

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF **VIOLENCE** AND ITS MANAGEMENT



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THE PSYCHOLOGY  
OF  
VIOLENCE  
AND ITS MANAGEMENT

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# WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AMONG APPRENTICES IN THE NIGERIAN INFORMAL SECTOR

by

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## Introduction

Workplace violence is an occupational hazard that requires attention in the concern for workers' health and safety. The World Health Organisation (WHO) identified workers' health as an important component that deserves much attention in its global health initiative. In 1996, the WHO set an objective of "Global Strategy on Occupational Health for All". In that regard, the WHO developed the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health. It was designed to provide a policy framework that protects, promotes and improves the health of all workers. During the 60<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly held in May 2007, the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health was endorsed. Member-states were urged to devise policies and plans for its implementation in consultation with all workers, employers and their organizations (Corvalan, et.al, 2007).

According to the WHO, all the member- countries were unanimous in their commitment to work towards the total coverage of all categories of workers including those in the informal sector of the economy, small and medium-sized enterprises with essential interventions for the prevention and control of occupational hazards and work-related injuries (where workplace violence features prominently). As challenging as the commitment seemed, the concern for workplace violence as an occupational hazard in manpower development practice and research in Nigeria has been underplayed. In government policies that set to address workers' health, the focus does not consider the small-scale informal sector that includes apprentices in various trades. Yet, they constitute a significant proportion of the working population and are major contributors to the Nigerian economy.

## The Nature of Workplace Violence

Workplace experiences have guided the definition of violence in its practical terms. Scholars see it commonly include both fatal and non-fatal violence, physical and psychological violence. According to the 1996 Intelligence Bulletin 57 of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), workplace violence involves violent acts, including physical assaults and threats of assault directed at individuals at work. Di Martino and Chappell (1998), identified violence at work to range from deliberate silence to homicide. Their view also separated physical violence and psychological violence. They presented different case studies across countries and continents to illustrate the various violent acts at work.

In the examination of Nigerian women prison workers' experience of workplace

violence, Fayankinnu (2010) reported both psychological and physical harm against the victim as impact on female prison workers. Poilpot-Rocaboy (2006) identified four types of workplace violence namely criminal, customer/client, worker-on-worker and personal/private. However, in the contextual review, Fayankinnu further classified the Poilpot-Rocaboy typology to psychological and physical violence as well. According to Ekore (2007), workplace violence, as a psychosocial hazard, concern incidences where workers are abused, threatened, assaulted or subjected to other offensive experiences in circumstances related to work.

A common theme, however, can be found in the various definitions of workplace violence that are available in the literature. The theme is that when it occurs in the workplace, violence hurts the victim, productivity and sometimes other members of the organisation.

Based on a plethora of surveys that have been documented in the literature, it is safe to define workplace violence in this paper as *any act or experience in the workplace that is directed at an individual which he or she considers to threaten, harm or hurt his or her physical and psychological well-being*. It might be perceived or real. This is not restricted to any particular workplace. It can and does occur in all workplaces but in varying forms and degrees.

When it occurs, workplace violence impacts the worker and organization negatively. Often times, productivity from affected worker suffers as he is either physically handicapped or emotionally drained to function optimally. Studies have classified the variety of workplace violence to affect the physical and/ or emotional well-being of the individual at work. The effect can range from mild to severe on a continuum.

### **Apprentices and Workplace Violence**

The informal sector in Nigeria covers the various occupations largely at the semi-skilled small-scale level which are not formalized. Workers in this sector are rarely captured in the policy and planning documents of government. They play important roles in offering technical skills as artisans. Its continuity depends on those who get into the trade as apprentices and later graduate to become artisans/technicians themselves. They are usually in auto and machineries repair, electrical, carpentry, bricklaying and building constructions, saloons and tailoring, and other related lowly-rated but highly significant professions. Despite their relative contributions to local and national socio-economic development, governments at various levels in Nigeria have no known policies that protect this inevitable and indispensable group from both physical and psychosocial hazards at work. Yet, it is common knowledge that they are vulnerable to almost every known experience of violence at work.

Casual visits to artisan shops or work centres readily show that individuals on apprenticeship are usually exposed to several hazards. A recent survey that involved the use of Rapid Assessment Procedure (RAP) identified certain dimensions of workplace

violence as the ones commonly experienced by apprentices in Ibadan metropolis. A cursory look at other semi-skilled workplaces across the country might not be different in the trend.

**Types of Workplace Violence in Selected Nigerian Semi-skilled Occupations**

- Harassment
- Sexual harassment in unisex occupation
- Intimidation of all sorts
- Bully by the trainer(s) and senior apprentice (s)
- Abuses by clients to the workplace
- Assault
- Verbal abuses
- Name-calling
- Physical threats
- Beating and punching
- Hitting with work instrument
- Ostracisation
- Kicking
- Deliberate infliction of physical injuries among several others

*Source: Rapid assessment procedure survey conducted in Ibadan,*

Though actual figures are unavailable to show incidence of death and fatal violence affecting apprentices in Nigeria's informal small-scale enterprises, a survey might report frightening statistics. This group has not been adequately investigated to be captured in the national database to provide statistical reference. The dearth of data from such an important occupational group would necessarily make it difficult to guide evidence-based intervention policies that address their safety and health concerns. Apart from informal mechanisms that are available in the workplace usually provided at the whims and caprices of the trainers, victims rarely get help when affected. Sometimes, the available help is sought from the perpetrators of the violence or concerned neighbors who might not be powerful enough to condemn the violent act. The lack of workplace policy on the topic has sustained the trend over time with the attendant effects.

### **Impact of Workplace Violence**

The prevalence of workplace violence has been attributed to several organizational failures. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has described it as one of the most important emerging risks in the workplace which has been generally acknowledged as a global issue affecting all countries. This informed the development of intervention



programmes such as the 'SOLVE'. When not addressed, workplace violence lowers the productivity and effectiveness of employees and the organization respectively. The negative impacts have been well-documented but not for apprentices in semi-skilled occupations in Nigeria.

For example, Ekore (2007) identified lowered self-esteem, depersonalization, anxiety, depression, high turnover rate, impulsive behaviours, higher use of alcohol and other drugs as possible consequences of psychosocial hazards in workplaces. This was found among bank employees. Apprentices in semi-skilled occupations may experience the same problems (negative impacts) when faced with workplace violence. Inability to cope with such consequences might be a factor in the lack of interest among young men and women to go into apprenticeship in trades as career option.

Similarly, Fayankinnu reported on several authors that linked workplace violence with higher level of stress and reduction of victims' well-being at work (Nielsen et al., 2004; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2001; Leymann, 1996). The findings by the authors that were reported by Fayankinnu also identified job commitment, performance and intention to quit as the areas more affected by workplace violence. Fayankinnu (2010) found that those who took part in the study reported perceived occupational hazards of workplace violence to impact negatively on their psychological health, social well-being and job-satisfaction. It is then obvious that the impact of workplace violence put all victims vulnerable at work. Yet, the apprentices in semi-skilled occupations have not been covered in the literature despite their high vulnerability. This necessitates the discussion of workplace violence among apprentices in the informal sector in Nigeria where statistics do not exist on the topic.

An obvious manifestation of the negative impact of workplace violence in semi-skilled occupations shows in the low-level of Nigerians involved in the various trades to offer services as artisans. There is influx of artisans from neighboring African countries to offer the semi-skilled services in Nigeria. It is no longer debatable that the number of young men and women entry artisanship as apprentices in Nigeria has declined significantly since the last decade. Apprentices ensure the continuity of artisanship. The downward trend has continually exacerbated the phenomenal youth unemployment problem. The situation is similar across the country and has brought about scarcity of artisans in most trade despite the unending demand for their services.

When young men and women enter artisanship as apprentices, they are confronted with a myriad of workplace experiences that sometimes overwhelm them. Such experiences constitute violence as they threaten, harm and /or hurt the well-being of the apprentice. When unable to adjust to such challenges, the victim quits the apprenticeship programme before completion of training. Hence, the high turnover observed among them in almost all the trades in Nigeria. It has become a national crisis in the form of

shortage of artisans such as plumbers, electricians, bricklayers, auto-mechanics and other related semi-skilled professionals to carryout technical services. As scarcely filled as these occupations are, there are millions of young men and women who have no jobs, no skills to sell yet these are not willing to go into apprenticeship as artisans. No known insight has been provided on the possible factors responsible for the trend.

### **Conclusion**

Workplace violence as an occupational hazard has been of great interest to the ILO and WHO in the quest to promote workers' health and well-being for enhanced productivity. The global statistics on workplace violence identified all categories of workers as vulnerable. That explains the global perspectives that guide their initiatives. The Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health of the World Health Assembly was guided by WHO while the SOLVE programme was designed by the ILO. Both initiatives are global strategies for addressing the local problem of workplace violence that prevail in every workplace and every country. Put succinctly, they are global strategies for addressing workplace violence that occur in workplace in every community. Though apprentices as artisans have not been incorporated as important stakeholders and potential victims that need to be protected, both initiatives did not exclude them in the original designs. They were designed to address the problem for all workers everywhere including those in the informal semi-skilled sector.

The dimensions of workplace violence reported by apprentices in this paper have shown that they experience violence and are as vulnerable as workers anywhere and in other occupations. That there is workplace violence among employees in Nigeria's informal sector is not debatable. What is mainly different is that workers elsewhere and in other sectors such as those in white and blue collar jobs are aware of steps to take when they become victims, and are equipped with skills to prevent situations that promote it. This is a major shift from the trend among apprentices in semi-skilled occupations in Nigeria. In Western countries and certain occupations in Nigeria, concerns about threats to the well-being of workers have resulted in proactive and intervention programmes built into the organizational policies. But there is no such programme for apprentices in semi-skilled occupations in Nigeria.

As mentioned earlier, this group of workers does not have known policies that effectively address experience of workplace violence. Oftentimes, victims are expected to accommodate workplace violence as part of the training. When not severe, the victim accommodates it as the norm or what is normal and should be. In severe cases, especially when there is physical injury that could be life-threatening, the victim is offered some financial support without any opportunity for psychological services such as counseling. Over 200 of workers in this category have never visited a psychologist. Almost 99% of them do not know anything about psychologists and

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professional counselors. This lack of awareness on their part would continue to reinforce the trend of workplace violence thereby raising its impact level on the workers, community, and socio-economic development.

Increase in awareness and advocacy as initial steps are required to empower apprentices to be able to speak out when faced with workplace violence. When they are assured of available mechanisms to deal with the problem, apprentices are more likely to adjust to the challenges associated with artisans-in-training. With high adjustment capacity, it will be possible to drastically reduce turnover rate and improve the statistics of young people entry into artisanship. The overall benefit would help improve apprentices' health and well-being. More people would be encouraged to choose artisanship as a career option thereby reducing youth unemployment while increasing access to services of semi-skilled technicians. Consequently, the crime rate in the country will be significantly reduced and socio-economic development will be enhanced. Apart from expanding the global literature on the topic, this paper presents the platform for sensitization to the needs of a dependable work group in Nigeria that is often neglected in public policy initiatives aimed at improving workers' health and productivity. It is also hoped that this paper has stimulated the desire for national health advocacy and possible intervention to address the lack of interest in apprenticeship among Nigerian young men and women.

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