

INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL VARIABLES ON ATTITUDE OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IN NIGERIA TOWARDS FREQUENT STRIKES BY WORKERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING.

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ABSTRACT

Strikes by government workers is becoming nauseating in Nigeria due to its frequency and economic, political and death toll effects on the masses .The study investigates the influence of personal variables on attitudes of public servants towards frequent strikes by workers in Nigeria. It involved 500 public servants selected through the technique of stratified random sampling. The descriptive survey design was used. A 12 item instrument titled “Attitudes of government workers to strike questionnaire” (AOGWTSQ) structured on a 4-point likert - type scale was used in data collection. The instrument was duly validated. From Hypotheses one and two religion and gender respectively do not influence government workers in their attitudes to strikes. However, findings indicate that significant differences exist between members of the two age groups studied in their attitudes towards strikes, while those in the lower age group tend to be confrontational and ready to embark on strike those in the older age group prefer to dialogue until a positive result is obtained. It was suggested that Counsellors should organise both group and individual counselling sessions for the workers periodically. Finally the implications and conclusion based on the findings were also presented.

Key words: Attitude, Public Servants, Ogun State, Frequent Strikes, Workers and Counselling Implications

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the problem

The rapid spate of strikes by workers reported from almost all sectors of the Nigerian economy is alarming and an obvious cause for concern. More often than not, one reads from newflash, radio and television broadcast and newspaper cover pages things like: ASUU on strike again, "teachers on Strike, the railways staff are on work to rule, NNPC staff on rampage, Nurses on strike, Doctors on Strike. Taxi drivers on strike and even so called "okada" riders on Strike also. Strike is deliberate abstention from official activities as a means of registering complaints or protects against the authority with a view to obtaining some concessions or favour.

The oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Ed, defines strike as a concerted cessation of work on the part of a body of workers, employer or employee. A strike is any concerted withholding of labour by a group of employees in support of a demand made by them to the employer (Israelstam, 2011). The obvious implication of the above is that strike by workers is a serious manifestation of industrial disputes and some form of failure or the other in the labour relations. The labour relations refers to joint participation of employees in determining policy concerned with compensation, house and working conditions (shubin, 1992).

The end of the Second World War led to the emergence of strike actions in Nigeria in 1945 (Onyemenam, 2013). This first launch out was successful. It attracted formation of labour unions and consequent demonstrations. However, the strikers were blue-collar job workers contrary to what obtains in this era as the white-collar job workers have taken over strike actions from the initiators.

The present research is concerned with the seemingly incessant strikes by workers in Nigeria because of the negative effects which strikes could inflict on the economy. Strike by workers is very rampant in Nigeria today. Salako (2003) maintains that whenever workers want to press home their demands, they believe the only language government understands is strike. Nigeria consequently, has been beset with a lot of industrial disputes in its growing process with the attendant debilitating effect on the economic development of the country. According to Nlemoha (1994), strikers do so for various reasons ranging from poor salaries, non-payment of salaries to poor conditions of service. Braide (2003) sees strike as a consequence of poor labour relations in an organization. Among the negative consequences of strike in Nigeria is that more often than not it results in breakdown of law and order, destruction of properties and structures and sometimes, lives. For example, when teachers go on strike, parents and students suffer, when taxi drivers or refinery workers go on strike, business and movement halt, when doctors and nurses go on strike many sick Nigerians die.

The government in Nigeria today is the greatest employer of labour (workers); it is strongly believed that solutions to incessant strike by workers could be found by workers themselves through their understanding and change in attitude of the Nigerian Public Servants to Strike. The public servant is in a veritable position to advise the government, to make impute in the labour relations policy formulation and in the implementation of same.

Some of the adverse effects of strike actions by workers are: loss of national output, fall of Gross Domestic product (GDP) which was recently re-based, manpower loss and man-hour loss, cost push inflation and increase in poverty level. Strike actions provoke scarcity of goods and services with a consequential effect of inflation due to high demand. Foreign investors may withdraw their

investments due to lack of trust emanating from instability in the business sector. Thus, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will be affected (Anyanwu, 2014). The employer is likely to lose money due to delayed service to clients or to lost production time. Where “no work, no pay” policy is established workers will lose their financial dues (salaries). If the strikers are dismissed they will lose their livelihoods altogether (Israelstam, 2011). Invariably, the whole family bears the brunt.

Reasons for workers strike vary according to organisation, level of satisfaction and locale. Generally, workers do not wake up to strike but for better conditions of service. Other reasons may emanate as a result of dis-satisfaction with company policy and (2) indiscriminate termination of appointment. Nwaogu (2012) highlighted reasons for embarking on strike action as:

- **For shorter working days**
This particularly refers to medical staff and those on shift duties soliciting for days off.
- **For lifting**
Sometimes employers frustrate employees due to exhibition of non – challant attitude to employee’s rising. Hence, workers decide to take the bull by the horn.
- **To stop reduction in salaries and wages.**
It is unfair for government to make unnecessary deductions from the masses’ wages and salaries without reflecting in the appropriate coffers.
- **Staff victimisation by employer**
- **Poor conditions of service and welfare package**

Strike action is a breakdown in cordial relationship between the labour and the management. Labour calls for strike in order to exert pressure on the employer or government to concede to a demand of the employees for improvement or ameliorating an unsatisfactory working condition (Nwaogu, 2012). This is to say that where effective collective bargaining is lacking strikes serve as the main channel for giving expression to the employee’s grievance. Ayinde (2016) reports that workforce comprising Nigeria labour Congress, trade Union Congress and Joint National Public Service Negotiating Council had in a letter to the State Government threatened to embark on mass mobilization of its workers for a strike action, should the state government refuse to adhere to their demands.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The recent strike action embarked by the Ogun state (the study area of this research) public servants was sparked off by the inability of Government to pay three months salaries owed the employees, and so called for immediate payment of outstanding twelve months Union check off dues and outright stoppage of contributory pension deductions. Other grounds for agitation are: 75% payment of workers’ salaries and the 25% deductions from their salaries as well as non payment of 16 months salaries of the workers of state owned Tai Solarin College of Education. Work force could no longer bear these; hence an ultimatum was given to the state Government to remedy the situation, failure of which they would embark on an indefinite strike. Government paid deaf ears: the work force (entity of the employees) embarked on strike starting from the 23rd of October, 2016. Most of the write ups on Ogun state strikes were News paper reports.

Writers are more interested in the causes and effects of strikes by strikers neglecting attitude of workers to strike action and the personal variables of workers which prompt strikes. There is a need to investigate the personal variables of the activists which influence attitudes of Ogun state workers

towards frequent strike actions. To the best of the knowledge of the investigators there is no empirical literature on influence of personal variables on attitudes of public servants in Nigeria towards frequent strikes by public servants with implications for counselling. It is therefore, imperative to embark on this study in order to investigate influence of personal variables such as religion, gender and age on attitudes of Ogun state employees towards frequent strike actions.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this research is:

- To investigate the influence of age, religion and gender on attitudes of public workers towards frequent strikes by workers in Nigeria.
- To provide adequate recommendations for adoption by government for a healthy relationship between government and its workers.

Knowledge of the outcome of this study will likely enlighten the government on how to expedite action in handling public servants matters. It is envisaged that Public servants will learn how to channel their grievances to the government and be patient for a response in the affirmative.

1.3 Hypotheses

The following Hypotheses have been formulated to guide this study.

- ❖ There is no significant difference in the attitudes of Christian and Muslim public servants towards strike action by government workers.
- ❖ There is no significant difference between male and female public servants in their attitudes to strikes.
- ❖ There is no significant difference in the attitudes of public servants within the age groups of 18-40 and 41-60 towards strike.s

2.0 Research Methods

2.1 Research Design

Descriptive research design is concerned with the establishment of relationships that exist between variables and opinions that are held by a group of people. This is considered suitable for this type of research. The descriptive research design involving the use of a 12 item questionnaire in obtaining the requisite information from workers in Ogun State was therefore, used.

The population of this study comprises all public servants in Ogun state, Ministries, Institutions, Local Government and other parastatals.

The sample for the study consists of 500 selected public servants as respondents. They were selected through the technique of stratified random sampling. Two hundred (200) respondents were selected from the ministries (State and Federal), 100 from the tertiary institutions, 100 from the hospitals and 100 from the primary and secondary institutions.

A Questionnaire, "Attitudes of government workers to strike questionnaire" (AOGWTSQ) was designed and used in Data collection. Part A of the instrument comprised personal variables such as religion, age and gender of the respondents while part B had 12 structured items. A four- point likert type rating scale which carries 1-4 scoring rate depending on the level of agreement or disagreement was adopted in scoring the responses. Part A of AOGWTSQ was scored using simple frequency and percentage. The Items were validated by subjecting them to a thorough scrutiny by other colleagues in the Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling. The Items were found to be appropriate for the study.

Data was collected by means of the questionnaire.

The data collected were analysed through the use of means and t-test, simple frequency and percentage.

3.0 Results

Hypothesis 1 (Ho1)

There is no significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their attitude to strike. The t-table comparison of their mean attitudinal inclinations is presented below:

3.1 Religious consideration

Table 1: Mean scores and the t-test analysis of attitudes of Christians and Muslim public servants to strike

Religion	N	Mean (X)	S.D	Df	t _{cal}
Christians	238	2.45	1.6	489	0.77 not significant
Muslims	262	2.23	1.25		

P>00.5 Not significant

The result of the t-test comparison of the mean scores of the attitude of Christian and Muslim public servants indicate that there is no significant difference in their attitudes to strike. The observed similarity in attitudes to strike among adherents of the two main religions show that differences in religious affiliations do not play any major role in how public servants in Ogun State do perceive strikes. The hypothesis that predicted the absence of any significant difference between Christians and Muslims in their attitudes to strikes is therefore, accepted.

Hypothesis 2 (Ho2): There is no significant difference between the male and female public servants on their attitudes to strikes.

3.2 Gender consideration

Table 2: Mean score and t-test analysis of Male and Female Public servants’ attitudinal response towards strikes.

Sex	N	Mean (X)	S.D	Df	t _{cal}
Male	302	2.3	1.28	498	1.04
Female	198	2.5	1.12		

The result of the t-test shows that similarities exist in the ways male and female public servants in Ogun State perceive Strikes. Gender therefore, does not exert any significant influence on the attitudes of public servants in Ogun State towards Strike. The hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant difference between male and female public servants in their attitudes to strikes, is hereby accepted.

Hypothesis 3 (Ho3): There is no significant difference in the attitudes of government workers within the age groups of 18-40years and 41-60years towards strike.

3.3 Age group consideration

Table 3: Mean Score and t-test analysis of attitudinal indications of public servants within the Age groups 18-40 and 41-60 towards Strike.

Age	N	Mean (X)	S.D	Df	t _{cal}
18-40	221	2.87	1.54	498	3.67
41-60	279	1.93	0.99		

P < 0.05 significant

The result of the t-test in table 3 shows that belonging to a particular age group significantly influences the attitude of public Servants in Ogun State to strikes. Therefore, the hypothesis which suggested that there is no significant difference between members of two age groups (**18-40 and 41-60**) is hereby rejected.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings show that neither religious affiliation nor gender significantly influence Nigeria's public servants in their attitude towards the use of Strike as a means of securing government or management's compliance in fulfilling their welfare or other demands. This is attested to by the observed similarities in the attitudes of both Muslims and Christian public servants towards strike action. The findings also show the same similarity in attitude towards strike by male and female public servants. The findings therefore, seem to suggest that Nigerians irrespective of their religious affiliations or gender tend to behave alike on issues pertaining to pecuniary interest or perceived welfare gains.

However, the t-test analysis in table 3 indicates that age influences the attitude of Nigerian public servants towards strike. The result indicates the existence of a significant difference between members of the two age groups who participated in this study ($p < 0.05$, $t = 3.66$). The observed significant difference in attitude to strike within the two age groups (18-40yrs and 41-60yrs) may be accounted for by the following factors: First, it would seem that public servants who are relatively more advanced in age (41-60yrs) and experience tend to be wary of the potential consequences of embarking on strike such as dismissals, loss of income to their families and other potential backlashes such as police brutalities and even death from police actions, hijack of peaceful strike action and demonstrations by militants and hoodlums et cetera. The relatively younger members of the public service who are less experienced seem to jump at any idea of strike as a means of settling perceived scores with either their employer or government without carefully counting the possible cost.

Secondly, it would seem that the more a worker is advanced in age and in the work place, the more careful the worker becomes on any issue which can potentially deprive him or her of his or her stable means of income or livelihood. On the other hand, relatively younger workers appear to be less careful in their actions and decisions and tend to be more adventurous than their actions and decisions. These findings therefore, have some obvious counselling implications.

5.0 Implications for counselling

The findings of this study have some pressing counselling implications. The counsellor has a significant role to play in the provision of conducive environment, as it includes interpersonal relationship within the establishment (Onukwufor & Ugwu, 2013). This implies that counsellors' role in prevention and remediation of crisis is not limited to the classroom

but extended to workplace. Counsellors are trained personnel who provide guidance services to those in need of them in order to understand themselves and live a better life.

Employers and employees need to understand that counselling is an effective and preventive people management strategy for organisations. Employee counselling can therefore, be defined as a process which is initiated by the counsellor or the manager to assist the employee or subordinate to gain knowledge, understanding and insights on a particular performance (Tham, 1998). This could relate to the counsellee's attitude, motivation or interpersonal skills. Essentially the counselling is to provide timely professional and confidential aid for employees whose personal problems might otherwise lead to work impairment, absenteeism, reduced productivity and cause accidents and conflicts in the workplace, or even job termination(Tham, 1998).

A major role of employee counselling is to help employees recognise problems and seek appropriate assistance. Employee counselling programmes are meant to provide effective means of dealing with problems in the workplace. Another major role of employee counselling is to help employees recognise problems and seek appropriate assistance. Counselling should be focused on good manager (boss) and employee relationship as well as employee and employee harmonious relationship. This will likely strengthen relationship among staff both vertically and horizontally. It is only when there is a peaceful relationship among employees in a workplace, that the environment can be conducive for production process. The counsellor should ensure that opportunity is created for social interaction from time to time. This will stall frequent strikes by employees over matters that dialogue could settle.

6.0 Conclusion

From results on influence of personal variables on attitude of public servants in Nigeria towards frequent strikes by workers, religion and gender have no significant influence on the attitude of Nigerian workers towards frequent strikes. Since significant difference was found between the two age groups used in this study it can be concluded that the older an employee is, the more he prefers to protect his position on the job rather than expose himself to danger of losing the job. Counsellors posted to industries and other work places will do a lot to stall imminent strike actions through application of various counselling techniques.

7.0 Recommendations

- The Nigerian Government should endeavour to expedite action on public servants' matters.
- The Nigerian government and other employers of labour should cultivate the habit of involving public servants in policy formulation which may have direct welfare or pecuniary effect on them.
- Workers should always tow the path of dialogue to achieve their claims.
- Government should no longer delay staff salaries/wages, welfare and any other thing that accrues to them until workers resort to violence.
- The counsellor should ensure that opportunity is created for social interaction from time to time.
- Governments and their agents must always ensure good faith and commitment in the implementation of any agreement they have entered into with workers.
- The Counsellor should organise both group and individual counselling sessions for the workers periodically.
- Government should post Guidance counsellors to other work places other than classrooms.

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