

LABOUR AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLES IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines labour and the factors that affect their health status and proposes ways of enhancing the labour force health status as a means of their optimum productivity in a developing economy.

KEYWORDS: Labour, Healthy Lifestyles and Developing Economy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Labour may be defined as an act of God which man was commissioned to work with his hands in order to make a living and sustain life. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15). It refers to any work performed by man that attracts a reward and satisfaction, such as work done for extrinsic reward like money and intrinsic reward for personal satisfaction (Tamunomiebi, 2003). Lifestyles are habits that people chose either voluntary or involuntary, which affect their health. Such habits include food, personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, mechanism for coping with stress, use of alcohol and drugs, smoking and unsafe sexual practice (Health Insurance Report, 2002). In a developing economy, labour is a factor of supply and demand; the supply of labour implies services rendered by Professionals (Architects, Doctors, Surveyors, etc) and Entrepreneurs (Carpenters, Shoe-repairers, etc) to those who consult them. The demand for labour therefore means services required or demanded from a category or persons for manufacturing, production of goods and services to other organizations or individuals; such services constitute "Paid labour" and when the services suffer declines, the demand for labour also drops, resulting in a reduction on labour force.

Labour is important as a global phenomenon for development of men and society. It plays roles in production of raw materials and manufacturing of goods that service humans. The recognition of the dignity of labour stir up the minds of people to seek for employment; prompt various Governments to create job opportunities; cause labour unions to work for their welfare and legislators to make laws on labour matters such as the minimum wage, price control measures, transportation, safety at work, industrial relations, labour and healthy lifestyles, among others.

For labour to function properly in enhancing development in both developed and developing economies, the importance of the health status of the labour force cannot be downplayed. A healthy population and the labour force in particular is a prerequisite for economic growth and development. A healthy workforce is more productive because the workers have more physical and mental energy and absent from work less often (Bloom and Canning, 2010). Nigeria, though rich has been variously described as dirt poor in terms of health care. Her health care system has also been described as a natural emergency where its per capita expenditure on health has remained one of the lowest in the world. This paper is focused on the following:

- Labour and economy

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- Influence factors on health status of work force and economy
- Enhancing lifestyles of workforce to optimum productivity

2.0 Labour and the Economy

Labour is held in high esteem as governments always consult their unions before taking decisions concerning the economy that would affect the welfare of workers. It collaborates with government to enhance or manage the economy. Recently, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum and Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) pledged to support Government in the passage of Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). Labour also services as watchdogs against the mismanagement of the economy by those in authority. Following a world Bank Group Report (Bakare, 2009), Nigeria is ranked 3rd in employing workers; this implies that either Nigeria has abundance of labour seeking employment for the wage rate is so low as to engender their demand by employers.

3.0 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE HEALTH STATUS OF THE LABOUR FORCE IN AN ECONOMY

The health status of individuals in any given environment be it developed or developing is influenced by some factors such as biology, behaviours, social and physical environment as well as policies and interventions (Healthy People, 2010; 2000).

3.1 Biological Factors

These are the genetic makeup of the individual as well as the physical and mental health problems inherited through the family line. However, certain factors like aging, physical activity can reinforce ill health in an individual.

3.2 Behaviours or Lifestyles

This has to do with the responses of the individual to internal and external conditions. This factor is correlational with biology in that the behaviours of an individual can be altered as a result of his or her understating of his or her family health history or genetic makeup. An individual who has a family history or heart disease may be compelled to adopt lifestyles or behaviours that would check the manifestation of such an illness in him/her.

Behaviour can also be shaped by the social or physical environment one finds himself or herself

either positively or negatively. The social environment that has to do with the interaction with friends, families colleagues in the work place also include, housing, public transportation and the presence or absence of violence in a community among others. It has a profound effect on individual's health particularly and that of the nation generally. According to Health People (2000), there is a bi-directional relationship between the individual's behaviour and the social environment he finds himself. That is, the behaviour of an individual shapes the social environment and vice versa.

3.3 Nutrient

The health of every worker is a product of what he eats. Therefore, adequate nutrition would ensure good health and increased productivity. Excessive eating would result in obesity, which is co-related with hypertension and diabetes, whereas, inadequate nutrition would lead to lower immunity/exposure to disease. This would result in productivity of workers.

3.4 Physical and Social Environment

Another important determinant of health of individuals is the physical environment. This can harm or promote the health of the individual and that of the community. The exposure of individuals to physical hazards in their work places can harm their health, while the provision of clean and safe work place and play grounds promote good health among workers.

3.5 Government Policies and Intervention

These are factors that have profound influence on the health of workers. Among these factors are:

- (a) The use of health promotion campaigns to prevent smoking in public places and the use of condoms or abstinence to prevent HIV and AIDS.
- (b) Policies that mandate the use of safety belts while driving and the use of helmets by motor bikes riders and passengers, as well as clinical services that would enhance mental health among others.

3.6 Access to Quality Healthcare Services

The last but not the least factor that affects the health status of workers in the developing economy like Nigeria is access to quality health care. Health care apart from involving the receipt of health services from health care providers also include: health

information and services that may be gotten from any other agency both governmental and non-governmental bodies.

4.0 ENHANCING THE HEALTH STATUS OF THE LABOUR FORCE FOR OPTIMUM PRODUCTIVITY

The evaluation of the factors that affect the health of individuals generally and the labour force in particular in a developing economy like Nigeria is an important pivot for developing strategies that would improve their health status. The understanding of the way and the manner these factors interdepend on one another remains an important means of achieving workers quality of life and longevity.

4.1 Encouragement of Regular Physical Activity by Workers Throughout their Working Life and Beyond

This will endanger healthy body, psychological well-being and also prevent premature death. These activities need not be strenuous to avoid dire consequences. Note that a healthy body possesses a healthy mind that results in improved productivity. However, obstacles most workers encounter in carrying out physical activities are lack of time and access to convenient facilities and environment at the least cost possible, especially, when the bulk of the workforce are lower cadre workers that are not well-remunerated. Chairman of Local Government Councils.

4.2 Discouragement of Tobacco/Alcohol use by the Workforce

Tobacco use has been reported to be one of the most preventable causes of diseases and death, the world over. Studies have shown that the in the United States (a developed country) along, tobacco use related deaths number about 430,000 yearly among adults with a medical bill of about 50 billion US dollars yearly (Healthy People, 2010, 2000).

The statistics in a developing country like Nigeria where the health care delivery system is inadequate can only best imagined. Government has attempted the regulation of this vice, but the results have not been very satisfactory. More stringent measures should be taken in this regard to discourage this unhealthy lifestyle by the working population, if production is to be enhanced. Addiction to alcohol/drugs can predispose the worker to lifestyle disease like liver cirrhosis of the liver, neurological problems,

abnormal behaviours and of course low productivity.

4.3 The Encouragement of Responsible Sexual Behaviours

Encouragement of responsible sexual behaviour among the working population is an indispensable factor in improving the health status of the labour force. Irresponsible sexually behaviours have remained the cause of Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including Human Immuno Virus (HIV) that results in Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (Coulibaly, 2005). AIDS has caused lower labour productivity due to the replacement of experienced workers (who are ill dead) with inexperienced ones. The current awareness campaigns in Government Ministries and Agencies have remained a step in the right direction. The scourge of AIDS and its effect on labour productivity need to over emphasized. The cost of medication, and psychological trauma the family members go through when one of theirs gets infected, is enormous and goes a long way to further impoverish the household especially if the infected worker was the bread winner.

4.4 Provision of Clean and Safe Working Environment

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) has reported that between 40% and 50% of the world working population are exposed to hazardous conditions in the work place/ these hazardous conditions coupled with occupational stress (associated with work organization) have been know to contribute to *cardiovascular* diseases and *musculoskeletal* problems as reported by Karasek and Theorell (1990). A healthy work place and environment will encourage the development of a healthy workforce required for the overall success of the organization. To achieve this will involve participatory, multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary cooperation between the workforce, their employees and government using health promotion and protection campaigns (WHO, 1999).

4.5 Access to the Quality Health Care System

Access to quality health care services can be determined by availability of health insurance, higher income and health care providers. In developing countries with inadequacy of health personnel and facilities and low remuneration, accessing quality health care has remained an uphill task for workers. For

persons in authority or in the higher income bracket, quality health care especially for the lower income workers. The health facilities in the hospitals should be improved to meet international standards.

4.6 Payment of Living Wages to Workers

The bottom line for meeting the basic necessities of life that would enhance healthy lifestyles vis-à-vis productivity is better remuneration. The present pay package of most workers in Nigeria is not enough to engender increased productivity. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has reported that currently, the world's workers still do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above minimum 2 US dollars a day poverty line. The World Bank has reported that Nigeria's recent economic performance indicators had not reflected on the standards of living of her citizens (Punch Newspaper, 2007). Lower wages with higher inflation have made it difficult for workers to meet the basic needs of their families such as adequate nutrition, cost of education, quality health care, etc in Nigeria.

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Health Status of the labour force is determined by factors ranging from biology to social and environmental factors as well as policies and intervention. The improvement of health status of the labour force in Nigeria would include the following: provision of clean and safe working environment, quality health care systems, and facilities for physical activity; others are discouragement of tobacco use by the workforce, irresponsible sexual habits and above all, payment of living wages to workers. To enhance labour productivity – a prerequisite for economic growth and development, the legislators in the State and Federal House of Assembly should enact laws that would promote healthy lifestyles among the labour force in Nigeria. Again, labour movements should be integrated into all aspects of the management of the country's people-oriented economy. This would enhance their total commitments and dedication to implementation of the country's socio-economic agenda.

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