

## **WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SECURITY, SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THE CHALLENGES IN HOTEL EMPLOYMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*The study delved into the concept of social security as a fundamental human right, emphasizing its relevance in the hospitality industry, which contributes significantly to the global economy. Despite its substantial impact, the sector faces challenges, particularly in the form of precarious work. In order to gain empirical insights into this problematic, we took a*

*comprehensive approach, engaging with 120 individuals from a dozen three-star hotels in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. To ensure consistency, we adhered to the European Hotelstars Union's classification criteria. Through thoughtfully crafted questionnaires, we delved into workers' perspectives on social security, social opportunities, and challenges. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, our analysis utilized frequency and simple percentage techniques, yielding 114 completed responses. The study unfolded the notion of social security as a fundamental human right, spotlighting its pivotal role in the vibrant hospitality industry, a cornerstone of the global economy. However, despite the industry's undeniable impact, the study reveals that hotel workers continue to grapple with social security and employment-related challenges that include human rights abuses, precarious working conditions, imposition of restrictive dress codes and gender-based violence. Based on findings, the study recommends the implementation of liberal dress codes among workers, provision of regular counseling and training, involvement of workers in the decision-making process, offering worker-friendly packages, and organizing relevant training programs to enhance staff skills and well-being, thus promoting sustainable development in the hospitality industry.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Hotel, Social Security, Opportunities, Challenges, Sustainable development*

**JEL Classification:** *J00, J30, J81, J83*

## **Introduction**

Social security has frequently been recognised as crucial to a decent, long-term way of life. Its existence is formally and informally acknowledged as a social welfare program of acts. The recognition of this in formal milieu informs the formulation of a variety of policies meant to provide protection to people and households through steady financial stability, access to health care, and other measures. The provision of such social coverage has been widely embraced by the weak, including the elderly, those without job, the ill, victims of work hazard, the pregnant, those whose primary providers were lost and so on. The formal social security programme often entails transfers (in cash or in kind) from the state to citizens to help smooth consumption and protect people or families from destitution (Gunawan *et al.*, 2017, Zein *et al.*, 2016). The informal social security

is the social safety measure provided outside the formally given social security paradigm (Olivier and Dekker, 2003). It may come in the form of cash or kind by family and community members to the poor and vulnerable in periods of difficulties (Angraeni, 2015, Putra, 2015).

In African settings, traditional support systems operate as social security measure on the tenets of solidarity and generalized reciprocity commonly found on kinship and familial ties. People's link through kinship and family ties creates in them a sense of community involvement and belonging (Dykstra, 2009). These underlying values and beliefs of family and kinship connections enable members to assist one another when faced with life cycle crises. Ability to perform these roles and responsibilities by the significant others rests on their economic solvency occasioned by existence of tangible means of livelihood. With this, it is evident that only those who are gainfully employed would be able to take on societal obligations when necessary (Gunawan *et al.*, 2018, Zein *et al.*, 2016). Aside this, Haselbarth (1977) stresses the necessity of work in sustaining life and that it creates satisfaction and joy as well as making joys of rest and relaxation, recreation and festivity possible. This therefore justifies the high value placed on work in most cultures and traditions around the world as well as its importance when compared to other aspects of social integration like housing, health, and interpersonal relationships.

Akwaki and Egwu (2017) believe that work, which is infused with the unique human capacity for self-expression and self-realization, is one of God's means of completing man's existence. The foregoing underscores the fact that work is obviously a means towards achieving and sustaining social security due to its economic, social, and spiritual possibilities. In view of this, there arose a need for the understanding of workers' perspective of their social security in the face of opportunities and challenges being faced on their jobs. Specific attention is being given here to the hotel industry due to its peculiarity as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy (Zarrina, 2020). It is also one of the top sectors for job creation owing to its labour-intensive nature and large multiplier effect on employment in other allied sectors. Understanding the position of the employees in the hotel industry in terms of quality of services being provided for effective working condition therefore becomes necessary in this paper.

The hospitality industry has become a prominent service sector in most countries across the world, particularly in those that experience high volumes of foreign travel. Studies have underscored the economic value of hotels to human

development as they provide goods and services that promote the welfare of countries and communities (Attila, 2016; Akinrinde & Telukdarie, 2023). Visitors who stay in hotels contribute directly or otherwise to local economies (Jurigová & Lencsésóvá, 2015). Generally, hotels provide two major services: (i) lodging, and (ii) dining. Domestic homes, foreign tourists, and institutional purchases are some of the clients in this market. Competitive price, service accessibility, and the range of free services are the main factors that affect the decision to stay in hotels and other lodging alternatives (Jurigová *et al.*, 2016, Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). This service sector continues to be the primary and most popular lodging choice for visitors from other nations (Jurigová & Lencsésóvá, 2015).

Factors like effectiveness and performance of the workforce were equally noted as affecting the success of these businesses. Lawson (2004) provides support for this claim by arguing that high levels of performance and productivity among employees can be linked to their level of job satisfaction. While this is pointing at motivation in general, it is also indicating the centrality of staff motivation in the sustenance the quality of ongoing services (Karatepe & Uluda, 2007, Hartline *et al.*, 2003, Hays & Hill, 1999). With all these identified, scholars (Khan *et al.*, 2015, Ogbonnikan, 2012) have pointed at pathetic working conditions among the employees in the hotel business hence the call for the managers and labour employers to establish common ground for satisfying workers' demands for better working environment.

In spite of its intrinsic qualities, Harkison (2017) noted that the hotel industry still has a bad image for its workplace. This was found to be caused by a variety of factors, including (a) the fragmentation of the industry, where the majority of employers are small and medium-sized businesses with low union density; (b) it is characterized by low wages and low levels of skill requirements; and (c) shift and night work as well as seasonality. It is in the course of this exposition that this study is making a modest contribution through exposition of employees' perceptions of opportunities and challenges in selected hotel establishments in Abuja FCT, Nigeria. It seeks to comprehend the opportunities and challenge(s) facing the employees, how they manage issues and the implications of this on service delivery and productivity. The study intends to make suitable recommendations for better service and increased patronage. This is against the backdrop of the fact that more patronage means more encouragement for further development and improved services.

## Materials and Method

The study relied on primary data sourced from 120 respondents who were sampled from 12 hotels in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory. These hotels were classified as three stars (Comfort Hotels) based on criteria given by European Hotelstars Union. A total of 10 respondents were sampled from each of these hotels. Where a respondent sampled could not participate, voluntary desire to take part was used in the selection of other respondent(s) as replacement. A copy of questionnaire was administered on each of the 120 respondents so as to gather information that are relevant to the study. Out of this number, only 114 copies were retrieved from the respondents. Data generated for the study were analysed using frequency and simple percentage to express the findings.

## Results and Discussion

The females constituted majority (60.5%) of this study population, while the males make up the 39.5% balance. Most of the respondents are in the age category of 31 – 40 years of age (35.1%). The least academic qualification of the respondents is secondary school certificate (15.8%) while the remaining have post-secondary education (National Diploma/Nigeria Certificate of Education, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor and Master degrees). Majority of the respondents are Christians (54.4%); substantial proportion of the respondents were unmarried (46.5%). In terms of years of experience gained on the job, majority of the respondents have spent more than 10 years in their places of work (22.8%), while the remaining respondents had gained between 3- and 10-years' experience on the job.

**Table 1: Distribution by Unit of Operation within the Hotel**

| Occupation                             | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Accommodation                          | 17        | 14.9       |
| Car hire services                      | 12        | 10.5       |
| Catering                               | 10        | 8.8        |
| Event centre/outdoor catering services | 14        | 12.3       |
| Food and Beverages                     | 22        | 19.3       |
| Laundry                                | 11        | 9.6        |
| Restaurant/Bar                         | 15        | 13.2       |
| Gymnasium/Swimming                     | 13        | 11.4       |
| Total                                  | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

As the findings show in table 1, there are 8 departments into which each of the sampled hotels were divided. These include: Accommodation, Car hire services, Catering, Event centre/outdoor catering services, Food and Beverages, Laundry, Restaurant/Bar, as well as Gymnasium/Swimming. The distribution of the respondents based on the Units of operation in the hotels is as follow: Accommodation (14.9%), Car hire services (10.5%), Catering (8.8%), Event centre/outdoor catering services (12.3%), Food and Beverages (19.3%), Laundry (9.6%), Restaurant/Bar (13.2%), as well as Gymnasium/Swimming (11.4%). Majority (31.6%) of the respondents have worked across all the departments available within the sampled hotels. Some (22.8%) have worked between 1 and 3 departments, 17.5% of the respondents have worked between 3 and 5 departments while the remaining 28.1% have their working experiences within the hotels cutting across 5 and 8 departments. The customers' patronage of the selected hotels was rated as excellent by 42.9% of the respondents. Others rated the patronage as ever constant; this was premised on the strategic location of these hotels within the town (33.4%). The remaining group of respondents were not specific in the rating of customers' patronage of their hotels, but maintained that the patronage was reasonable (23.7%).

**Table 2: Factors Influencing Customers' Patronage of the Hotel**

| Response                                               | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| It is the best you can get in this part of the country | 26        | 22.8       |
| The services are affordable and of high quality        | 32        | 28.0       |
| Food service is always prompt                          | 40        | 35.1       |
| Outdoor catering services are equally available        | 16        | 14.1       |
| Total                                                  | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

Several factors were given by the respondents as responsible for the rating of the hotels according to customer's patronage. As some (22.8%) responded, patronage was possible because the sampled hotels were the best one can get in that part of the country. It was further reported that the hotels were of high standard in terms of quality and affordability of services, hence the high volumes of patronage they always attract (28%). Data gathered also show that prompt food services (35.1%) as well as availability of outdoor catering services (14.1%) accounted for why the hotels continue to receive impressive patronage.

**Table 3: Available Opportunities within the Hotel Industry**

| Responses                                                                 | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Entrance into the hotel industry requires little or no special skill      | 10        | 8.8        |
| Provides learning and training opportunities for new entrants             | 17        | 14.9       |
| Avenue for acquisition of new skills and improvement on the existing ones | 12        | 10.5       |
| Serves as source of income and means of livelihood                        | 14        | 12.3       |
| Provides avenue for making functional social contacts                     | 20        | 17.5       |
| Encourages career advancement and job mobility                            | 16        | 14.0       |
| Opportunities for direct access to superior officers and mentoring        | 08        | 7.0        |
| Opportunities to become service provider and entrepreneur                 | 11        | 9.7        |
| Staff and customers motivation for cordial relationship and commitment    | 06        | 5.3        |
| Total                                                                     | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

The respondents further affirmed that opportunities abound for employees working in the hotels industry. The opportunities as listed include: little or no special skills as entry requirements into the hotels industry (8.8%); the industry provides learning and training opportunities for new entrants into the system (14.9%); working in the industry creates avenues for the acquisition of new skills and improvement on the existing ones (10.5%); hotel jobs constitute major sources of income and means of livelihood (12.3%); it provides avenue for making functional social contacts (17.5%); it encourages career advancement and job mobility (14%); it provides opportunities for direct access to superior officers and proper mentoring (7%); working in the hotels creates avenues for becoming service provider and subsequently transform to an entrepreneur (9.7%); it promotes staff motivation and customers motivation towards creating cordial relationship and higher commitment (5.3%) .

**Table 4: Effects of the available Opportunities on Career Prospects of the Employees**

| Responses                                                                                                                     | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Ability to predict and take necessary steps for my career advancement                                                         | 25        | 21.9       |
| Having people with like mind to share experience and dream with will translate to better career future for me in the industry | 18        | 15.8       |
| Conducive working environment is possible through friendly social contacts which encourages job productivity                  | 38        | 33.4       |
| Enhance employee commitment facilitate effective productivity                                                                 | 33        | 28.9       |
| Total                                                                                                                         | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The effects of available opportunities on the career prospects of the hotel workers include: ability to predict and take necessary steps for career advancement (21.9%), having people with like mind to share experience and dream with for improved career future (15.8%), possibility of conducive working environment through friendly social networking that makes for increased productivity (33.4%), and enhancement of employees' commitment to facilitate effective productivity (28.9%).

**Table 5: Challenges encountered by Hotel Employees**

| Responses                                                           | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Pressure of work and absence of time to rest during the peak period | 30        | 26.3       |
| Occasional embarrassment from customers                             | 21        | 18.4       |
| Sexual harassment from the superiors in the work place              | 15        | 13.2       |
| Sexual harassment from the customers                                | 12        | 10.5       |
| Occasional raiding from the law enforcement agents                  | 26        | 22.8       |
| Enforcement of dressing code that is against religious belief       | 10        | 8.8        |
| Total                                                               | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

Part of challenges of working in the hotels settings as identified by the respondents include: pressure of work and absence of time to rest during the peak period (26.3%); occasional embarrassment from customers (18.4%); sexual

harassment of female employees by superiors in the work setting (13.2%); sexual harassment from the customers (10.5%); occasional raiding from the law enforcement agents (22.8%); and enforcement of dressing code that may negate employee's religious belief (8.8%). As Victoria (2019) notes, workplace challenges have implications for employees' productivity and the socio-institutional well-being of the stakeholders of any organisation. The possible effects of the afore mentioned challenges on the hotel employees include: gradual withdrawal of interest from the work (26.3%), confusion on how to please the management and the customers (22.8%), inadequacy of experienced staff due to constant staff turnover (19.3%), constant stress affects service delivery (14.1%), and negative productivity (17.5%). These findings corroborate Chandrasekar's (2011) conclusion that working environment impacts immensely on employees' performance either towards negative or positive outcomes.

**Table 6: Channels of Exposure to Opportunities and Challenges in the Hotel Industry**

| Responses                                                                                       | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| From superiors and other members of the management                                              | 42        | 36.8       |
| From customers during service delivery                                                          | 31        | 27.2       |
| Encounters with the superiors and customers expose every worker to opportunities and challenges | 22        | 19.3       |
| Repetition of same job over time                                                                | 19        | 16.7       |
| Total                                                                                           | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

The above reveal show how hotel workers are being exposed to both opportunities and challenges in their workplaces. As table 6 shows, 36.8% of the respondents reported that these usually occur from their superiors and other members of the management in the course of service delivery; 27.2% reported that the opportunities and challenges come from the customers only, while 19.3% was of the view that encounters with superiors and customers usually expose every worker to opportunities and challenges. The remaining 16.7% was of the view that constant repeating same job over some periods of time exposes workers to opportunities and challenges.

**Table 7: Inevitability of Encountering Challenges in Hotel jobs**

| Responses                                                                                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| The challenges emerged in the course of daily activities at the working place                  | 23        | 20.2       |
| The challenges are the products of individual differences                                      | 19        | 16.7       |
| They are workplace challenges that can only be resolved within the workplace alone             | 21        | 18.4       |
| They are necessary ingredient for effectiveness and developmental process of the establishment | 27        | 23.7       |
| The challenges are inevitable and can only end with the establishment                          | 24        | 21.0       |
| Total                                                                                          | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

The inevitability of meeting challenges in the course of working with hotel establishments as depicted in table 7 above has been stressed. As the respondents note, encountering challenges while working in the hospitality setting is inevitable. This was justified by the fact that most of these challenges do emerge in the course of daily activities at work place (20.2%), while some are products of individual differences (16.7%); the challenges are basically workplace related, and its solution should be workplace specific (18.4%); the challenges are necessary ingredient for effectiveness and developmental process of the establishment (23.7%), the challenges can only end when the establishment ended (21%). All the above make these occupational challenges inevitable.

**Table 8: The Existing Mechanisms for Managing Workplace Challenges**

| Responses                                                                                                                                           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Feedback mechanism exists through which opinion of customers were obtained and understood to avoid unpleasant encounter between customers and staff | 30        | 26.3       |
| Supervisors are always available to ensure that unpleasant situation is resolved without getting to the management level                            | 45        | 39.5       |
| The staff were trained to acknowledge that customers are always the Kings and Queens                                                                | 39        | 34.2       |
| Total                                                                                                                                               | 114       | 100.0      |

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

All the respondents have encountered challenges in the course of their works as staff of these hotels. The existing mechanisms and those adopted by the workers for the management of these challenges included: existence of feedback mechanism through which the opinion of the customers are gotten and understood to avoid unpleasant encounter between the customers and staff (26.3%), supervisors are always available to ensure that unpleasant situation is resolved without getting to the management level (39.5%), the staff were trained to acknowledge that customers are always the Kings and Queens (34.2%).

### **Research findings and Social Security Advocacy for Hotel Employment**

Social security is one of the concepts adopted in the social sciences for addressing the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. The idea flowed from the global concerns regarding how to guarantee a wide-ranging human security. Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, specifically captured the concept of social security as a fundamental human right issue under which “everyone is granted the right to social security coverage”. The hospitality industry being one of the largest economic sectors of the world has in the last four decades recorded considerable growth which justifies the pride of place it currently enjoys as one of the largest global industries (Draskovic, et al, 2022). The sector, as a top employment contributor, accounts for an estimated 10.3% of global GDP, translating to a US\$8.9 trillion contribution to the world’s GDP and 330 million jobs in 2019 (Ngwenya, 2020).

Despite the cruciality of the sector’s contribution, the number of depreciating and precarious types of work in the industry keeps growing (Standing, 2011). This has prompted scholars’ conclusion that international tourism has an influence on structural changes of the employees’ work; and by so doing creates a lot of low-paid jobs and low-skilled precarious types of work (Tung & Cuong, 2020; Kosikova et al., 2019; Pavlic et al., 2019). Precarious work as conceptualised by Draskovic, et al (2022) are characterised by those occupational challenges created by the global industrial environment. Delibasic et al. (2022) specifically associate it with nonstandard or substandard work contracts, including temporary, fixed term, and short-term contract, part-time contract, agency work, freelance work, on-call employment and civil contracts. The fact that the hotel industry employs a lot of precarious workers (Pupavac et al., 2020) explains why social security coverage should be extended to cover employees in the hotel industry.

Given the nature, structure and social context of jobs in the hotel industry, there exists various strands of exploitation, sexual harassment (mostly against females) by customers and superiors, harassment of employees by the law enforcement agents, lack of freedom due to dress code imposition and more. All this underscores the urgent need to redirect the social policy frameworks towards extending social security coverage to employees in the hotel industry so as to guarantee an improved quality of life and its sustainability.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This study showcased the prevailing working conditions, the medium of exposure to opportunities and challenges and mechanisms adopted to manage the challenges. The respondents identified availability of motivation for friendly relationships and commitment among staff and guests as what made their hotels deserving of steadfast patronage. The challenges encountered at work include (a) psychological breakdown brought on by stress and lack of time for rest during peak times (b) occasional consumer embarrassment (c) sexual harassment by supervisors at work (d) sexual harassment by customers (e) sporadic raids by law enforcement officials (f) Enforcement of dressing code that is against religious belief. The effects of these noted workplace challenges on service delivery and productivity, according to the respondents, include: (a) Gradual loss of interest in work due to management's failure to meet workers' needs; (b) confusion over how to please management and customers without lowering one's self-esteem; (c) inadequacy of experienced staff due to staff members' constant withdrawal of services; and (d) ongoing stress due to insufficient break time, (e) constant repetition of the same job over periods of time. (f) Productivity is also affected negatively as a result of (i) fluidity in the modes of their entrance into the hotels where people with little or no special skill are recruited, and (ii) high level of staff turnover and loss of resources invested in training to instil skills into the staff members recruited without skills in the first place.

Opportunities identified as available to these hotels workers included (i) securing of jobs with little or no skills, thereby corroborating the expositions of WTTC (2015), Dayananda (2014), Amirtharaj, *et al.* (2011), UNWTO (2011), ILO (2010), Kovac (2008), Analoui (2007), Decenzo and Robbins (2007), Dessler (2007, 2006), Beardwell, *et al.* (2006), Bounken and Pyo (2002), Cook, *et al.* (2002), Lashley (2001) and Armstrong (1992). Virtually all the workers saw the challenges being encountered as inevitable hence their adaptation to the situation

probably to avoid job loss in the face of unfavourable social and economic situations in Nigeria. The exposition of challenges in spite of available opportunities therefore calls for action on how the best of the hotels could be attained. It is necessary that constant review of workers' condition of service be taken into cognizance with utmost attention. The overall ramifications of this when actions are taken will enhance the well-being of the workers. When this is achieved, the associated array of physical health benefits, such as lower blood pressure, reduced risk of stroke, a stronger immune system, and even a longer life will suffice to grow the hospitality industry. Other tourism-related industries will be benefited in the long run for sustainable development.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were adapted from the suggestions offered by the respondents as possible way out in sustaining and improving on the available opportunities and overcoming service challenges among the employees of selected hotels in the study area.

- A liberal but decent dress code that will go in line with every religious practice should be introduced
- Regular counselling of staff and in-house training should be organised.
- Channels should be created for staff to make inputs into the running of the hotels
- Provision should be for compensation of staff to take pressure off their feelings of work-related embarrassment
- Annual award for the best staff and most loyal customers for effective management, employees and customers' interactions
- Enforcement of meaningful workers-friendly packages to retain experienced staff
- Appropriate training programmes is a welcome development in the organization for as long as they would be relevant to address the aforementioned areas so as to enhance skills amongst workers

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