

**GENDER AND AGE AS FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTICIPATION IN THE INFORMAL  
LABOUR MARKET OF OWERRI METROPOLIS, NIGERIA**

**By**

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) ushered in the early 1980s; the process of reconfiguring states and markets to serve the interests of foreign and, to lesser extent local capitalists. In the process, the labor markets have been subjected to policies and institutional changes rooted in economic liberalism policies and have become more precarious for women and, for men. Studies have found that women have suffered more than men from the adverse impacts of SAP (see for instance, Palmers 1995, Afshar and Dennis, 1992 and Moser, 1989). Judging from the works of Moser (1989) and Afshar and Dennis (1992), the outcome of SAPs for most of the poor women seems to be seriously reduced capabilities for living healthy stress free lives.

In the decades after Structural adjustment in Nigeria, the labor market has changed significantly as the economy has changed. As the formal economy shrunk in the era of neoliberal expansionism, the informal economy has expanded. According to Aladekomo (2004) employment opportunities in the formal economy and in government has shrunk under economic liberalism. The down sizing of government employees and, of formal private sector employment either due to closures of businesses collapsing under the weight of poor infrastructures, high costs and foreign competition have caused increases in the unemployment rate. The national unemployment rate has risen from 3.6% in 1995 and 13.65 in 2001 and to 14.8% in 2004 (FOS 2005).

The entry of a growing army of the urban unemployed shut out of the formal economy into the urban informal labor market has significant implications for gender structures and relations in the informal market. It could for instance, result in greater competition in labor markets that were hitherto characterized as “male” or “female” with consequences for gender structure of participation, gender relations, returns from participation and, absolute and relative welfare of men and women. The urban casual labor market is one of the informal markets that have expanded as the adverse effects of the neo-liberal reconstruction of the Nigerian state and markets have deepened. The urban casual labor markets tend to be

unregulated and its conditions are often precarious as there is daily uncertainty about employment, low wages and very poor working conditions. In addition, it is typically a market where supply often exceeds demand. Given that women have been dominant in the informal economy and given the already existing institutionalized biases against women in access to high paying positions and sectors and, in inequities in participation, the influx of the unemployed into the informal economy can potentially worsen the status of women in the job market. It is important therefore, that we study and understand (a) the gender composition of the informal labor market, (b) impacts on gender relations and (c) the working conditions of men and women.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES**

One of the informal labor markets that have become a feature of the urban informal market is the casual labor market. Economic liberalism has expanded casualization of labor in constructions, banking, manufacturing and the oil and gas industry. However, it is in the informal labor market that casualization has expanded. This study focuses on the informal casual labor market in Owerri (Imo State of Nigeria).

The recent history of the conglomeration of casual labour in Owerri is linked to 1976 when the state was created. Road junctions such as Douglas, Mbaise, MCC, and Orji road were where the phenomena were first observed. Most of the casual laborers were public sector workers and civil –servants that returned from Enugu (former capital of the defunct East Central State) and found no jobs in the Owerri civil service. They came to these junctions early in the morning for building contractors to offer them daily jobs. Their activities ranged from bricklaying, digging to other jobs on construction sites to street cleaning. Unskilled and illiterate labourers expanded the ranks of those seeking daily employment at the junctions.

The problem of urban unemployment has even given rise to new entrants – unemployed graduates - into the casual labor market. Trade liberalization, democracy and other new capitalist policies encouraged this phenomenon by bringing in its wake an increase

in privatization and subcontracting of municipal waste management and construction works. What is being witnessed now is a large labour market of casual labour also tagged “hard labour” because construction work is predominantly powered by muscles. It is this mix of the educated, uneducated, skilled, semiskilled, unskilled, male, female, old and young labour that gather at road junctions every morning for daily, weekly or monthly jobs in sub-sectors like masonry, carpentry, painting and plumbing.

In this study, we pose and answer three questions. First, what is the gender and age composition of the casual labour market in Owerri? Second, what is the nature of gender relations in the interface between casual labourers and their employers? Third, what are the working conditions of men and women in the casual labour market in Owerri? The objectives are thus:

- (i) To determine and analyse the gender and age composition of the casual labour market in Owerri;
- (ii) To examine the nature of gender relations in the interface between labour demand (employers) and labour supply (workers) in casual labour;
- (iii) To determine the working conditions of both the men and women in the casual labour market in Owerri and analyse the gender structure of precariousness in the market.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on the construction and functioning of the labour market and its impacts on and consequences for gender composition, relations and working conditions is considerable. Much of the research work has been targeted towards gender activities in the urban formal sector labour market or on aspects of the urban labour market (Hariss et al. 1990; Lachaud 1993, Rodgers 1989), and in, some of the various defined broad sectors of the informal sector labour market. These studies have contributed to understanding gender and labour market.

Some studies reveal conditions of discrimination, poverty and vulnerability of women in the unorganized sector also, of a lack of support system except workers' organizations. Dietrich (1995) studied the illegal and exploitative working conditions of women in the unorganized sector in India. Her findings reveal that there are young women between 16 and 25 years who are sold into virtual bondage by contractors and spend their lives under unbelievably inhuman conditions with 12-15 hours of work and totally inadequate housing and sanitation. The women earn between Rs 800 and 1,100 a month though, at least Rs 1,200 was promised to them. Food expenses are deducted; while medical expenses are borne by the workers and are very high. They suffer many injuries and infections due to handling frozen prawns, working in damp conditions, slipping on water and ice. They live, 30 to 50 people in one room with only two or three latrines and have to take baths in bunches of four or five in order to make it to work on time. There is no recreation and they do not get leave. Sexual harassment seems to occur and possibilities of labour organization are extremely difficult. These issues were brought before a court, after which the jury gave a judgment acknowledging the totally inhuman conditions in the sector and certifying violation of many labour laws, concluding that the government does not seem to have the will to enforce the labour laws.

More generally, low skilled and unorganized workers may be unable to obtain decent working conditions and remunerations from employers in the absence of social legislation or in the absence of its effective enforcement, as exemplified in Bremen's (1985) study. Another study suggested that the minimum wage can probably help to improve the situation of employees of micro enterprises (Morrisson 1993). Women who constitute one of the vulnerable groups in Figueiredo and Shaheed (1995) are disadvantaged in the labour market either because of their characteristics (e.g. limited education, skill, or experience; constraints on behaviour due to household responsibilities or cultural mores); functioning of the labour market and processes of exclusion from the labour market (such as discriminatory practices related to employment opportunities, lack of access to credit markets and to technology;

and/or macro-economic and labour market conditions (such as structural adjustment programmes; globalization of production; transition to a market economy; economic recession). Labour market segmentation implies differentiation even among workers in the lowest productivity and income jobs.

Figueiredo et al. (1995) pointed out that the working poor are less well organized than others and this undermines their attempts to gain improved wages and working conditions. In addition, irregular and casual employment also affects the way wages are set and paid. It is clear from the foregoing that gender discrimination may be important in creating groups of workers who are particularly vulnerable to low wages. Many women do not appear on the labour market only because their opportunities are limited; it might also be as a result of their personal characteristics such as caste, age, disability or race (Anker 1995; Samson 2008; Standing et al. 1992; Paukert 1993; Chakravati 1995). Economist argues that even work values (Filer 1985) and child bearing and child rearing decisions (Waite and Berryman 1985) predict a woman's choice of a "sex-traditional" or "sex-non traditional jobs".

Poverty has been at least in part, a consequence of inherent inequality in labor markets. As a result of the insecure and irregular nature of the jobs depicted as flexible and precarious in the literature, male and female workers in these segments are also particularly vulnerable to unemployment, and these often appear in short term/casual work. Thus, casualization of employment relationships, marginal self employments, unprotected wage employment, acceptance of poorly remunerated jobs, production of low-quality goods or services for sale, the undermining of the ability to invest in the acquisition of skills and training and a reinforcement of the inability of the poor and vulnerable (women inclusive) to escape from labour market vulnerability are consequences of the construction and functioning of the contemporary labour market (Figueiredo et al., 1995; Buvinic, 1995 and Francke, 1992).

In some countries where policies directed at improving the quality of jobs in the economy and improving the quality of the labour force exist as is the case with a global credit

programme for small and micro enterprises by the Central Bank of Costa Rica, the Mexican Empresas Solidaridad and the FONDOMICRO in the Dominican Republic, activities of SENAI and SENAC in Brazil, INFOTEP equally in the Dominican Republic, and INA in Costa Rica, they have few attendant problems (ILO 1992; PRONASOL 1993; Barros and Camargo 1995).

In models of the labour market, conditions of work and nature of contracts are salient factors. Elson (1991b) pointed out that Marx was the first social thinker to emphasize that labor contract was incomplete as the distinction between labour and labour power incorporated the idea that employment contracts cannot be completely specified in advance. According to Elson, the employer still faces the task of extracting work from the worker after the market transaction has been entered into: 'management' of labour and the design of labour processes has to try to compensate for the incompleteness of labour contracts. Employers are challenged by problems of monitoring exactly what the workers do. Mackintosh (1981) in a study of women casual workers offered a good illustration of the point about incompleteness of contracts in casual labor market. In the study, women workers took advantage of the casualized and anonymous teams in which they worked to send female relatives and friends to substitute for them when they needed time off for domestic duties.

Labour market economics also recognizes the problem of gender differentiation. Elson (1991a) takes male bias to mean a bias in society that operates in favour of men as a gender, and against women as a gender. According to Elson (1991b) when attention is focused on the labour market, it is the sexual division of labour in the household that is taken as a parameter. As such the fact that women have lower wages and occupy jobs with fewer promotion prospects than men is attributed in part to the fact that women have responsibilities for child care, housework etc. A study of Women and the labour market in Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya and Tanzania undertaken for the Women and Development Division of the World Bank by Collier et al. (as cited in Elson 1991b) showed that discrimination against women is attributed to irrational prejudice or to inadequate information about women. In

line with this, much effort has gone into trying to determine how much of the gender differentiation in a particular labour market is due to discrimination and how much is 'legitimate' because it stems from differences in qualifications, seniority, absenteeism etc. This is because it did not explain the fact that women in Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya have on average lower earnings than men, though in the case of Tanzania there may be noticeable discrimination. The fact that discrimination as a factor explaining the lower participation rates of women in Cote d'Ivoire was merely suggested (Elson 1991b). Whilst in the case of Kenya and Tanzania, the lower participation rates of women largely were attributed to women's lower aspirations which in turn were attributed to their lack of role models to copy. The study did not consider household responsibilities to be a significant factor (Elson 1991b). The study implied that female preferences which are 'defective' are responsible for their not benefiting as much as men from the labour markets, thereby presenting them as under-achievers.

Most previous studies such as Collier et al. (as cited in Elson 1991b) concentrated on the supply side rather than the demand side; on individuals rather than on structural characteristics of labour market (nature of labour contracts and labour processes), as aptly pointed out by Elson (1991b). The problem needs to be approached from all dimensions e.g. in terms of structural characteristics, market institutions and the job to which they allocate people. Palmer's (1991) offered a feminist adaptation of the neo-classical framework wherein the concept of market distortion was used. She studied the effect of gender relations on the operation of labour markets, and identified the following issues: gender discrimination in access to resources; women's unpaid work in reproduction and family maintenance; unequal terms of exchange of resources between women and men in households and gender differentiation in intra-household income and expenditure patterns. According to her, all these gender relations lead to resource misallocations that can be referred to as 'gender-based market distortion'. This was greatly exemplified in her illustrations emanating from series of



analyses carried out by her on likely responses of agriculture, manufacturing and services sector to structural adjustment policies.

Structural adjustment, deregulation and privatization which are offshoots of neo-liberalism are processes that have bred and intensified sex segregation of jobs, affected how women entrepreneurs are able to respond to new growth areas and brought doubts to whether women in the labour market can acquire new skills and access to new jobs (Palmer 1991, 1995, Elson 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1992). In Palmer's (1991) study, legalizing many of women's informal sector activities that are currently illegal was recommended. In Elson's (1991b) study it was indicated in her review that certain jobs, classified as women's jobs, had come to have attached to them lower pay and worse conditions than the job predominantly done by men. And in turn, women's work was entirely casualized and the hiring had a number of corrupt features one might expect when young male team leaders are responsible for the hiring of women. While men were generally paid the minimum wage, women generally received less than the minimum wage; and the expenditure that they had to make to discharge their obligations to nurture their families increased.

The best recipe for a labour market was one given by Palmer (1995). According to her a well functioning labour market is one that fosters the development of productivity, growth and new comparative advantage. This is not the same as one in which labour is cheap, or wages rapidly change to clear the market. Rather, it is a labour market that has low entry barriers; it is not divided by rigid segmentation, is free from discrimination, and facilitates increases in the quality of labour.

The fact that the labour force is segregated and that pay disparities exist between female and male workers is well documented. While the gap narrowed in the 1980s, women continue to be concentrated in fewer occupations than men (Baron and Bielby 1986; Jacobs 1989). The studies stressed that the phenomenon of occupational segregation by sex is commonplace and quite extensive in every country. They also revealed that stereotypes exist in the labour force as most work in occupations are dominated by one sex, giving rise to so

called “female” or “male” occupations as shown for developing countries (Anker and Hein 1986), Nordic countries (Nordic Council 1995), and a number of industrialized nations (Rubery and Fagan 1993). Collectively they found “male” occupations to be more important than “female” occupations in terms of number and size. Some previous studies, Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos (1992) and Blau and Ferber (1992) found that inequality is greatest in Latin America and the Caribbean region, while on the other hand some other previous studies indicate that inequality is lowest in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The latter as perceived by these studies is as a result of the fact that one occupation, agriculture is extremely large in this region (Anker 1998).

Relatively fewer studies analyze the informal casual labor market. Aladekomo (2004) is one of the few studies of the casual labour market in a Nigerian urban location. She examined the nature and content of the casual labour market in terms of workers educational background, qualification, skill and immigration status and investigated the social problem they create by their agglomeration at locations and the following were her key findings; the casual laborers were there by force not by choice, they formed a large proportion of the urban poor, they are mostly migrant and they obstruct traffic. Aladekomo’s study offered very useful analysis of the phenomenon of “Early Morning Casual Labour Market” even though; it did not adopt a gender perspective.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study used the survey method. This was best suited since the study was to undertake a gender analysis of the labour market which is a particular social phenomenon. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data included the use of both structured and unstructured questionnaires for the casual labourers both male and female, the use of interview schedule for the employers (those who recruit casual labourers) and series of focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were conducted before the surveys and they included the use of open-ended questions as part of its test items.

The essence of this procedure was to capture more questions to add during the surveys. The questionnaires, interview schedules and FGD test items covered the following aspects: personal bio-demographic data; recruitment/terms of payment; nature of working conditions/ relationship with employer/ relationship with employees; workers organizations, problems and envisaged solutions. Participant observation was also used in the study; it included visits to construction sites and major roads, documentation of observed working conditions which were deemed necessary to reveal what perception could not reveal. The observation units for data collection were the road junctions with casual labour agglomeration and the sites and other spots wherein they work.

The initial step involved a careful identification of all the casual labour road junctions in the metropolis. The population of study on the labour supply side was all men and women that gathered at different road junctions or spots of congregation early in the morning daily for recruitment, and on the labour demand side, all those who recruit the casual labour (men and women) daily. However, while obtaining a population estimate of casual labourers might be easier, it must be stated that there are no statistical records of the number of employers of casual labourers in Owerri and since the hirers cannot be properly estimated, and ratio of sample size to population cannot be determined. The number covered in the study is presumed to be enough to articulate what the situation is. On the labour supply side, the sample (200) which is representative of the population of study was only taken when the estimate population of study (1000) had been determined. When the total sampled population of 200 casual labourers for the study is compared with the estimate population of 1000 (130 at Ama JK / Douglas road junction, 500 at Mbaise road junction, 250 at Hardel junction Orji and 120 at MCC / Uratta road junction) to find the percentage of sampled population, we get a mean of twenty percent. Thus, a sample of 100, 26, 50 and 24 each were taken from Mbaise road junction, Ama JK / Douglas road junction, Hardel and MCC / Uratta road junctions respectively to obtain the total sample. For these casual labourers, the sample was selected using the stratified sampling technique, and stratification was by gender and

location. In each stratum, respondents were randomly selected using the table of random numbers for the questionnaire administration. For the employers, respondents were selected using the snowball method because it is purposive.

The data obtained were collated and homogenized before analysis. This study employed several statistical techniques to analyse its data and ensure a gender analysis that captured bits and pieces for a more complete picture than is possible to get from only one single statistical test. In analyzing the data, descriptive statistics were used as well as Regression analysis and Chi-square analysis which are all inferential. For the needed gender analysis, the first step was the use of descriptive statistics that included:

1. The extent to which casual labour is female (percentage female)
2. The extent to which women are concentrated in casual labour (percentage of all women workers in each sub type).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study identified two actors in the casual labour market in Owerri Metropolis. These were; the employers (those who need the services of casual labourers and recruit them) and the employees (the casual labourers themselves). The findings confirmed that the casual labour market of Owerri Metropolis has a small and insignificant proportion of women. Of the 200 respondents (casual labourers), 160 (80 per cent) were men and 40 (20 per cent) women (see Table 1). Thus, many of the casual labourers, on whom the informal sector relied heavily on, were men. This gender imbalance may confirm the fact that men dominate the casual labour market as most other labour markets.

The female casual labourers served copies of the questionnaire were mature women aged between 35-54 years, 42.9% (30) was aged between 35-44 years and 25.0% (10) was aged between 45-54 years. From the above table one can deduce that the absence of women within the age brackets of 16-24 years and 25-34 years, indicates that it is the time women get “locked in” to child care, a time typically described by Elson (1991a) as phases of raising

children which physically have to be undertaken by women- pregnancy, childbirth, breast feeding. It is the lack of independent entitlement that forces women into dependence for these phases of child rearing, phases which according to Elson are particularly difficult to combine with income-earning. While Palmer (1995) argues that it is because of gender, and not biology, that most of the work of child care is done by women, which invariably often leads to the phenomenon of absent markets. In the same Table 1, within virtually every cohort above age 24 except for 65 years and above male casual labourers have better participation than their female counterparts, with the highest being in the 55-64 years category.

**TABLE 1: GENDER COMPOSITION OF CASUAL LABOURERS BY AGE**

<b>Age Group (years)</b>	<b>Men</b>		<b>Women</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	
16-24	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
25-34	30	100.0	0	0.0	30
35-44	40	57.1	30	42.9	70
45-54	30	75.0	10	25.0	40
55-64	60	100.0	0	0.0	60
65 and Above	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>200</b>

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

The hypothesis (Ho) that there is no significant difference between age and gender among casual labourers in Owerri Metropolis, as well as its alternative (H<sub>1</sub>) was tested using Chi-square statistical analysis. The critical value of 7.815 emerged at 0.05 significance level at 3 degrees of freedom and with the calculated value of  $X^2_c$  45.982 being higher than the

critical value we therefore reject the  $H_0$  and accept the  $H_1$ . Thus there is a significant difference between age and gender among casual labourers in Owerri Metropolis. This highlights the very selective nature of female casual labour market participation.

Gender composition from literature is a key concept in the construction of labour markets. Equally implied here is the fact that casual labour market in Owerri is not necessarily constructed by gender though gender might be a vital structural characteristic, but perhaps by other forces such as political, economic and socio-cultural factors. The gender of employees (casual labourers), on the one hand and those of the employers on the other, is far from being homogeneous. All the employers were men, while the casual labourers consisted of both men and women (see Table 2). There is no gross disparity in age between the employers of Casual labourers and the casual labourers both male and female. This is because they all fall within the productive age of the workforce of a nation.

**TABLE 2: GENDER AND AGE COMPOSITION OF THE KEY ACTORS**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Ave. Age</b>
Employees (Casual Labourers)	160(80%)	40(20%)	45
Employers	22(100%)	-	47

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

There are subtypes of casual labour and usually this categorization is according to the nature of assignment involved. Table 3 shows gender segregation by major subtypes of casual labour. The first column shows the composition of each major sub-type. Women are disproportionately represented.

Almost all the casual labourers in construction are men (98.4 per cent) while women comprised 5.6 per cent. Cargo handling and refuse/waste disposal are subtypes that have a predominance of men (100 per cent) and no women (0.0 per cent). Although women make up 20 per cent of casual labourers they are concentrated in clearing and cleaning (100 per

cent) and farming/food processing (100 per cent). These numbers suggest that differences in the labour market exist in terms of segregation (gender position). The predominance of women in a restricted set of sub types of labour market or occupations is seen as evidence of male domination within stratification systems.

**TABLE 3: CASUAL LABOURERS DISTRIBUTION BY CASUAL LABOUR SUB - TYPE AND GENDER**

Major Subtypes of Casual lab.	Men in Subtype		Women in Subtype		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Construction	102	94.4	6	5.6	108
Cargo Handling (loading and offloading)	48	100.0	0	0.0	48
Clearing and cleaning	0	0.0	23	100.02	23
Refuse/Waste Disposal	10	100.0	0	0.0	10
Farming/Food Processing	0	0.0	11	100.0	11
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>200</b>

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

The findings of the study agree with Boserup (1970) and Cohen and House (1993). In their studies the structure of female activities are seen as quite distinct from that of males, as is typical, throughout the world that women are found in particular occupations within specific labour market sectors. In Owerri Metropolis women comprise only a small minority in most subtypes of casual labour which depicts segregation by sub-type. Almost all of them are confined to lower level jobs such as cleaners or grass clearers that weed farms, which

require no skill. These emerging differences in Table 3 have strong implication for wage differentials between the sexes.

The study revealed that casual labourers in construction works are mostly masons, painters, plumbers, carpenters, electricians who have skills in bricklaying and masonry, carpentry, plumbing/repairing of facets, electrical works and finishing (terrazzo, tiling, window fixtures and painting). They are mainly recruited for building projects within and outside Owerri Metropolis. Since the wake of the fourth republic and with the full dividends of democracy gradually being reaped, coupled with new legislations of revocation of under – developed and undeveloped plots of land, building construction is facing a boom. The painters have equally been positioned for jobs as many landlords or property owners are recruiting them for the painting of their houses. This is in order to beat the deadline given by the government for the painting of all buildings in Owerri Metropolis in line with its clean and green initiative (a pro-greencity policy).

Casual labourers with skills in the construction industry are predominantly men. There are very few women among these casual labourers found in construction that have skills. It is only in the painting that women have skills. Other women in construction are there as mere labour hands that clear bushes, mix concrete, carry blocks and mortar and handout tools at construction sites. Thus in this subtype women out number men in the categories of unskilled workers. Those with skills come to Mbaise Road Junction, Douglas Road Junction, Hardel Road Junction and MCC/Uratta Road Junction which are spots of agglomeration and recruitment, with tools ranging from paint brushes, buckets, shovel, pick axe, diggers, hammers and saws to trowels daily. Those without skills which are mostly women come with either cutlasses, hoes, brooms or nothing at all. Such women are found in only Douglas Road Junction and Hardel Road Junctions, where both sexes agglomerate as against MCC/Uratta Road Junction and Mbaise Road Junction which is meant for only male casual labourers.



Cargo handling and refuse/waste disposal subtypes are devoid of women mainly because of its heavy reliance on intense manual labour rather than skill even though there are some stages of its operation that skills acquired are actually applied. Women on the other hand dominate clearing and cleaning as well as farming/food processing subtypes mainly because it requires no special skills except the usual skill and experience in household activities which they are familiar with at the home front. These observable segregation based on the sex of casual labourers is likely to retard casual labour market efficiency and labour market functioning. According to Bergmann's (1974) view and that of Cohen and House (1993), it often gives rise to women crowding into low-paying, and low productivity jobs in the labour market, all of which have implications for poverty reduction especially at the household level.

From Table 4, it can be seen that output and capability is the highest consideration made by employers in casual labour recruitment and wage determination and this accounts for 30 percent of responses. The least considerations are made on age and gender factors, and these accounted for 5 percent and 10 percent respectively. Those employers who consider output and capability opine that the political climate, economy and growing women's involvement are affecting gender relations in the casual labour market. For those who consider age and gender in labour recruitment and wage determination, in their opinion, gender relations in the casual labour market are being affected by the economy. Those who deviated from these above opinions are employers who consider strength and nature of work. They indicated that education and culture are critical factors affecting gender relations in the casual labour market. Generally apart from the economy, religion, education, political climate, culture and growing women's involvement were identified by employers as affecting gender relations in the casual labour market in different degrees. The two variables in Table 4 were regressed one against the other with linear regression statistical analysis using Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient model. The computed R-squared is 0.0164 which explains 1.6% and a residual of 98.4%. The test for reliability on Ho: The relationship

between Employer and casual labourers is not gender dependent/discriminatory at 3 degrees of freedom led to an acceptance of  $H_0$ . This is because the value of the calculated  $t = 0.224$  is less than the tabulated  $t (0.05)_3 = 2.353$  or critical value.

Among the casual labourers the general perception is that the nature of gender relations in the interface of casual labourers and their employers is such that it reinforces traditional women's economic role, and this accounts for 42.0 percent of responses (see Table 5). Of the respondents, 39 percent perceived it as being too paternalistic and disregards women's economic role. Both forms of perception definitely have implications for patriarchy

**TABLE 4: EMPLOYERS' CONSIDERATION / FACTORS AFFECTING GENDER RELATIONS IN THE CASUAL LABOUR MARKET**

<b>Employers' Consideration</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Factors Affecting Gender Relations in the Casual Labour Market</b>								
<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>The Economy</b>	<b>Environmental conditions</b>	<b>Political climatic</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Growing women's</b>	<b>Total</b>	
Endurance and Low bargaining	F %	0 0	0 0	30 27.2%	0 0	10 33.3%	0 0	0 0	40 20%	
Duration of work and Efficiency	F %	0 0	10 100%	10 9.1%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	20 10%	
Skill	F %	0 0	0 0	20 18.2%	0 0	10 33.3%	0 0	0 0	30 15%	
Age	F %	0 0	0 0	10 9.1%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	10 5%	
Strength and Nature of work	F %	10 50%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	10 100%	0 0	20 10%	
Output and Capability	F %	10 50%	0 0	20 18.2%	0 0	10 33.3%	0 0	20 100%	60 30%	
Gender	F %	0 0	0 0	20 18.2%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	20 10%	
<b>Total</b>		20	10	110	0	30	10	20	200	

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

**TABLE 5: NATURE OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE INTERFACE OF LABOUR DEMAND (EMPLOYERS) AND LABOUR SUPPLY (EMPLOYEES) AS PERCEIVED BY CASUAL LABOURERS**

<b>Location (Point of Agglomeration)</b>	<b>Too paternalistic and disregards women's economic role</b>	<b>Does not recognize cultural specifics and crossed inequalities</b>	<b>Reinforces traditional women's economic role</b>	<b>Undervalue unpaid women's work and introduces over-burden</b>	<b>Disgards potential of public policy</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mbaise Road Junction	30 (38.5%)	0 (0.0%)	50 (59.5%)	10 (50.0%)	10 (55.6%)	100
Douglas Road Junction	8 (10.2%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (11.9%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (44.4%)	26
Hardel Road Junction	35 (44.9%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (11.9%)	5 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	50
MCC/Uratta Road Junction	5 (6.4%)	0 (10.0%)	14 (16.7%)	5 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>78 (39.0%)</b>	<b>0 (0.0%)</b>	<b>84 (42.0%)</b>	<b>20 (10.0%)</b>	<b>18 (9.0%)</b>	<b>200 (100.0%)</b>

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

which is a fundamental factor hindering effective participation of women in the labour market as a whole. Other perceptions, which are that it undervalues unpaid work and introduces over-burden and that it disregards potential of public policy account for 10 percent and 9 percent respectively. None of the casual labourers perceived it as not recognizing cultural specifics and crossed inequalities. These perceptions equally varied from one point of agglomeration to another. For those that gather at Mbaise road junction their most perceived nature differed from those that gather at the other three points of agglomeration.

**TABLE 6: NATURE OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE INTERFACE OF LABOUR DEMAND (EMPLOYERS) AND LABOUR SUPPLY (EMPLOYEES) AS PERCEIVED BY EMPLOYERS OF CASUAL LABOURERS.**

<b>Category</b>	<b>frequency (number)</b>	<b>percentage</b>
Too paternalistic and disregards women's economic role	9	40.9
Does not recognize cultural specifics and crossed inequalities	7	31.8
Reinforces traditional women's economic role	2	9.1
Undervalue unpaid women's work and introduces over-burden	2	9.1
Disregards potential of public policy	2	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

The nature of gender relations in the interface of labour demand (employers) and labour supply (employees) as perceived by employers differed a little from the perceptions of casual labourers who constitute labour supply on those same lines or views (i.e. categories of responses). From Table 6 it can be seen that 40.9 percent of respondents (employers) perceive the nature of gender relations in the interface of labour demand and labour supply as too paternalistic and disregards women's economic role and this constitutes the majority of opinions on this issue. Following them, are those who indicated that their perception is that it does not recognize cultural specifics and crossed inequalities, they account for 31.8 percent of the respondents. While many perceive it as not recognizing cultural specifics and crossed inequalities, their attitude belies this.

On the interface between the two, employers' recruitment in the casual labour market of Owerri was mainly in the following areas of construction, farming and food processing, and clearing and cleaning. This explains why consideration for skill and education on labour recruitment cuts across both genders. They however admitted that they would not readily recruit pregnant females and nursing mothers with babies to work either at construction sites, people's homes, people's farms, major streets or processing mills. Though women accept cheaper rates and employers agree that men have the best bargaining power, for the same work equal payments are made to both females and males in the casual labour market.

Women were adjudged the most diligent gender by employers of casual labour. According to these employers, an observable fact is that in the evolution of the casual labour market in Owerri Metropolis there is a sharp growth in the number of females in casual labour. They however feel that male casual labourers are best suited for construction work and the females for clearing and cleaning work, while acknowledging that the following reasons; women's appreciation of their need for personal income and women's acquisition of new skills and education would prove better forces for occupational distribution in the entire labour market.

Women's less physical strength and the branding of some activities as best handled by males are big challenges confronting women labourers in the communication or point of interaction with employers in the casual labour market. Right at the points of agglomeration, women face discrimination because they are not allowed to assemble at the same place as men for the two locations that even allow them. They are not allowed to agglomerate at Mbaise road junction or at MCC/Uratta road junction because those points are exclusively for male casual labourers. This bias being observed is among the casual labourers themselves. When asked during the focus group discussion sessions to proffer reasons for such segregation, the following were supplied as major reasons amongst other; that there are certain job specific for the different genders, that there are different codes of conduct between the different genders, that the waiting points are not large enough to accommodate both gender and that it makes it easier for the hirers to know where exactly to go and get the type of labourers required. All of which infer that in their ranks predictions of men's resistance to women's equality is very likely. An issue dwelt on in details in Corkburn's (1991) study. The male casual labourers have a favourable strategy which they employ to ensure being selected and that is the raising up of their tools when a hirer approaches, because many of them are skilled they have tools to raise. The women on the other hand with majority who do not have the requisite skills for construction work simply stand and look on while the selection takes place. For the casual labourers to ensure order and good organization at agglomeration points there are male leaders in all four locations for them within Owerri Metropolis. This is simply because males have been able to organize and are more likely to be unionized (Hartmann, 1979). Women casual labourers only have a leader in one location, and that is Douglas road junction. Casual labourers in Owerri Metropolis equally admitted that males and females do not compete for the same type of job as they agglomerated differently, and that time differentials do not exist among gender in work commencement. The female casual labourers in the casual labour market claim that household poverty forced them into the labour market. For many of them, the belief is that the gap between women

and men's participation in the casual labour markets is still wide, as women spend less time working than men. These findings do not agree with Appleton et al's (1990) study in which differential participation in the labour market strongly correlated with female education, but rather it agrees with Andes (1992) whose findings suggest that differences in the labour market exist in terms of gender position.

From Table 7 it can be seen that some of the employees i.e. casual labourer respondents work under conditions that are cordial and amenable. Forty- five percent of them work under situations whereby their hirers joke with them and supply them their needs such as water, food, restrooms with toilet facilities while working for them. Of this group 77.8percent are male while 22.2 percent are female. Another 5 percent work at sites where security and safety gadgets are provided for them. Many other employees work in conditions that are far from being favourable. There are those who work for employers that refuse sometimes to pay the agreed fee at the end of the day (15 percent). Male casual labourers that are given heavy workloads account for 66.7 percent, while women that are given heavy work loads account for only 33.3 percent.

A few work in situations where verbal abuses are showered on them coupled with their being rebuked and shouted upon while at work (5 percent), while others in similar conditions are those that claim hirers provide transport (vehicles) to sites for them only to abandon them at the site after the close of work (5 percent). These conditions are predominantly faced by male casual labourers. The last worst scenario/work conditions men work in are those in which hirers do not care about their safety and security let alone providing them related gadgets. It is only female casual labourers that indicated that they work in conditions that expose them to conflict zones such as farms in communities, they account for 5 percent. Employers that give food and water to labourers do so that they may have energy to work harder. None of the respondents worked in situations where employers neither made sexual overtures to the females nor made sexual overtures to the males. None of them worked in



conditions where hirers provided transport to and from the worksite or its equivalent nor in conditions wherein they were subjected to stringent rules while at work (see Table 7.)

In the field it was observed that many casual labourers work daily at construction sites, and before they were hired for the day they would normally arrive at the road junction or the point they wait for callers by 7.00 am. Many of them have been in the casual labour market for about ten years or more. Some were once employed in the formal sector but abandoned

**TABLE 7: WORKING CONDITIONS OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN**

<b>Working Conditions</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Abuse, rebuke and shout on me</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>Joke, supply my needs (water, food, seat and resting room) while working</b>	70 (77.8%)	20 (22.2%)	90 (45.0%)
<b>Make sexual overtures to the females</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Make sexual overtures to the males</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Refuse sometime to pay the agreed fee at the end of the day</b>	30 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (15.0%)
<b>Provide transport to and from the work site or its equivalent</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Provide transport to and abandon us at the site</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>Expose us to conflict zones</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (100.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>Provide us with security and safety gadgets at site</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>Do not care about our security and safety</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>Subject you to stringent rules</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (10.0%)
<b>Give you heavy work leads</b>	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)	30 (15.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>200</b>

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

the job for the following reasons; retrenchment/downsizing, insufficient wages and intolerable working conditions. On the average the male casual labourers work for 7-12 hours, while the females may at times work for fewer hours. Many of them do not get work daily; many claimed that the regularity of the work they get is at the most thrice weekly, some even reported that most times there are no jobs for them to do. To ensure selection, they employ subtle methods such as calling out or just raising their tools but occasionally they go ahead to struggle for jobs in their desperation. Several reasons were indicated by respondents for joining casual labour such as; unemployment, to increase weekly income and to be sure of food for the day.

While at work, many of the casual labourers are not provided helmets, fire extinguishers, first aid items, rain coat/rain boot, reflective garment, sun hats, sunglasses etc. whether male or female, for their safety. Interestingly no one challenges hirers / employers of casual for the non provision of these items at sites/ work places. Rather the employers exploit them employing their services for such reason as; flexible hours of work, cheap labour, they work harder than their mates in the formal sector, they are paid according to work given, its temporary nature, absence of a viable and organized labour, competition amongst them to be hired, absence of strict labour laws to observe, no agreement signing required, easy to fire and availability of labourers. All these were proffered by the hirers during the focus group discussion session. The State government, Non Governmental Organizations on Women Affairs, Ministry of Labour, law enforcement agents, federal government agencies on women's right and union of casual labourers that should stand in the gap to stop the exploitation of these casual labourers especially the female ones are simply doing nothing.

Table 8 shows the gender structure of precariousness in the casual labour market of Owerri Metropolis. It can be seen that more men than women are concentrated in the jobs underlain with precariousness. Some male casual labourer respondents (15.0 percent) pointed out that their jobs are poorly paid without signed agreements/contracts (See Table 8). According to them there are no written agreement/contract prior to commencement of

work, as such there were no documents for them to sign. The most important aspects of the jobs were discussed verbally i.e. nature and mode of payment and the tasks to be performed. In the labour market what the employer buys is the worker's capacity to work, the exact quantity and quality of work activity that will be required cannot be detailed because of complexities and uncertainties in the production process (Elson, 1991a). In other words, Elson is saying that the employer even in signing agreements with employees is still saddled with the task of getting his money's worth i.e. labour from the employees after the agreement has been entered into. This would be too herculean for the hirers. Though at times women workers take advantage of the casualised nature of the job, there are however cases where women especially wives in family business have no wage labour agreement or contract with their employers and are not considered as waged employees by their husbands.

Employers of casual labourers are known for circumventing labour laws. Many of the employers interviewed declined willingness to sign agreements with casual labourers for the following reasons; the uncertainty of the future, difficulties with the drafting of such documents, legal implications of such documents, insufficient time for employees activity let alone wasting some proportion of it in such formalities and difficulties of adherence to such documents by both parties (themselves and even the labourer whose work is highly flexible).

Most of the casual labourers' time range of work is long and span 7am-4pm daily even on rainy days, this makes the wage earned poor and not commensurate when compared with the spent effort for the day. Many complained that the wages given were very meagre and would not sustain them. The casual labourers were paid on a daily basis a wage ranging from 1,000.00 to 3,500.00 Nigerian Naira (₦120 to \$1). In some cases wages were fixed especially for the skilled and unfixed mostly for the unskilled depending on the nature of the job. Employers however claim that there are no discriminatory differences in wages paid due to gender, but the female casual labourers are of the opinion that there are such factors as lack of skill, lack of experiences, lack of strength, relatively low status of women, reproductive roles, low decision making and no effective bargaining power that indirectly impede their

chances of being paid same wages as their male counterparts in some spheres of the labour market. All the respondents agreed that the females were the best gender suited for decent jobs, while the hirers rated them as more diligent than the males. Of those that work in violent situations, women constitute 50 percent (See table 8). Women who work in farms occasionally find themselves working on parcels of land being contested for by some individuals and before long are drawn into fights and mutilation by attackers with machetes and knives. Women are also found working in areas of toxic chemicals. Hundred percent of those who indicated working in such areas are women. They are often recruited to clear bushes densely packed with human excreta or weed farms that have odour of urine and are stenchy. Urine in high concentrations is acidic and contains urea in ample quantities which prolonged exposure to can have negative health implications. Such works as afore discussed are not in conditions of dignity and safety.

Night work and work on major roads are precarious jobs faced by men (See Table 8). Some of the casual labourers are recruited as night watchmen on daily basis in order to ensure security at project sites or people's homes. There are others hired to work in thick deserted bushes in order to clear them for road construction. Some male casual labourers respondents also indicated working on jobs with police arrests and detention, which depicts an absence of social security in the work place. In decent work rights are protected and there is freedom at work. Table 8 having revealed forms of precarity and areas of unsafe and insecure jobs, equally reveals that forty (40) percent of respondents (a significant few) do not work in precarious situations. In this study unlike Adkins (1995) which documented the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the labour market, sexual harassment is not significant in the casual labour market of Owerri Metropolis as revealed by Tables 7 and 8.

**TABLE 8: GENDER STRUCTURE OF PRECARIOUSNESS**

<b>Forms of Precarity/Areas of Unsafe and Insecure Jobs</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Night work</b>	30 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (15.0%)
<b>Underground</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>Poorly paid and without signed agreement/contracts</b>	30 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (15.0%)
<b>Constant firing without cause</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>In violent situations</b>	10 (50.0%)	10 (50.0%)	20 (10.0%)
<b>On major roads</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>In thick deserted bushes</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>With constant threats of rape and sexual harassment</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>With police arrests</b>	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (5.0%)
<b>In areas of toxic chemicals</b>	0 (0.0%)	10 (100.0%)	10 (50.0%)
<b>On environmentally unsafe sites</b>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<b>None of the above</b>	60 (75.0%)	20 (25.0%)	80 (40.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>200</b>

**Source: Author's Fieldwork**

A Chi-square model was used to test two other hypotheses for the study employing the data on Tables 7 and 8. The difference in the working conditions of male and female casual

labourers in the casual labour market was first investigated, using two way table (Table 7). Chi – Square calculated value = 21.109, D.F = 6, critical or tabulated value at 0.05 = 12.592. There is significant difference; this may be as a result of men working in seven (7) different conditions of work unlike the women that work in three (3) different conditions. Next, the difference in the level of precarity of jobs both male and female casual labourers are hired for was investigated, again using a two way table (Table 10). Chi-Square calculated value = 66.000, D.F = 6, critical or tabulated value at 0.05 = 12.592. There is significant difference. This may be due to fact that there are more men involved in precarious jobs/activities than women. Thus, while some literature portray women as ‘victims of discrimination’ which made them ‘subordinate and dependent’ results of this study indicates that there are few women casual labourers associated with jobs embedded in precariousness when compared with their male counterparts.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The study has presented and discussed the conditions under which casual labourers work in the informal labour market of Owerri Metropolis. This article has described the composition of the casual labour market in Owerri Metropolis along age and gender factors. The first conclusion one makes is that there is significant difference between age and gender among casual labourers. It has examined the nature of gender relations in the interface between labour demand (employers) and labour supply (workers) in casual labour. The study helps us to conclude that the relationship between employer and casual labourers generally is not gender biased as such it is not discriminatory. Though for the women in particular, the study has highlighted a universal tendency (as a result of women’s insufficiency of certain skills and low level of education) to engage them in cheap, lower paying and less dignifying subtypes of casual labour, even when they are more thorough and diligent than male casual labourers in those subtypes. It has shown that active women’s movement that can intervene for over - exploited women casual labourers are non – existent. From the study the

conditions of work and treatment by employers of employees are bad and not dignifying. The study further indicates that there is significant difference in the working conditions of male and female casual labourers. There is equally significant difference in the level of precarity of jobs both male and female casual labourers are hired for. Suggested criteria for fixing favourable working conditions are scientific or medical evidence, health and safety requirements, social and cultural patterns, and economic consideration. This study is a digression from Appleton et al's (1990) study in that the study unlike theirs was intended to help us see how gender comes to play a role in the functioning of the casual labour market in Owerri Metropolis. This study not only attempted to look at the supply side (the age and gender characteristics of casual labour), the demand side (the characteristics of employers/hirers of casual labourers), but also at some of the structural characteristics of labour markets (labour agreements and labour processes). It does not attempt to address aspects and measures of human capital especially endowments of education. Women's labour market experience differs from men's labour market experience in casual labour. There is still need for women casual labourers to have a negotiated wage, reasonable working hours, favourable working conditions, respectable treatment, acknowledgement of the dignity of their labour, specific legal protection, membership in an effective casual worker organisation and effective bargaining power. Many believe that the making of labour laws applicable to casual labourers (both males and females) will make unfavourable working conditions such as one with verbal abuses, that lacks safety and security that has health risks, that has heavy physical/mental strain and last for long hours to stop. To satisfy casual labourer's (especially the females) quest for better socio-economic prospects they should be well remunerated and should have signed agreements/contracts entered into. Programmes to sensitise, educate and orient both male and female casual labourers as well as their employers should be instituted for better economic growth and efficient casual labour market. Unionisation and networking for better conditions should be encouraged.



Policy makers and development planners should not ignore the labour practices in the informal labour market; as such they should be partners in its efficient construction and functioning. Policy makers should design laws and regulations that offer casual labourers some measure of protection from exploitation. To reduce less human capital, women should be encouraged to attain a high level of education and acquire technical skills. Government through its agencies should intervene by mainstreaming gender in all its labour policies, and educate employers and casual labourers on labour standards, declarations and resolutions through workshops and seminar. The male and female casual labourers as partners should spearhead the solution to problems of gender segregation that keeps women in few subtypes of casual labour. Women NGOs should actively participate and ensure those women workers' rights are given special priority and should create programmes for the enhancement of female casual labourers. Legislations for promotion of equality at work place should be made by the State and National Assembly members. International conventions to which Nigeria is a party to should be domesticated and implemented.

To reduce earnings gap, the important question remaining for policy-makers is the potential of demand for women in certain subtypes of casual labour. This will precipitate changes in the quality and quantities of female casual labourers supplied and determine whether the expected changes will be associated with an enhanced subtype distribution of casual labour in the informal labour market of Owerri Metropolis. Though this study helps us to establish linkages between the theoretical orientation of the study and the empirical findings, more needs to be done. There is need for further research into more specific sources of intersections of age inequities and gender segregation of subtype in the casual labour market. Additionally studies can begin to detail how patriarchy can throw up new obstacles for women and men in the casual labour market, especially in a world where globalisation is supposed to check labour which is gendered and informed by class and age. These anticipated further studies will usher in the needed rapid gains from female labour force participation in casual labour market of Owerri.

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