

## **Social Significance of Work and Unemployment in Nigeria**

**Olowu Josephine**

Department of Sociology,

Bingham University

Karu, Nasarawa State

Tel: 08036145794

e-mail: olowujosephine@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

*Work holds very significant place in our lives as most of us spend over fifty percent of our waking life engaged in some form of work. Work like other human activities such as eating, sleeping and socializing essential to our very existence while unemployment has serious consequences for individuals and society individual and societal aspirations for human and societal developments are undermined by high level of unemployment Nigeria has witness high rates of unemployment. This paper therefore traces the history of work and examines the social significance of work, reasons for unemployment and governmental efforts in curbing unemployment. The objective of the paper was to show how significant work is in human life and how devastating unemployment can be. It also reveals that the root cause of unemployment is capitalism. The study was anchored on two theoretical framework, the functionalist and Deprivation perspectives. The Data for the paper was collected from secondary sources which were published data in textbooks, journals and internet materials. The study recommends more orientation on the dignity of labor, values of hard work, frugality and asceticism.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Work is as old as the human space itself. Even the earliest bits of recorded history about our ancestors are basically accounts of the work they did. Most work in the earliest times was devoted to the purpose of keeping the individual alive. Often, such work was in the line of gathering food, capturing prey, attacking or defending against enemies and obtaining safety from the elements in the form of an appropriate shelter Dex, S. (1985 P 14-15)

According to Callahan etal (1985 p 15) the very experience of work has changed from earliest times to the present. Prior to the industrial revolution, work was extremely physical. However, Charles Zastrow (2000 P 45-342) took a brief look at the history of work and found that the ancient Greeks viewed work as a curse imposed on humanity by the Gods, which means work was regarded as an unpleasant and burdensome activity that was incompatible with being a citizen. Citizens sought to have extensive leisure time so they could further develop their minds.

The Romans viewed commercial banking as acceptable employment, practically all other occupations were considered vulgar and demeaning.

While the ancient Hebrews viewed work ambivalently: on one hand they regard work as a drudgery and a grim necessity. On the other hand they regard work as a penance for original sin. (The Bible asserts that original sin began with Adam and Eve disobeying God in the Garden of Eden). However, the early Christians took a slightly more positive view of work, like the ancient Hebrews they accepted the idea of work as penance for original sin but they also believed people needed to work to make their own living and to be able to help those in need. They also thought work had spiritual value, as they associated it with purification and self-denial later, certain Christians monks believed that for them work was dejecting, that it was morally better for them to beg than to work.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century work has profound social values and in their time, work became highly valued, that is why Martin Luther a protestant reformer asserted that labour was a service to God. Since the time of Luther, work has continued to be viewed as honourable and having religious significance. John Calvin, another protestant reformer added more dramatic effect on changing the views toward work Calvin preached that work is the will of God. Hard work, good deeds and success at one's vocation were taken to be signs that one was destined for salvation. Also, that it was God's will for people to live frugally and to invest profits from work in the new ventures, which in turn would bring in more profits for additional investments and so on. Hard work and frugality came to have great value while idleness or laziness came to be viewed as sinful. The puritans were most influenced by this teaching and developed an ascetic lifestyle which denied worldly pleasures but imbedded values of hard work, frugality and asceticism, which became the core values of protestant ethic. These core values ushered the world into what is known as capitalism – George Ritzer (2000 P 147)

Callahan, et al (1986p 14) explained that with the advent to other sources of energy, work became mechanized and standardized. While new ways of working present exciting opportunities for many people they can also produce deep ambivalence in the past of others who feel that they are caught up in a running world.

**Capitalism:** is an economic system in which the means of production are largely in private hands and the main incentive for economic activity is the accumulation of profits. This system

gave rise to industrial society and post industrial society in spite of these changes in society social problems like scarcity, poverty and unemployment are still with us. Gidelens, A. (2006 P 775) agreed that the labour market is also undergoing profound change as part of the shift from a manufacturing to a service-oriented economy. The widespread introduction of information technology is also provoking transformations in the way organizations structure themselves, the type of management style that is used and the manner in which work tasks are delegated and carried out. Rapid change he maintained, can be destabilizing workers in many different types of occupation now experience job insecurity and a new sense of apprehension about both the future safety of their work position and their role within the work place.

The role that work plays in the life of many easily be seen in case of unemployment. Men dread unemployment, not merely because it means less of money but mostly because it means loss of life – Pranav Dua (2017)

Dua muntaned that to find oneself without work in society with the social connections and hopes rooted in work is like experiencing the withering away of one's very life.

### **Statement of Problem**

Nigeria has an estimated population of 170 million people, it is also endowed with solid minerals, oil and gas and sizeable educated and skill workforce.

In spite of these, Nigeria has not been able to warmness its resources to progress the economy sufficiently to improve the welfare of its seaming population. Furthermore, after about two decades of military rule, the country is in murky state, inflation, interest rate and the naira exchange rate were unsustainable and the employment rate was astonishing. Also the power sector is doing better as a result the crippling industries and public sector that still suffers from ineptitude and corruption. Thus unemployment is a societal problem it is not only the problem of those without jobs and their families, it affects the entire society and has far reaching consequences on both the micro and the macro level.

According to Schaefer (1993 P 428), the unemployed individual and his or her family must adjust to a loss of spending power, there is also an accompanying loss of self-image, social status since our culture and others view unemployment as a kind of failure. According to Olafsson and Svensson (1986) unemployment can be harmful to both the physical and the emotional health of



the unemployed and his family members. The duo also found that unemployed young adults had elevated blood pressure and cholesterol levels, so also does children and spouses of the unemployed showed symptoms of poor health. Previous studies in countries such as America suggest that prolonged unemployment may lead to dependency on drugs or alcohol or emotional problems within the family setting.

According to one estimate a 1.4 percent increase in the unemployment rate of the united states is associated with a 3.7 percent increase in suicide. In Nigeria, according to an awareness advertisement on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017 during the 9'Oclock network news an estimate of 4,900 people were drown in the Mediterranean sea in a bid to reach Europe for greener pasture many of these people Nigerians. On the macro-level unemployment leads to a reduced demand for goods and seriates. Also as unemployment increase people may seek out work in the informal sector in some cases participate in criminal enterprises like prostitution arm robbery, terrorism arson. Consequently the burden of supporting public services such as law enforcement, fire service and Education falls heavily on those who remain gain fully employed in the legitimate economy.

The unemployment rate in Nigeria as presented by the National Bureau of statistics in percentage form showing that unemployment rate rose for the seventh straight quarters to 13.9 percent in the third quarter of 2016 from 13.3 percent in the previous period. It was the highest level since 2009, as the number of unemployed rose by 5.2 percent to 11.2 million, employment rose at a much slower to 6.6 percent to 69.5 million and the labour force increased 1 percent to 80.7 million. Meanwhile, youth unemployment rate increased 1 percent from 24 percent in the previous period. A year earlier, the unemployment rate was recorded at 9.9 percent. Unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 9.52 percent from 2006 until 2016, reaching an all time high of 19.70 percent. It is based on these alarming statistics that this paper is written.

*Source: National Bureau of statistics 2016*

Quite simply, the above official unemployment rate measure the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force it does not count women who are home makers who fail to seek paid job because of child care and those with temporary jobs, like skilled workers who have temporary gone into dress making, hair making, catering services etc.

However, faced with these problems of unemployment the government have been undertaken some programmes but inspite of them all, unemployment is on the increase. Again, many official statistics of unemployment are calculated according to the definition of unemployment use by International Labour Organization. (ILO)

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Just like many concepts, it is not easy to define work and unemployment. However, we will look briefly at some few definitions of work and unemployment. With respect to work Damachi et.al (1986p 122) opined that work has held several dominant meanings and positions to the generations of Western workers, and has tended to acquire its significance as a function of cultural and environmental situations which incidentally change, ever so often with each passing generation either as a reaction to environmental realism, cultural changes (norms and values) or as a fad. Each generation evolves its acceptable meaning of work, which therefore, determines how work is to be done including hours of work, who would work, what wages for work etc. Fox (1977 P 4) views work as the basis of all human progress, materials, intellectual and spiritual.

Dunkerley (1975), posits that work is a socially desired activity in any society and is necessary for the production of goods and services, this means that work orientations are socially determined within the sphere of work and its place in the society.

Anthony, P.D. (177 P 313) observes that, work is a mixture of skills which are difficult to acquired and apply.

### **Concept of Unemployment**

It has been difficult to find any universally accepted definition of unemployment, however many scholars have conceptualized it from different perspective, that is from the social psychological and economic perspective. Nevertheless we will be looking at some few definitions. It is also worthy to note that many official statistics of unemployment are calculated according to the definition of unemployment used by the international labour organization (ILO) which refers to individuals who are without a job, who are available to start work within two weeks and who have attempted to look for a job within the previous month. This measurement of unemployment implies that, unemployment is the inability to gain decent employment.

Unemployment is viewed as persons who are currently not working or out of work and who has either actively sought for employment at least four weeks or is awaiting re-absorption after being

laid off. He also noted that unemployment is inevitable and accepted in the country as a result of friction in the labour market, and this results from the rate at which people change their jobs. The question now is how would persons that are unemployed partake in the benefits of what having or being gainfully employed comes with?

**Theoretical Perspective:**

The paper is anchored on two theories: The functionalist theory and deprivation theory.

**Functionalist Perspective:**

In the view of functionalist theory society is like a living organism in which each part of the organism contributes to its survival. Schaefer (1993 P 18) assert that functionalist perspective emphasizes the way that parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability. This implies that work is as a part of a society and it is structured to maintain the stability in society. Schaefer continued that Emile Durkheim focused on the role of the structure in reinforcing feelings of solidarity and unity within group life. Therefore work is seen as a role which workers must perform in reinforcing feelings of solidarity and unity in society for Talcott Parsons, a society is as a vast network of connected parts each of which contributes to the maintenance of the system as a whole and if any aspect of social life does not contribute to society's stability or survival by not serving some identifiable useful function or promote value consensus among members of a society. It cannot be passed on from one generation to the next. In this case work is functional and should be passed on to the next generation hence unemployment is not functional and does not contribute to society's stability or survival thus it is dysfunctional. This shows that everybody cannot contribute to the stability of society even when they desire to because they are deprived of such opportunity as a result of unemployment.

**Deprivation Perspective**

Deprivation perspective as put forward by M. J. Jahoda et al in T. Boland and R.Griffin (2017) suggests that the unemployed lack the social benefits created by work. In this line of thinking, the unemployed are without the social status, solidarity regular activity, sense of collective purpose and structured experience of time that are available to those in work. This axiology, that unemployment is a problem to be solved by employment, dominates social economic and political thinking. The theories' are relevant to the significance of work and unemployment as they provides explanations on the unemployment status. and through the explanations of the



functionalist the contributions of work in society, without work such roles would have no meaning.

### **Social Significance of Work**

According to Giddens (2006) work whether paid or unpaid as being the carrying out of tasks requiring the expenditure of mental and physical effort, which has its objective, the production of goods and services that cater to human needs. for many of us work occupies a larger part of our live than any other type of activity, having a job is important for maintaining self esteem. even where work conditions are relatively unpleasant and the tasks dull work tends to be a structuring element in people's psychological makeup and circle of their daily activities. Thus significance of work as follows:

1. **Money:** A wage or salary is the main resource money people depend on to meet their need. Without an income anxieties about coping with day to day life multiply
2. **Activity level:** work of ten provides a basis for the acquisition and exercise of skills and capacities
3. **Variety** work provides access to contexts that contrast with domestic surroundings.
4. **Temporal structure:** for people in regular employment, the day is usually organized around the rhythm of work.
5. **Social contacts:** the work environment often provides friendships and opportunities to participate in shared acclivities with others.
6. **Personal identify:** work is usually valued for the sense of stable social identity it offers. Against the backdrop of this formidable list, it is not difficult to see why being without work may undermine individuals confidence in their social values.

Unemployment is usually viewed as the state of being unemployed and a phenomenon that occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work.

Unemployment comes in different forms which are as *follows*:

1. **Frictional Unemployment:** This arises when people have their present job with hope of getting another one or a new one but fails at that time.
2. **Seasonal Unemployment:** This type of unemployment is caused by seasonal change that affect some types of work for example workers that work in road construction companies.

3. **Search Unemployment:** Is unemployment which occurs when some people turn down offers of work in search of better paid employment.
4. **Structural Unemployment:** This is as a result of slight change in the industries structure of a country as result workers are retrenched.
5. **Voluntary Unemployment:** This type of unemployment occurs when some people refuse to take up any paid employment.
6. **Deficient Demand or Cyclical Unemployment:** occurs when there is decrease in the quantity of goods demanded or there is over production which results to fall in prices.
7. **Under Employment:** occurs when workers potential is under utilized or when a worker is paid less than the effort puts on the job.

### **Costs of Unemployment**

Unemployment can however have devastating effects as it reduces the amount of income that a single person or family receives. B. Harold Wilensky 1991 cited in Zastrow (2000) found that long-term unemployment often leads to extreme personal isolation because work is a central part of many people's lives. Again if work ties are severed many of the unemployed see friends less, cease participating in community life and become increasingly isolated.

D.D. Braginsky and B.M. Braginsky found long term unemployment causes attitude changes that persist even after reemployment. Being laid off or fired is often interpreted by the unemployed as a sign of being incompetent and worthless, self-esteem is lowered, experiences of depression, the feeling of being alienated from society. Many suffer deep shame and avoid friends and see themselves as an easily replaced statistic and lose faith in the economy and political system of their country. Unemployment is strongly associated with emotional problems, according to Harvey Brenner (2014) admission into mental hospital increase, also the rate of suicides especially during economic recession like we have in Nigeria presently.

Brenner continued that incidences of child abuse can be higher and of course in Nigeria unicef report sep 10, 2015 says six out of ten Nigerian children experience some form of violence.

### **Reasons for Unemployment**

Macdonis, J. J. (2005 P297) explained that the reason for unemployment in society the reason for unemployment in society is that capitalist economy benefits from the reserve labour pool of unemployed people. This is done he said, by having too few jobs. For everyone ensures that



there is always someone willing to do even the last desirable work. A reserve labour pool he maintained, also increases the chance that there is someone willing to do a job for less money. In this case unemployment pushes wage levels down.

There are other reasons for unemployment that are numerous and complex because even when society has full employment there will always be some people that are capable of working who are temporarily unemployed, there will be those people who are changing job and some recent graduates who have not found jobs and those with prolonged illness or other career absent such as child rearing.

Automation in many industries has reduced the number of workers needed and make certain job skills obsolete. The Baby Boom factor is another reason, which for 35 year past children have been growing up and entering the labour force in large numbers. Economic reasons could be when there is decrease in purchase of locally made products this usually have adverse effect on manufacturing industries other factors that cause unemployment are as follows: Epileptic electric power supply as we do have in Nigeria today, Poor quality of Education, Negligence of Agricultural and other natural resource and financial crime popularly known as corruption.

### **Various Efforts made by Government in Addressing the Problem of Unemployment in Nigeria in Recent years.**

In Nigeria and other countries faced with problems of unemployment, governments take much or more paternalistic approach to make jobs available for the unemployed by creating programmes or training the unemployed by paying them. Some of these programs are:

#### **Operation Feed the Nation OFN**

In 1976 Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the Operation Feed the Nation OFN Programme which was to encourage ill prepared undergraduates of university to go to the rural area to teach farmers to farm.

#### **The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural**

Infrastructure (DFRFRI) introduced in 1986 by Gen. Ibrahim B. Babangida, was to gainfully employed unskilled workers. Another legacy of the Babangida administration is the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986, NDE was created to design and implement programmes to curb mass unemployment and to articulate policies that would develop work programmes with labour intensive potentials. The Olusegun Obasanjo led administration birthed

the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) Which seeks to facilitate the achievement of national goals like generation of employment creation of wealth etc.

For President Goodluck E. Jonathan, it was YOUWIN which stands for Youth Enterprise with innovation in Nigeria. It is an innovative business plan competition aimed at job creation by encouraging and supporting entrepreneurial youth in Nigeria to develop and execute business ideas. It is open to both male and females between the ages of 18 to 45 years. The programmes mentioned above are good but notwithstanding, these programmes like others in Nigeria are bedevilled by improper implementation inconsistency and lack of fund etc.

### **Conclusion**

This paper revealed how work evolved from the primitive stage to the capitalist form of work that shaped the world of work today. It also revealed that while work has socioeconomic, psychological and human significance unemployment can have devastating effects as it reduces the amount of income people have as a result loss of social status, physical and emotional health harm, and adverse effect on society. It is however, important to note that if the identified root causes of unemployment are treated with the expertise and dispatch deserved, it will no doubt foster stability and growth in society.

### **Recommendations**

Government should orientate the public on the dignity of labour. This will encourage more employment opportunities in the informal sector. This will make many people to contribute meaningfully to their lives and to their society. Government should come out with a welfare programme to cushion the effect of unemployment. It should be formed in a way that government and all wage earners should contribute for the purpose of assisting those without jobs. Government should stop the appointments into Federal positions of those who have served as governors, ministers in the past for payments of their salaries and allowances take a great toll on government expenditure and hence prevent government from employment of younger people. Hard work, frugality and asceticism lifestyle should be encouraged in Nigeria as this will encourage more investments and more employment in society.

In addition, entrepreneurial education should be encouraged in our schools. It is said that wars always reduce unemployment rate, Nigeria is at war with insurgents the government can use this

opportunity to draft many into the army and law enforcement agencies. The government can urge companies that provide military products such as bullets, food, medicine, planes etc, to give employment to people Government should also cut down on federal spending, place tax on individuals and businesses in order to stimulate the economy. Interest rate should be lowered; to encourage consumers to purchase more items through loans and credit this will boost local production and consumption of locally made goods.

## References

- Anthony, P.D. (1977). *The Ideology of work*. Tavistock, London
- Boland, T. And Criffin R. (2017). *The Sociology of Unemployment*. Manchester University press, Manchester.
- Callahan, R. And Hon (1986) *Understanding Organisational Behaviour.A. Managerial viewpoint* Charles E. Merril Publishing Co., Ohio.
- Damachi, U.G. (1986). *Contemporary Problems in Nigeria Industrial Relations Development*. Press, Lagos.
- Damachi, U.G. (1986). *Contemporary Problems in Nigeria Industrial Relations*. Development Press, Lagos.
- Dex .S. (1986). *The sexual Division of work*. Harvester Press Pub. Group, Sussex.
- Dunkerley, D. (1975). *Occupations and Society*. Routledge, London.
- Fox, .A. (1976). *Themes and Issues in Modern Sociology: A sociology of Work in Industry* Collier. Macmillan Publishers, London.
- Giddens, A. (2006). *Sociology 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Simon Griffiths polltry and Wiley Put. Ltd, India.
- Jahoda, M. (1982). *Employment and Unemployment*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Macionis, J. J. (2005). *Social Problems 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey U.S.A.
- National Bureau of statistics, Report 2016. Available at: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com>
- Nigerian Television Authority (NTA January 8<sup>th</sup> 2016 9pm Network News
- Olafson, O. and Svensson, P. (1986). Unemployment Related lifestyle Changes and Health Disturbances in Adolescents and Children in the Western countries. *Social science and Medicine* Vol 22 (No.11), pp. 1105 – 1113
- Rutzer, G. (1996). *Sociological Theory fourth Edition*. Mc-Graw-Hill Companies, Inc., Singapore
- Schaefer, R. T. and Lamin, R. (1993). *Sociology 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. Mc-Graw – Hill Inc, New York.
- Watson, T. J. (1980). *Sociology, Work and Industry*. Regal Kegan Paul Co, London.
- Wilensky H. L. (2002). *Rich Democracies: Political Economy, public policy and performance*. Available at: [https/books google.com.ng.books](https://books.google.com.ng/books).