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## Assessment of Socio-Economic Livelihood Conditions and Coping Strategies of Employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, amidst Industrial Strike Action

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### Abstract

*Over the past few years, there have been series of industrial strike actions embarked by the union of employees across Nigerian tertiary institutions. Such strike actions have adverse effects on the socio-economic livelihoods of the employees, yet there have been dearth of empirical researches on the socio-economic livelihood conditions, as well as the coping strategies of the employees amidst the strike action. This study was positioned to fill these gaps in empirical research by investigating the socio-economic livelihood conditions and coping strategies of employees in federal public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, using Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State as a point of reference, amidst the 2022 industrial strike action embarked by the employees. Data were collected from 250 academic and non-academic employees of the institution, who participated in the study through a web-based data collection procedure. Data collected were processed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package, and data processed were analysed descriptively using frequency count and simple percentage. Findings of the study revealed that the respondents described their socio-economic livelihood conditions within the period of the industrial strike action as difficult. The study also revealed that they coped with such difficulties using different coping strategies including resort to agricultural activities, reduction in the number of meals consumed within the household, cutting down on household utilities, obtaining loans from cooperative organisations, and purchase of food items on credit, among other latent coping strategies. The study therefore recommended the need for civil organisations and all stakeholders in the country, including the media, to mount serious pressures on the federal government, in order to come to renegotiate on the workable terms of agreement with the union of employees within the public tertiary institutions.*

**Keywords:** *Assessment, coping strategies, employees, livelihood, socio-economic, strike*

## Introduction

Over the past few years, there have been series of industrial strike actions embarked by the union of employees across Nigerian tertiary institutions. Issues associated with the strike actions have often been linked to poor employee welfare, poor conditions of service, poor and erratic funding, weak institutional autonomy, as well as economic and political factors (Ogbette, Eke & Ori, 2017). For the two decades, industrial strike actions in the Nigerian Universities have seemed to be a tradition which has sequentially occurred almost on annual basis.

However, the recent strike action embarked by the different employees' unions within the Federal Universities including both the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) has been a more serious one, which has lasted for over four months within the period of this study, without any concrete agreement between the Federal government and the employees unions. To exacerbate the whole situation, the Federal government of Nigeria gave a 'no work, no pay' condition – which implies that amidst the strike actions, the striking employees are left without any pay. It is worthy of note that employees within the government institutions including Universities employee, depend largely on their wages for the socio-economic livelihood and sustenance of their families and once this wage become restricted, their socio-economic livelihood becomes severely affected. This implies that they have to cope with the situation using alternative coping strategies.

Livelihood coping strategy refers to mechanisms adopted by individuals in order to adjust through a difficult or stressful situation affecting their sustainable livelihood. Within the extant literature, livelihood coping strategy types have been conceptualised differently by scholars. For instance, Austenfeld and Stanton (2004) identified three dimensions of coping strategies including: task-oriented coping which is characterized by mechanism by which individuals attempt to reconceptualise or find solutions to their adversities (e.g., action planning, problem solving, positive reappraisal), emotion-oriented coping strategy which is characterized by mechanisms by which people try to regulate the negative emotionality associated with a perceived adversities, by engaging in conscious activities related to affect regulation (e.g., emotional disclosure, seeking social-emotional support and avoidance-oriented coping strategy which is characterized by activities and/or cognitive strategies used in a deliberate attempt to disengage from difficult situations (e.g., wishful thinking, seeking distractions, substance use (Endler, Parker & Butcher, 1993).

Some other scholars such as Gúnther and Harttgen (2009) equally highlighted two forms of coping strategies including: ex-ante and ex-post strategies. According to the scholars, the ex-ante strategies are protective risk-management actions adopted by households before an eventual adverse situation. Such coping strategies may include some form of self-insurance like precautionary savings and assets accumulation, etc. The ex-post coping strategies on the other hand refers to action taken by a household to mitigate the effects of an adverse situation, including strategies like reduction in household expenses, diversifying sources of household income and other measures that are taken within a short-term to buffer the effects of an adverse event (Aquiar & Hurst, 2005).

Be that as it may, currently, there seems to be dearth of research into the socio-economic livelihood situation of striking employees, as well as their socio-economic livelihood coping strategies within the context of the lingering industrial strike actions in Nigeria. Thus, how employees cope with the precarious situation of ‘no work, no pay’ enforced by the Federal government of Nigeria in the 2022 strike actions embarked by employees, remains unclear and requires urgent empirical research into it; as such could help expand the body of knowledge on coping strategies of University employees during strike periods, as well as provide a research direction into the socio-economic livelihood difficulties faced by employees within this period. In order to explore this topic in details, this study was positioned to achieve the following aims:

1. To assess the perceived socio-economic livelihood conditions of public Universities employees amidst industrial strike actions.
2. To examine the socio-economic livelihood coping strategies adopted by public Universities employees amidst industrial strike action.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The development of resilience theory could be attributed to many researchers, but the notable contributors to the theory include Norman Garnezy and Masten Tellegen. Resilience theory is one of the theories applicable to provide explanation about how people cope with adversity situations. According to Masten and Obradovic (2006), resilience theory is the conceptual framework for understanding how some individuals can bounce back in life after experiencing an adverse situation in a strength-focused approach. This is based on the fact that adversities and precarious life challenges are inevitable realities of human existence. As such, when such situations occur, resilience is required in order to pull through from such difficult situations. The theory argues that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how people deal or manage it. In other words, when people face adversity situations or misfortunes that

could trigger frustration, resilience become a major buffer that helps them cope effectively with the situation.

According to Ledesma (2014, p.1), resilience refers to “the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration and misfortune”. Some scholars have argued that resilience is not a personality trait, rather a dynamic process or system which people could adapt successfully to threats and adversities in life (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, Yehuda, 2006). It is a socio-psychological mechanism that helps people survive, recover or even thrive amidst precarious situations that affects that socio-economic livelihood.

Within the context of the present theme under discourse, it goes to argue that adversity situation for University employees arises particularly when they are deprived access to their wages. This is considering the fact that a majority of them depend largely on their wages for socio-economic livelihood sustainability, and when such is no more forth coming expectedly, there is bound to be serious strain on their socio-economic livelihoods, which could result to depression, anxiety, frustration and poor socio-economic adjustment. Hence, in such difficult situation, only individuals who develop high level of resilience would be able to cope effectively with the situation. Resilience in the context of University employees relates to their ability to withstand their current hardship caused by the industrial strike action, using various coping strategies. Thus, the resilience theory hypothesises a relationship between coping strategy and the perceived socio-economic livelihood conditions of employees within public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, amidst industrial strike action.

## **Methods**

This study was conducted among academic and non-academic staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The institution is one of the federally owned public tertiary institutions within the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. According to Ihudiebube-Splendor & Chikeme (2020), the descriptive cross-sectional survey design refers to that which provides data for describing the status or characteristics of a phenomena or relationship among phenomena, at a specific point in time. This research design was also considered appropriate for this study in due its flexibility in helping gather data at a specific point in time for a defined population. A sample of 250 respondents participated in the study through an online-survey

approach. Considering the fact that this study was conducted within the strike period, the researcher considered online-survey approach more flexible in order to reach the respondents and to manage the difficulty associated with physical access to the respondents. The online-survey approach involved the use of Google Form survey administration software package in designing questionnaire measuring ‘employees’ coping strategies amidst industrial strike action’. With regards to the data collection procedure, the researcher reached out to some members of the Universities employees who gave the researcher information about different social media platforms for both the academic staff and non-academic staff of the selected universities. The social media platforms used included Whatsapp and Telegram. The Administrators of the social media platforms were contacted and explained the objective of the research. After obtaining the cooperation of the groups’ administrators, the link to the web-based questionnaire forwarded to the groups with the help of the groups’ administrators who assisted in explaining the essence of the survey to the respondents, and to assure them the authenticity of the web link. Participation to the survey was made voluntary since there was no feasible criterion for probabilistic selection of the respondents. A timeline of two weeks was set after which any other entry was discarded. Thus, only data entries or responses obtained within the set timeline were used for data analysis.

Data collected were coded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package version 21, which was used in processing all the relevant statistical data. Thereafter, the processed data were analysed using descriptive statistics involving frequency count and percentages and data analysed were presented in tables and charts.

## Findings

**Table 1**

*Summary of Data Analysis on Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	120	48.0
Female	130	52.0
Total	250	100.0
<b>Age Categories</b>		
22 - 29 Years	22	8.8
30 - 39 Years	73	29.2
40 - 49 Years	99	39.6
50 - 59 Years	43	17.2
60 - 69 Years	13	5.2
Total	250	100.0
<b>Job Designation</b>		
Academic Staff	97	38.8
Non-Academic Staff	153	61.2
Total	250	100.0
<b>Employees' Ranks</b>		
Junior Staff	74	29.6
Intermediate	109	43.6
Senior	67	26.8
Total	250	100.0
<b>Household Size</b>		
< 5	64	25.6
6 - 10	140	56.0
> 10	46	18.4
Total	250	100.0

Table 1 contains findings of data analysis in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. From the gender dimension, data analysis showed that slightly higher proportion (52.0%) of female employees participated in the study compared to slightly lower proportion (48.0%) of males. The respondents aged between the minimum ages of 22 years to the maximum age of 69 years, with those aged between 40 – 49 years constituting the highest proportion (39.6%) of the respondents within the sample. This implies that the majority of employees in the public Universities are within the mid-adult ages. Data analysis equally showed that slightly more than half proportion (61.2%) of respondents was non-academic staff as compared to slightly lower proportion (38.8%) of them who was academic staff. With

regards to the respondents' ranks, the majority (43.6%) were within the intermediate level, about a quarter proportion (29.6%) of them were junior staff, while the least proportion (26.8%) of them were at the senior level. In terms of household size, the majority (56.0%) of the respondents had a medium household size of 6 – 10 people.

### Perception of Socio-economic livelihood condition amidst Strike Action

The respondents were obliged to describe their perceptions regarding their socio-economic livelihood conditions within the period of the industrial strike action, using six distinct questionnaire items. The analysis conducted on their responses was presented in table 2.

**Table 2**

*Respondents' Perception about Socio-economic Livelihood amidst Strike action*

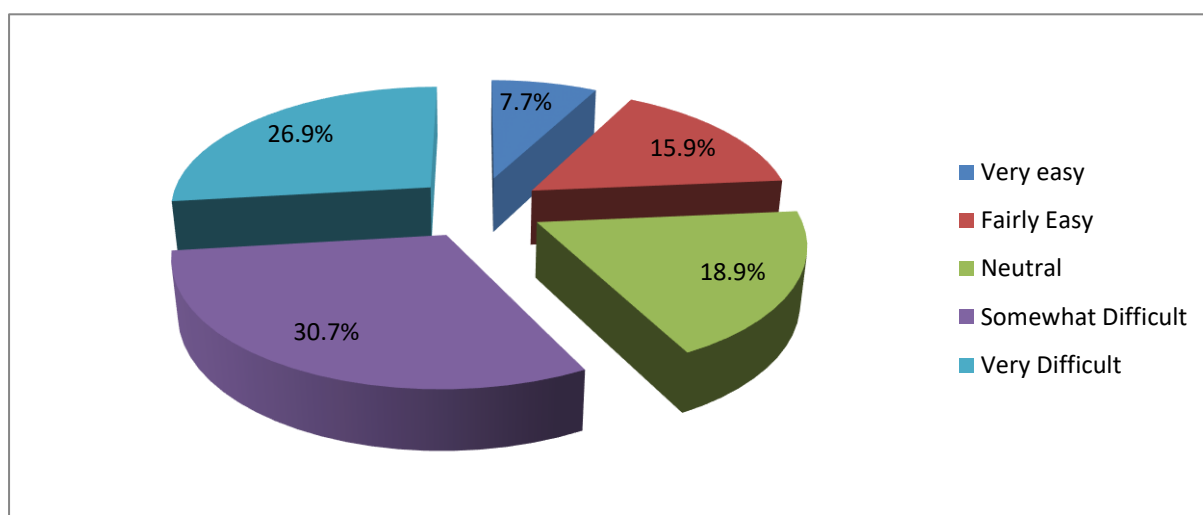
Item Description	Very easy	Fairly Easy	Neutral	Somewhat Difficult	Very Difficult	Total
Have access to Water	25 10.0%	59 23.6%	120 48.0%	34 13.6%	12 4.8%	250 100.0%
Pay electricity bills	29 11.6%	43 17.2%	20 8.0%	67 26.8%	91 36.4%	250 100.0%
Have access to adequate food	13 5.2%	48 19.2%	31 12.4%	69 27.6%	89 35.64%	250 100.0%
Have access to Nutritional	18 7.2%	21 8.4%	68 27.2%	95 38.0%	48 19.2%	250 100.0%
Pay for house rent	8 3.2%	26 10.4%	25 10.0%	99 39.6%	92 36.8%	250 100.0%
Pay other levies	23 9.2%	41 16.4%	19 7.6%	76 30.4%	91 36.4%	250 100.0%

Table 2 showed the item-by-item analysis of respondents' perception about their socio-economic livelihood conditions amidst the strike action embarked by the Universities employees in 2022. In the first item, close to half (48.0%) of the respondents were neutral with regards to the perception of how easy it was to have access to water needed by their households. In terms of payment for electricity bills, the largest proportion (36.4%) of them perceived it as very difficult within the strike period. This could be due to low finance associated with 'no work, no pay' policy of the federal government against the striking University employees. With respect to access to adequate food required to sustain their households, the majority (35.6%)



of the respondents considered it as ‘somewhat difficult’ to obtain. A significant proportion (38.0%) of the respondents equally averred that access to nutritional assets was somewhat difficult for them and their households. In terms of payment of rents, the highest proportion (39.6%) of the respondents considered it as somewhat difficult to handle within strike period. On the last item, which was related to payment of other levies, the highest proportion (36.4%) of the respondents considered it very difficult to handle. What was evident in the above findings was the fact that the respondents showed negative perception about their socio-economic livelihood conditions amidst the 2022 strike action embarked by employees of Nigerian public Universities.

Figure 1 shows the descriptive summary of respondents’ perception about their socio-economic livelihood conditions amidst the 2022 strike action by the employees of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.



**Fig. 1.** Summary of Respondents’ Perception about their Socio-economic livelihood Conditions amidst industrial strike action

Data contained in figure 1 showed that in the overall analysis, the majority (30.7%) of the respondents perceived their socio-economic livelihood conditions during the strike period as ‘somewhat difficult’. This was equally followed by 26.9% of them who perceived it as ‘very difficult’. These findings imply that the socio-economic livelihood conditions of the public Universities employees were rather difficult for them. This may be more difficult considering the high inflation rate of products and services in the Nigerian market within the period of the strike action. As such, their situation may have been compounded by these realities and challenges on the socio-economic livelihood of people in Nigeria. Consequently, it was

considered necessary to examine the coping strategies adopted by the respondents to cope with the challenges they faced within the strike period.

### Socio-economic Livelihood Coping Strategies amidst Strike Actions

**Table 3**

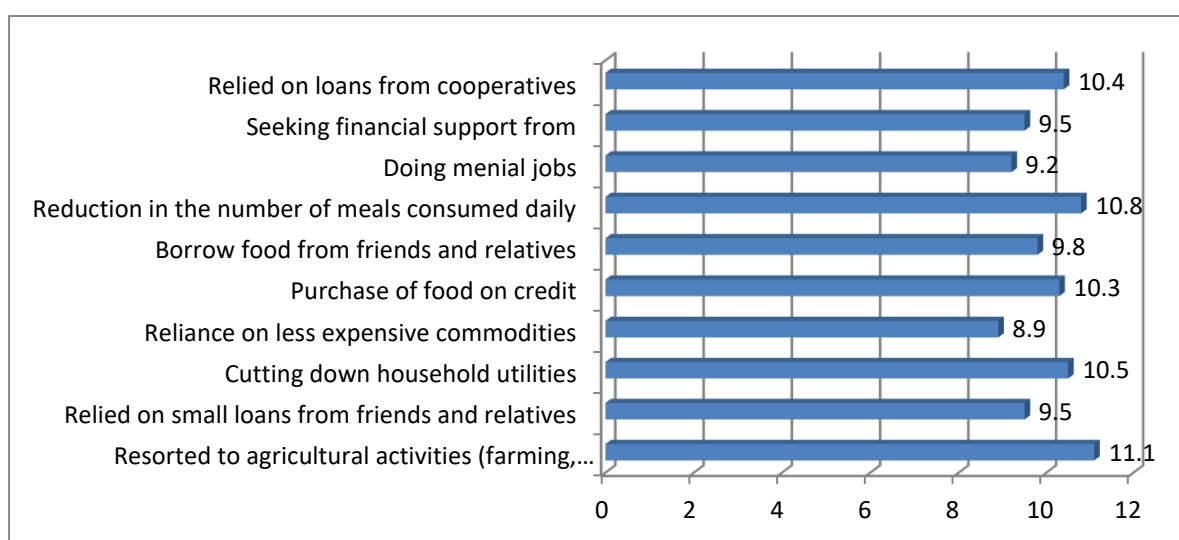
*Respondents Socio-economic Coping Strategies during long strike action*

<b>Coping Strategies</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
– Resorted to agricultural activities (farming, livestock, piggery, fishing etc)	151 60.4%	99 39.6%	250 100.0%
– Relied on small loans from friends and relatives	129 51.6%	121 48.4%	250 100.0%
– Cutting down household utilities	144 57.6%	106 42.4%	250 100.0%
– Borrow food from friends and relatives	121 48.4%	129 51.6%	250 100.0%
– Purchase of food on credit	141 56.4%	109 43.6%	250 100.0%
– Reliance on less expensive commodities	134 53.6%	116 46.4%	250 100.0%
– Reduction in the number of meals consumed daily	147 58.8%	103 41.2%	250 100.0%
– Doing menial jobs	126 50.4%	124 49.6%	250 100.0%
– Seeking financial support from friends	130 52.0%	120 48.0%	250 100.0%
– Relied on loans from cooperatives	142 56.8%	108 43.2%	250 100.0%

Item by item analysis as contained in table 2 showed that a majority (60.4%) of the respondents resorted to agricultural activities. Slightly above half proportion (51.6%) of the respondents relied on small loans from friends and relatives. More than half proportion (57.6%) of the respondents indicated that they had to cut down some household utilities such as cable, power etc. Only 48.4% of the respondents borrowed food from friends and relatives. A greater proportion (56.4%) of the respondents equally purchased food items on credit and another significant proportion (53.6%) of the respondents relied on less expensive commodities. A

greater proportion (58.8%) of the respondents equally indicated that they had to cope with the situation by reducing the number of meals consumed daily within their households. Half of the respondents equally indicated that they got involved in menial jobs to sustain their households during the strike period. Slightly more than half of the respondents equally indicated that they sought financial support from friends and lastly, the greater proportion (56.8%) of the respondents had to rely of loans from their cooperative organisations.

Figure 1 summarises the data on the socio-economic livelihood coping strategies adopted by the public University employees within the period of the 2022 strike action.



**Fig. 2.** Summary of Responses on Socio-economic Livelihood Coping Strategies amidst Strike Action

As seen in figure 1, the most viable socio-economic livelihood coping mechanism adopted by the highest proportion (11.1%) of the respondents within the period of the 2022 strike action was that of resort to agricultural activities. 10.8% of them had to cope through reduction in the number of meals consumed daily within their households. 10.5% of them had to cut down household utilities, 10.4% of them had to rely mostly on loans from their cooperative organisations, while 10.3% of them purchased food on credit, among other coping strategies adopted.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has been able to explore the perceived socio-economic conditions and coping strategies of employees within the selected public Universities in the Southeast Nigeria, within the context of the protracted industrial action embarked by the union of employees within the

public tertiary institutions at the time of this study. This study concludes by highlighting that the resuscitation and sustainability of education in Nigeria cannot augur well without the conditions and welfare of the employees being prioritised by the federal government. A majority of the University employees have lost confidence in the educational system and have venture into other areas of endeavour in order to cope with their socio-economic livelihood demands. This system has an impending consequence over the sustainability of quality educational outputs within the public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is so considering the view that employees of public tertiary institutions are supposed to concentrate on the productivity of the educational institution through researches and professional development programmes rather than venturing into other livelihood endeavours.

However, such actions have been necessitated by the question to survive the strain placed on them by the poor work situation in which they find themselves. Hence, to nip this situation in the bud, all hands must be on deck to promote the interests of the Universities employees to the federal government for immediate actions. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations were articulated:

1. There is the need for civil organisations and all stakeholders in the country, including the media, to mount serious pressures on the federal government, in order to come to renegotiate on the workable terms of agreement with the union of employees.
2. There is the need for the nation's political structure to be reformed in order to infuse the right leaders who understand the importance of education to national development. This would help to ensure that issues triggering strike actions within the public tertiary institutions in Nigeria are resolved once and for all.
3. There is also the need for the union of employees within public tertiary institutions to start up with contingency funds which could be used to assist the union members financially in times of crisis such as during strike action, as well as other adverse events that requires welfare obligations for the employees.

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