turn for the worst in the times of economic crisis. At its conclusion, the symposium emphasized the important link between collective bargaining rights and eradication of precarious work. The symposium found that “while more countries formally guarantee core labour rights, less workers can exercise these rights due to the rise of precarious work” (ILO, 2012, p. 25). A close analysis of exploitation of workers is relevant in this context.

### **EXPLOITATION OF LABOR IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY**

As shown in a World Vision document (2009), labor exploitation is work obtained from a person under real or perceived threat in which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily. Labor exploitation can occur in many circumstances, particularly in the context of workers’ ignorance of their basic human rights. Labor exploitation can also occur in different sectors such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction, and service. Labor exploitation usually emanates from abuse of power and control in an industry. It begins with an ideology in which labor is perceived as a commodity.

Perception of exploitative relationships may vary from individual to individual and society to society. Torimiro (2009) describes exploitation in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay. As reported by Grant (2008), urban work can be highly exploitative for certain people such as children, women, and older people. The above description of exploitation is analogous to Otobo’s (1994) observation that exploitation or labor exploitation can occur in employment contracts through false supposition of a freely contracted agreement between two parties in which employees need the jobs to survive and also through the restriction by prevailing rates of the employees’ bargaining power when they get their jobs. They are given the job title and pay, but the amount of work to be accomplished for the pay may not be specified.

Consistent with the above explanation, one can observe the flow of exploitation and false consciousness among workers in the Nigerian informal economy, where capitalists have promoted exploitation of workers in several ways, including long hours of work, excess workload, low wages, deprivation, conflict, and dehumanization. This situation is exacerbated by several factors, including unemployment and poverty.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PRECARIOUS WORK AND EXPLOITATION**

The Marxist theory of conflict was adopted to explain exploitation and precarious working conditions, with a focus on the situation in the Nigerian informal economy.

The choice of Marxist theory is due to its suitability for analysis of forces of production and relations of production in the capitalist society.

The Marxist theory of conflict is suitable for an analysis of the problem of exploitation and its consequences on workers in the Nigerian informal economy, particularly with reference to the interplay of the internal and external sources of conflict. The internal sources of conflict may include autocratic management style, lack of promotion, and low pay, while the external sources of conflict may include government's industrial and economic policies, the nature of labor and social legislation, the state of the economy, and the general distribution of wealth and power in society. The implications of the existence of conflict in an organization were summarized by Otobo (1994):

The problems in industry may be fruitfully reduced to two: those of job security on the one hand and uses and abuses of power on the other. In capitalist systems the status of labour as a commodity (or factor of production) has telling repercussions on workers' security of employment (Otobo, 1994, p. 214).

Marxist theory stipulates that workers or employees constitute a social class with values and aspirations that are usually in conflict with those of their employers. The power of employers is usually maintained by the social structure of the capitalist society, especially through the instrumentality of the existing laws and the law enforcement agencies. In this regard, the existing labor law in Nigeria does not provide adequate protection for workers in the informal economy, although the law gives more protection to the capitalists, including those in the informal economy.

The above situation promotes the experience of exploitation, which has become a norm in the Nigerian informal economy, where invariably many Nigerians are subjected to underemployment and poverty. In this case, continued protection of capitalist interest translates into alienation and deterioration of living standards for workers in the Nigerian economy. It is clear that workers in the Nigerian informal economy have been alienated and denied adequate opportunities for upward social mobility.

Marxist theory dwells on different forms of alienation, such as alienation from the production process, alienation from the object of production, alienation from fellow workers, and alienation from self. Many workers have been alienated from ownership and control of goods and services produced in the Nigerian informal economy. The owners of goods and services in the Nigerian informal economy have higher economic power and they usually distinguish themselves from workers in the

sector. With unequal power relations in the informal economy, workers usually lack power to make final decisions on certain issues in the sector and many of them are yet to experience career advancement.

## METHODS

The present article adopted a descriptive research design based on a survey conducted in the Lagos State of Nigeria (Figures 1 and 2). Lagos State was the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria from its inception in 1967 to 1991, when the FCT was relocated to Abuja, a city in north-central Nigeria. The administrative structure of the state comprises 20 local government areas and 57 local development councils. Lagos State has a population of 9,113,605 and it accommodates about 6.4% of the Nigerian population of more than 140 million (National Population Commission, 2006, as cited in Odemi & Nixon, 2013). The current estimate of the Nigerian population is more than 170 million (Odeyemi & Nixon, 2013).

A significant number of migrants from different regions in Nigeria and elsewhere live in Lagos State. The indigenous populations of Lagos State include different dialect groups of the Yoruba, including the Awori, the Ogu, the Ijebu and the Ilaje,



Figure 1. Map of Nigeria showing Lagos State



Figure 2. Lagos State in Nigeria

while the Nigerian migrants in the State include the Igbo of southeast Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria, the Ijaw of southernmost Nigeria, and the Tiv of central Nigeria (Akinwale, 2012).

With the presence of a significant number of multinational corporations, Lagos State has accommodated some foreigners from various countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and North America. It has been projected that Lagos State would be the world's third largest city by 2015 (Massey, 2002).

Ten out of the 20 local government areas of Lagos State were randomly selected and a total of 500 respondents randomly selected from different informal economy organizations (IEOs) participated in the study. The list of the organizations selected includes restaurants, private schools, cybercafés, pharmacies, supermarkets, printing presses, car wash, furniture workshops, laundry shops, and bakeries. The sampling frame included any available informal economy organization with at least five employees and which is not part of the organized private sector.

The process of data collection from the field lasted for two months (November to December 2010) and it was facilitated by ten research assistants who were trained and mobilized accordingly. The research instruments used for the collection of data – a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews – were analyzed with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistics.

In compliance with the basic ethical issues in social research, a total of 500 copies of a structured questionnaire were distributed and 20 in-depth interviews were conducted among male and female workers selected from different organizations in the study area. The respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was obtained accordingly. In line with the principles of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, all the respondents participated freely without fear of any harm. The response rate stood at 96.6%.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The issues addressed in the findings of the present article are as follows: sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, the nature of working conditions among the respondents, predictors of the respondents' experience of precarious working conditions, experience of exploitation among the respondents, correlation between experience of exploitation and precarious working conditions, as well as the outcomes of the experience of exploitation among the respondents. These issues clearly show the orientation of the article, other than the informal economy.

The issues were analyzed and discussed in relation to the Nigerian sociocultural environment, based on a survey research strategy guiding the lines of discussions and application of a Marxist theory of conflict – the theoretical approach adopted for the article. The article maintains a logical connection between the issues, with a clear focus on the relationship between exploitation and working conditions in the Nigerian informal economy. The findings and discussions in the present article were aligned with relevant ideas in literature through appropriate citations and references. The general impression created in this article deals with the issue of exploitation and precarious working conditions in relation to the experience of workers in the Nigerian informal economy under study.

### **Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, marital status, educational qualification, religious affiliation, age, and working experience. The male respondents outnumbered their female counterparts by 11.8%. A total of 59.2% were not married, while 31.3% were married. A total of 70.2% of the respondents did not acquire higher education. Less than one-third of the respondents had postsecondary educational qualifications, such as a national diploma or a bachelor's degree. The inference drawn from this finding is that many respondents identified with a relatively low level of formal education.

The highest number of the respondents (59.9%) identified with Christianity followed by 36%, who claimed to be Muslims. In a way, this finding reflects Weber's (1992) idea on "protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism," showing the concept of calling in which individuals are expected to fulfill their moral obligations through worldly affairs. It is noted that the religious calling promoted the spirit of modern capitalism, resulting in wealth accumulation through reinvestment and economic efficiency.

The mean age of the respondents was 27.04 years with standard deviation of 4.07 years. This implies that the majority of the respondents were adults. Specifically, 63% of the respondents disclosed that they were under the age of 30 years, while the age distribution of the remaining 37% ranged from 30 to 50 years.

Regarding the current work experience of the respondents, those who indicated that they had worked currently for up to five years constituted the majority (76.4%) followed by those who indicated that they had worked currently for up to ten years (18%). The mean current working experience was 6.6 years with 3.2 years as standard deviation. The relatively low level of working experience was attributed to the age of most of the respondents.

### **The Nature of Working Conditions among the Respondents**

Given the information in Table 2, the majority of the respondents indicated their experience on different aspects of working conditions such as: adequate responsibility (86.1%), commitment (84.1%), organizational development (79.5%), job security (77.4%), training (75.4%), workaholic (73.7%), and supervision (72.7%). Also, two-thirds of the respondents indicated their experience of some working conditions, including loyalty (68.1%), joint decision-making (63.8%), nonmonetary remuneration (62.3%), workplace safety (60.9%), and promotion (50.7%).

However, low proportions of the respondents reported experience of contentment with position (49.9%), job satisfaction (40%), contentment with salary (39.5%), and accomplishment or fulfillment (27.8%). The prospect for promotion was equally low as only 50% of the respondents confirmed its availability. These findings partly indicate the trends in precarious working conditions. The low level of affirmation of contentment with the issues of salary, position, and job satisfaction show the extent of precarious conditions among the respondents.

Evidence of precarious working conditions is noticeable under a close examination of a synthesis of some variables showing the nature of precarious working conditions



**Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	213	44.1
Male	270	55.9
Total	483	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Not married	286	59.2
Cohabitation	32	6.6
Married	151	31.3
Divorced/Separated	9	1.9
Widowed	5	1.0
Total	483	100.0
<b>Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary	15	3.1
Secondary	188	38.9
Diploma/Technical	136	28.2
Degree/Higher Diploma	117	24.2
Masters	27	5.6
Total	483	100.0
<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Traditional	15	3.1
Islam	174	36.0
Orthodox Christianity	110	22.8
Pentecostal Christianity	179	37.1
Other	5	1.0
Total	483	100.0
<b>Age (Years)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
20	37	7.7
25	267	55.3
30	134	27.7
35	35	7.2
40	10	2.1
Total	483	100.0
<i>SD:</i> 4.07 <i>M:</i> 27.04		
<b>Current Work Experience (Years)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
0-5	87	18.0
6-10	18	3.7
11-15	9	1.9
16-20		

among the respondents. The result of the affected variables is graphically presented in Figure 3, which represents an annotated summary of some variables in Table 2, especially all the variables with less than 50% of affirmation. It is noteworthy that not all aspects of working conditions are precarious in all organizations in the Nigerian informal economy, given the high magnitude of respondents with experience of some working conditions, such as adequate responsibility, job security, training, and supervision.

**Table 2: Experience of Working Conditions among the Respondents**

Working Conditions	Experience (%)	
	N = 483	
	Yes	No
Training	75.4	24.6
Supervision	72.7	27.3
Nonmonetary Remuneration	62.3	37.7
Contentment with Salary	39.5	60.5
Contentment with Position	49.9	50.1
Adequate Responsibility	86.1	13.9
Commitment	84.1	15.9
Organizational Development	79.5	20.5
Loyalty	68.1	31.9
Job Satisfaction	40.0	60.0
Workaholic	73.7	26.3
Job Security	77.4	22.6
Promotion	50.7	49.3
Workplace Safety	60.9	39.1
Joint Decision-Making	63.8	36.2
Accomplishment or Fulfilment	27.8	72.2

The data in Figure 3 show that precarious working conditions have become partly noteworthy in the Nigerian informal economy organizations under investigation. The data in Figure 3 show an average of the extent of the respondents' experience of precarious working conditions. The data were derived from amalgamation of several variables with low levels of affirmation of experience of working conditions among the respondents. The following variables were included in the merger: contentment with salary (39.5%), contentment with position (49.9%), job satisfaction (40%), and accomplishment or fulfillment (27.8%).

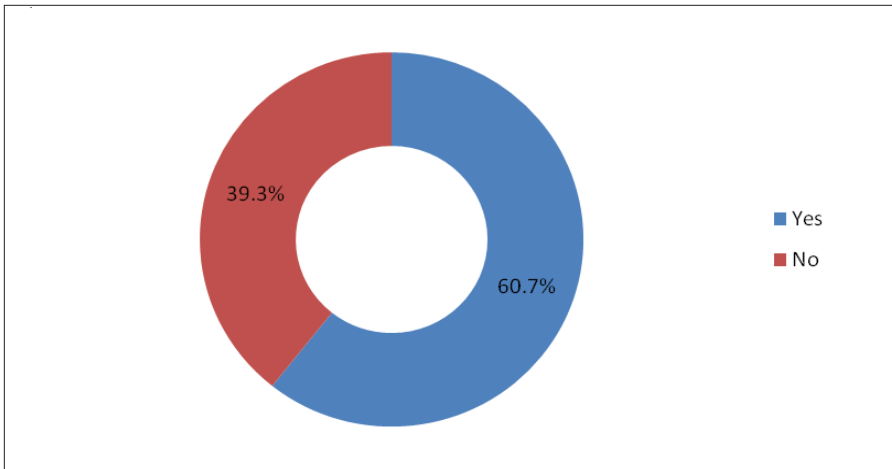


Figure 3. The magnitude of precarious working conditions among the respondents

The proportions of negative experience with some aspects of work constitute precarious working conditions. This is based on the ILO's (2012) description of precarious work as nonstandard employment, which is characterized by low pay, insecurity, lack of protection, and insufficiency for household support. The Nigerian informal economy can be regarded as a laboratory for nonstandard employment because it partly fits the ILO's description of precarious work.

### **Predictors of the Respondents' Experience of Precarious Working Conditions**

The respondents' experience of precarious working conditions was connected with several background factors, such as age, education, gender, income level, job status, marital status, and religion. The variation of the group mean in some of the aforementioned variables showed a significant difference at probability value of less than 0.01. The results show a significant variation between experience of precarious working conditions and each of the following variables: Age (Sum of Square = 1.945, Mean Square = 1.945,  $F = 12.988$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); Designation/Job Status (Sum of Square = 3.844, Mean Square = 1.281,  $F = 8.755$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); Income Level (Sum of Square = 1.393, Mean Square = 1.393,  $F = 9.237$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ); and Marital Status (Sum of Square = 2.413, Mean Square = 0.804,  $F = 5.385$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

Expectedly, a combination of several factors, as shown in Table 3, provides a basis for an understanding of experience of precarious working conditions in the Nigerian informal economy. Experience of precarious working conditions (EPWC) is the

dependent variable presented in Table 3. It is important to note that the dependent variable was transformed and computed from a merger of unfavorable responses to the issues of salary, position, job satisfaction, and accomplishment or fulfillment from work.

**Table 3. Summary of Predictors of the Experience of Precarious Working Conditions**

ANOVA OF EPWC	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	1.945	1.945	12.988	0.001
Designation/Job Status	3.844	1.281	8.755	0.001
Income Level	1.393	1.393	9.237	0.003
Marital Status	2.413	0.804	5.385	0.001

Note: ANOVA = analysis of variance; EPWC = experience of precarious working conditions.

Analysis of the direction of variations between experience of precarious working conditions and the variables in Table 3 was presented in Table 4, showing cross tabulation of the variations. Only the first three variables in Table 3 significantly associated with experience of precarious working conditions. However, the variation between marital status and experience of precarious working conditions was not statistically significant.

The results of cross-tabulation of variations presented in Table 4 show that the younger respondents reported their experience of precarious working conditions the most. It was found that the experience of precarious working conditions was more prevalent among junior staff. Also, the respondents with lower level of income reported the highest proportion of experience of precarious working conditions. This finding shows the various groups of people that are more vulnerable to precarious working conditions in the Nigerian informal economy.

### **Experience of Exploitation among the Respondents**

As shown in Table 5, experience of longer hours of work and low level of monthly income were analyzed and used as indicators to explain the experience of exploitation among the respondents. The respondents' daily working hours ranged from 7 to 12 hours, indicating a continuum of 49 to 84 working hours per week. Most of them (73.5%) indicated that they worked for 10 to 12 hours daily, while some (26.5%) noted that they worked for seven to nine hours daily. The regime of

**Table 4. Cross Tabulation of Variations in Experience of Precarious Working Conditions**

Characteristics	Precarious Working Conditions			Chi-square	Sig.
	Yes	No	Total	$\chi^2$	
<b>Age (Years)</b>				4.846	0.03
20 – 30	35.8	27.1	62.9		
31 – 40	24.8	12.2	37.1		
Total	60.7	39.3	100		
<b>Designation/Job Status</b>				17.77	0.001
Junior Staff	37.9	31.7	69.6		
Senior Staff	22.8	7.7	30.4		
Total	60.7	39.3	100		
<b>Income Level (N)</b>				5.630	0.02
1,000 – 40,000	48.7	34.8	83.4		
41,000 – 80,000	12.0	4.6	16.6		
Total	60.7	39.3	100		
<b>*Marital Status</b>				6.662	0.08
Not Married	33.7	25.5	59.2		
Cohabitation	3.5	3.1	6.6		
Married	21.3	9.9	31.3		
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	2.1	0.8	2.9		
Total	60.7	39.3	100		

\* Relevant but not statistically significant

relatively long daily working hours is not commensurate with the relatively low monthly income identified with most of the respondents. This gap reflects the exploitation of workers in the Nigerian informal economy, especially when viewed from the international benchmark on working hours in decent work.

Working hours have been an important issue for the ILO since the founding of the organization (Tucker & Folkard, 2012). The first ILO Convention focused on the establishment of limits on daily and weekly working hours. The recent economic crisis and the Global Jobs Pact of 2009 put the issue of working hours back on the agenda (Tucker & Folkard, 2012). This has been coupled with a significant shift away from the “normal” or “standard” working week towards “nonstandard” work schedules such as shift work, compressed work weeks, weekend work, and on-call work. The international agenda on decent work was renewed in Geneva in 2011.

**Table 5. Indication of Exploitation among the Respondents**

Daily Working Hours	Frequency	%
7	6	1.2
8	40	8.3
9	82	17.0
10	140	29.0
11	70	14.5
12	145	30.0
Total	483	100.0

*SD: 1.4    M: 10.4*

Monthly Income (N)	Frequency	%
10,000 – 19,000	93	19.3
20,000 – 29,000	184	38.1
30,000 – 39,000	51	10.6
40,000 – 49,000	75	15.5
50,000 -59,000	22	4.6
60,000 – 69,000	14	2.9
70,000 – 79,000	6	1.2
80,000 and above	38	7.9

The prevalence of long hours of work has become a major problem in Nigeria, especially in the informal economy. Despite their flexible working time arrangements, many informal organizations experience long hours of work. The working hour is considered long at more than 48 hours per week, while it is considered low at less than 30 hours per week (Tucker & Folkard, 2012).

As more and more workers engage in so-called “nonstandard work schedules,” there is a need for information concerning how different kinds of working time arrangements can impact on workers’ health and well-being, in order to estimate both the short- and long-term consequences for workers and employers, as well as for society at large.

The respondents’ monthly income ranged from ₦10,000 (\$60) to over ₦80,000 (\$485). Most of the respondents (83.5%) mentioned that their monthly income was within ₦10,000 (\$60) to ₦49,000 (\$240). Only 16.6% of the respondents were identified with a relatively higher monthly income ranging from ₦50,000 (\$300) to over ₦80,000 (\$485). The mean monthly income was ₦30,103.50 (\$182), while the standard deviation was ₦19,806.90 (\$120).

Given the relatively high cost of living in the study area – the metropolis of Lagos State of Nigeria – all categories of the respondents' monthly income are relatively low. Essentially, if high salary is an important work value, many workers would expect adequate compensation from their employers in exchange for work obligations. Unfortunately, their longer hours of work with low level of pay contradict the needed motivation and this could result in negative outcomes such as occupational hazards and job dissatisfaction. Thus, most respondents would have been influenced by the reality of life in Lagos State, especially in the context of urbanism as described by Louis Wirth:

The urbanization of the world, which is one of the most impressive facts of modern times, has wrought profound changes in virtually every phase of social life. [...] Density involves diversification and specialization, the coincidence of close physical contact and distant social relations, glaring contrasts, a complex pattern of segregation, the predominance of formal social control, and accentuated friction, among other phenomena. (Wirth, 1938, p. 1)

It is noted that urbanization has led to an agglomeration of people from different locations for socioeconomic purposes. This situation accentuates social inequality and stratification of individuals based on different criteria such as ethnicity, employment status, tastes, and preferences. Eventually, the dynamics of urbanism promote predatory relationships, which tend to obstruct the social order.

The context of urbanization in Lagos State exposes glaring contrasts between splendor and squalor, riches and poverty, intelligence and ignorance, order and chaos. In this context, interaction between individuals with incompatible status fosters a spirit of competition and mutual exploitation. This circumstance provides a basis for the prevalence of abnormal conditions such as personal disorganization, mental breakdown, delinquency, crime, and corruption, which pervade the Nigerian society. Workers in the Nigerian informal economy are worst hit by the vagaries of urbanization.

### **Correlation between Experience of Precarious Working Condition and Exploitation**

The results presented in Table 6 show a negative correlation between the respondents' experience of precarious working conditions (PWC) and monthly income ( $r = -0.123, p < 0.01$ ). This implies that the experience of precarious working conditions increased with low income, thereby showing the gravity of exploitation in terms of excess work load with poor pay. A positive correlation was observed

between experience of precarious working conditions and working hours. This implies that the more the hours of work, the higher the level of precarious working condition. However, the correlation was not linear ( $r = 0.044, p > 0.05$ ). There was also a statistically significant negative correlation between monthly income and working hours ( $r = -0.113, p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 6. Correlation of Experience of Precarious Working Conditions and Exploitation**

Pearson Correlation		PWC SCALE	Working Hours	Monthly Income
<b>PWC SCALE</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.044	-.123(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.333	.007
	N	483	483	483
<b>Working Hours</b>	Pearson Correlation	.044	1	-.113(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.333		.013
	N	483	483	483
<b>Monthly Income</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.123(**)	-.113(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.013	
	N	483	483	483

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Outcomes of the Experience of Exploitation among the Respondents

The outcomes of experience of exploitation were analyzed in the light of the implications of the respondents' working conditions in the informal economy organizations under investigation. The findings on the trends in working conditions indicate that more than 60% of the respondents could be adversely affected by frustration as a result of their experience of precarious working conditions, such as low pay, inadequate opportunity for promotion, and job dissatisfaction. As a result of their experience of exploitation, workers' health and safety could be compromised. This outcome is analogous to Otobo's (1994) earlier observation that the imposition of longer hours of work consequently led to diminishing returns and a rise in accident rates when World War I broke out and ammunitions were badly needed.

Many instances of the outcomes of experience of exploitation featured in the participants' narratives in the in-depth interviews. Most of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with perceived low levels of their pay. They also complained about



excess work load and the lack of overtime payment. Excerpts of expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived low levels of wages and salaries in some informal economy organizations are presented in Table 7 for clarity.

**Table 7. Some Narratives Showing the Outcomes of Experience of Exploitation**

ID	Ethnographic Summary	Content Analysis
1	The money I am being paid in this supermarket is not enough at all. After I remove transportation fare the remaining money cannot be sufficient to buy good food before I think of how to plait my hair and talk of bathing soap and cream. I am looking for another work. I have OND but to get work is not easy.	A female worker in a supermarket expressing agony over a low salary with an indication of labor turnover intention.
2	Pertaining to this organization, [...] people are not satisfied with what they are earning. They always complain of the salary being paid. [...] That is why when some people are asked to work overtime, they will start grumbling.	A male worker in a bakery revealing his observation of complaints about a lack of job satisfaction among coworkers in his organization.
3	The money we get from this carwash is very small compared to the kind of work we do. We open our carwash by 9:00 in the morning on a daily basis and we stay at the carwash till around 6:00 in the evening and sometimes we are still in the carwash even till after 7:00 p.m. if there is job or if another customer comes during closing time. That is how we operate from morning till evening from Monday to Saturday and Sunday. We are used to obeying the rules of the owner of the carwash. He is a no-nonsense man.	A male worker in a car wash explaining the disparity between pay and workload, as well as long working hours under the control of an autocratic capitalist.
4	There are many cases of casual labor in this organization and this is because most of our staff are appointed on casual basis. So the employer can easily replace those who do not come to work regularly with those who are ready for serious work.	A female worker giving an account of instances of casualization and lack of job security among coworkers in a restaurant.
5	The work I am doing here is more than the money I am getting. [-] My salary is not even enough for transportation and feeding let alone saving.	A clear case of exploitation arising from capitalist appropriation of surplus value in a cybercafé in Lagos State.
6	[-] I struggle to get to work. Transportation na wahala [transport fare is a problem]. For accommodation I no fit [I cannot] talk about that one. I fit [can] sleep anywhere I see. Make God help us.	A male worker in a laundry sharing his experience of difficulty concerning transportation and accommodation in Lagos State.

Source: Excerpts of in-depth interviews with Informal Workers in Lagos State, Nigeria, 2010

## **CONCLUSION**

The present article examined the relationship between workers' experience of exploitation and precarious working conditions in the Nigerian informal economy. The majority of workers experienced exploitation through long hours of work with low pay. Many workers affirmed their exposure to training, supervision, adequate responsibilities, and organizational commitment, despite high level of awareness about several instances of exploitation observed in the Nigerian informal economy. This situation is driven by the capitalist economic system, which has caused so much discontentment and anxiety in contemporary Africa (Amin, 2012).

Exploitation provides a basis for experience of precarious working conditions in the Nigerian informal economy. It has been discovered that with exploitation of labor in the informal economy workers are not paid adequately for their actual labor. Their wages fall below the level of what is needed to live a meaningful life, especially in the Lagos State of Nigeria where the cost of living is very high. This situation is not sustainable. It must be reversed to promote peace and justice at the workplace and society at large.

Some workers were more vulnerable to precarious working conditions than others, depending on their socioeconomic backgrounds. Exploitation and precarious employment highly affected workers from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds and this situation can easily impair their health and safety at the workplace. This suggests an urgent need for a progressive workplace policy that can ensure decent work and adequate protection for workers in the Nigerian informal economy. As shown in a recent study by Rodgers (2013), precarious work can be controlled within the scope of traditional labor rights or through the creation of new rights. These approaches should be considered to improve the situation of workers in the Nigerian informal economy.

The above suggestion is necessitated by the reality of exploitation in the capitalist society. As reported by Ritzer (1996), when exploitation becomes high and unbearable, the working class can mount pressure and force governments to place restrictions on the actions of capitalists. Governments can do this through amendment of the labor law to ensure regulation of employment relations in the informal economy. The recent emergence of the Federation of Informal Workers of Nigeria (FIWON) is a good step in the right direction. This organization should metamorphose into a vibrant trade union to properly articulate the interests of workers in the Nigerian informal economy.

The Nigerian government at different levels should give priority attention to the issue of labor standards in the informal economy. As noted by Alston (2004), labor standards consist of freedom of association, freedom from forced labor, freedom from child labor, and nondiscrimination in employment. Also, the work environment should be improved to safeguard workers' health and safety in the Nigerian informal economy. Workers in the Nigerian informal economy require adequate protection from the problems of precarious working conditions, including vulnerability and entrenchment of the culture of poverty. Finally, governments should design simple and transparent criteria to redefine and protect the employment relationship in the informal economy.

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