

**PATTERNS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN IN INFORMAL SECTOR IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined the patterns of workplace violence among women in informal sector. The study adopted a survey research design. Three hundred and seventy-four women working in informal sector like farm, bakery, laundry, canteen and various construction sites were randomly selected. Their ages range from 21- 48 years with the mean of 32.6 years. Workplace Violence Questionnaire (WOVIQ) was used to collect data for this study. Two hypotheses were raised to test workplace violence among women in informal sector across educational qualifications and ages. The findings revealed a significant difference in self-reported workplace violence based on age of women working in informal sector at  $F_{(3, 373)} = 23.66$ ;  $p < .05$  and significant difference in self reported workplace violence based on level of education of women working in informal sector was at  $F_{(3, 373)} = 28.46$ ;  $p < .05$ . It was concluded that although all female workers experienced workplace violence in their workplace at different degrees, it was discovered that the younger the female workers are ones who reported workplace violence more. Apart from age which is significant in determining the workplace violence among female workers, level of education also influences workplace violence, the higher the level of education the less the reported workplace violence. It was recommended that supervisors at different sites, firms etc should discourage any negative practice in the non-formal workplace including sexual harassment. Secondly, because of their status, female employees should be protected by legislation against such acts. Thirdly, non-governmental organizations interested in women issues should provide forum for female workers to bring forward their complaints whenever they experience workplace violence and other related discriminatory practices against them.*

**Keywords:** workplace violence, feminism, informal sector

**Introduction**

It is now widely recognized that informal sector plays a vital role in the process of economic growth and development. It has been reported that the majority of the global population makes out their livings from the informal sector (Chukuezi, 2010; Horn, 2010; ILO, 2010; Meagher, 2007; Kohnert, 2006). The informal employment provides a cushion for workers who cannot find a job in the formal sector. These workers are called informal labour. 'Informal labour' is defined to include workers who are employed on a casual or temporary basis without any proper form of contract, as well as those who work for themselves

either alone or in small groups. The informal sector is characterized by non-compliance and non-applicability of labour legislation. The sector is also characterized by a strong presence of a number of loosely organised, workers'/operators' unions, or associations, that attempt to address some of the issues on self-help, collective basis. Working from dawn to dusk everyday the informal labourers are persistently exposed to various types of physical work hazards and various health problems. In compensation to their labour, they earn a very small amount of income. These workers have no security of employment, receive few or no benefits, and are often unprotected by labour laws.

In Nigeria today the informal sector employs majority of youths especially women but the official statistical apparatus still does not gather systematic data on the informal economy. This has made information on the size and employment structure in the informal sector hard to obtain. However, the estimates suggest that the sector accounts for between 45% and 60% of the urban labour force, up from about 25% in the mid-1960s (*Nwaka, 2005*).

Workplace violence especially of women has remained a worrisome concern to rational minds in our. Though it happens in every work of life and in all regions of the world, it is more common among the informal sector workers. While a number of countries have adopted some policy measures to combat it, most of the countries are just giving lip service to such a crucial phenomenon. Workplace violence is one of the most complex and dangerous occupational hazards facing people working in informal sector.

The range of workplace violence includes fistfights, non-fatal stabbing, not-fatal shooting, homicide, psychological and sexual harassment and sabotage (Simon, 1986). Personal life does spill over into the workplace, and sometimes those personal issues present themselves with dangerous consequences. The costs associated with incidents of workplace violence consist of both hidden and highly visible items, and the total cost can be very high. For example, women workers, particularly those in the informal economy like those in export processing zones, construction sites, farms, traders in motor parks and domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harassment. In both developing and industrialized countries migrant workers are also at risk because of the problems of getting work, social isolation, and inability to stick up for themselves.

Workplace Violence against women cuts across all cultures and traditions, across class, ethnic, and religious barriers. In fact, one thing that is universal is acts of violence against women. It is very difficult to recognize that workplace violence has occurred unless the victim can admit it has happened. Unfortunately, often a woman will deny, even when asked, that she has been beaten, raped or assaulted. That she has had violence committed against her may be denied or internalized. This explains the cases of apparently happy woman later going mad due to the stress and injury of being battered and abused.

The various forms of workplace violence can occur regularly. In all these forms of abuse, the victim is always afraid and for many victims the thought of even leaving the abusive situation does not occur to them because they have been so intimidated by the abuser they feel that they may not be able to function without the abuser. Moreover, the employment situation in the country is not favourable. They therefore stay in these work environments to the detriment of their mental and physical health. Also abusive behaviour may not be recognizable to the victim because the pattern of abuse has been so regular it may seem as normal behaviour to the victim.

In Nigeria, reporting violence is different due to cultural and religious implications. Most ethnic groups in Nigeria believe that the woman is not equal to the man and therefore she must always submit to his authority either at home or workplace. They teach women that whatever the circumstance the man is in charge and she must submit unequivocally. Even when the man is confronted he often gets away with the equivalent of a slap on the wrist. The situation is no better when she reports to the police. So they suffer in silence.

### **Statement of Problems**

The dangers arise from the exposure to violent individuals combined with the absence of strong violence prevention programmes and protective regulations in informal sector are pathetic. However, what is available suggests that coercion and not being wanted may play a considerable role in workplace violence.

This study therefore examined the patterns of workplace violence among women in informal sector in south west of Nigeria

**Methodology**

**Design**

This study adopted a survey research design. Three hundred and seventy-four women working in informal sector like farm, bakery, laundry, canteen and various construction sites were purposively selected. Their ages range from 21-48years with the mean of 32.6years.

**Instrument**

Workplace Violence Questionnaire (WOVIQ) “a self-report inventory representing the first attempt to assess the prevalence of workplace violence in a manner that met traditional psychometric standards” was developed and used to collect data for this study The internal consistency was found to be adequate with Cronbach Alpha of .74 across gender, and test-retest stability of .68 over 3 months.

**Result**

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Reported Workplace Violence Against Women

	Variations	N	Mean	Standard Deviations
Age	16-25	129	34.12	2.40
	26-35	82	22.18	2.16
	36-45	105	18.24	2.10
	45 years and above	58	14.64	2.14
Education level	No formal Education	128	38.14	2.18
	First School Leaving Cert.	94	22.14	2.24
	O/L	109	14.26	2.28
	Above O/L	43	10.42	2.12

The trend of reported workplace violence against women working in informal sectors in Nigeria was shown in table 1. The trend has shown in table 1 revealed a decrease as the age and level of education increase. The significance of this inverse relationship observed was tested in the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in self-reported workplace violence based on age of women working in informal sector.

**Table2: Summary of Analysis of Variance**

Model	Variations	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Between	1110.12	3	370.04	23.66	.000
	Within	5786.8	370	15.64		
	Total	6896.92	373			

The hypothesis one which stated that there is no significant difference in self-reported workplace violence based on age of women working in informal sector was rejected at  $F_{(3, 373)} = 23.66; p < .05$ . This implies that there is significant difference in self-reported workplace violence based on age of women working in informal sector.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in self-reported workplace violence based on level of education of women working in informal sector.

**Table3: Summary of Analysis of Variance**

Variations	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between	5587.2672	3	1862.4224	28.46	.000
Within	24212.8	370	65.44		
Total	29800.0672	373			

The hypothesis two which stated that there is no significant difference in self reported workplace violence based on level of education of women working in informal sector was rejected at  $F_{(3, 373)} = 28.46; p < .05$ .

This implies that there is a significant difference in self-reported workplace violence based on level of education of women working in informal sector.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The bulk of discussions about gender inequalities at work focus on various ways in which female workers are unnecessarily underprivileged in the workplace in terms of low pay, lower status job, restriction from certain jobs as well as confinement to sex-type jobs (Mackinon, 1979; Schaefer, 1989; Haralambos and Holborn, 2000). However, while these aspects are important, the issue of workplace violence at work seems to attract little attention. Reskin and Padavic (1994) pointed out that because sexual pressures are as a form of workplace violence typically initiated by those in superior positions against the less powerful; women are more likely than men to be the objects of unwanted attention, especially in the workplace. The present study has brought to the fore the issue of workplace violence at work with a specific focus on the experience of female workers in Nigeria's non-formal work environment.

As demonstrated in this study, all female workers experienced violence in their workplace at different degrees. However, we must also note that the younger the female workers the more the reported workplace violence. Apart from age which is significant in determining the workplace violence among female workers, level of education also influence workplace violence, the higher the level of education the less the reported workplace violence.

The following are recommended as a way of reducing the incidence of sexual harassment in the Nigerian non-formal workplace. Firstly, supervisors at different sites, firms etc should discourage any negative practice in the non-formal workplace including sexual harassment. Secondly, because of their status, female employees should be protected by legislation against such acts. Thirdly, non-governmental organizations interested in women issues should provide forum for female workers to bring forward their complaints whenever they experience workplace violence and other related discriminatory practices against them.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of workplace violence against women working in informal sector should be taken seriously if the world is sincere in protecting these vulnerable poor people. Their contributions to the growth of developing economies are important and they should be protected.

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