

The Impact of Industrial Disharmony amongst Healthcare Professionals in Nigerian Healthcare Sector

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Abstract

Review Article

Industrial disharmony is a state of unrest, a situation where there is an inability among the participating parties to reach a peaceful agreement as it affects job rules and conditions of work. It presents itself as disputes between employers and employees, or between trade unions and employer organizations. Certain factors can be attributed to causing industrial disharmony, these include; inter professional rivalry amongst workforce, perception of preferential and favoured treatment to one group over another, inefficient and ineffective management style strained relationship between the management and labor unions. Highlight were made of the impact of industrial disharmony on the Nigerian healthcare sector, aimed to enlighten policymakers that policies that enhance harmony in the health sector are required, and if they are already in place, then their full implementation is urgently required. Three thematic areas of interest in the discourse on industrial disharmony amongst healthcare professionals in Nigeria were expatiated to include; industrial harmony; employees' productivity and job satisfaction and last but not the least clients' satisfaction of service delivery. The numerous negative impact of the ongoing disharmony within the Nigerian Healthcare sector as typified by the different professional associations and unions, whom hardly agree on modes of remuneration, career recognition and headship appointments in the healthcare institutions, has continuously made the health care indices of the country to be at abysmally low ratings. The way forward would be to canvass for the appointment of Health administrators with expertise in Health Economics and Administration to oversee the smooth and unbiased running of public health institutions in Nigeria. Also, all healthcare professionals should be given equal and fair recognition based on the value additions they provide to efficient and effective patient management. Lastly, the realisation by all healthcare professionals that the patients' satisfaction should be taken as the most important interest to be defended by all professionals and staff working in the healthcare sector.

Keywords: Industrial Disharmony, Healthcare Professionals, Nigeria.

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BACKGROUND

Industrial harmony refers to a state of peace in the organization, which can be assessed in terms of the absence of strikes and distrust among working groups, peaceful relationship between the management of the organization and the unions, and also a positive perception by employees of their contribution as participants within the organization [1]. It promotes a feeling of contentment, and as a result, workers are encouraged to give their best. Industrial disharmony, on the other hand, is a state of unrest, a situation where there is an inability among the participating parties to reach a peaceful agreement as it affects job rules and conditions of work. It presents itself as disputes between employers and employees, or between trade unions and employer organizations. Certain factors can be attributed to causing industrial disharmony, these include; inter professional rivalry amongst workforce,

perception of preferential and favoured treatment to one group over another inefficient and ineffective management style strained relationship between the management and labor unions [2].

The Nigerian healthcare system just like that of any other country serves as the backbone of its growth and development [3], but it has suffered greatly from numerous crises [4] which is predominantly in the form of worker strikes. Just like in any organization, whether private or government-owned, the need for a peaceful and stable working environment cannot be overemphasized. Sadly, the Nigerian healthcare sector has been weakened by conflict, acrimony, grievances, and apprehension [5].

Industrial harmony is a major ingredient that promotes productivity and goal attainment in an

institution [6]. In any situation where conflict is said to exist between employee groups, distrust is sure to set in, this hinders the employees' performance and commitment and thus generally influencing the organizational output [7]. No institution can function without harmony. When industrial disharmony is evident job satisfaction will be poor, this will in turn, affect client satisfaction eventually leading to low productivity. Industrial disharmony can be attributed to; poor motivation and remuneration, inequitable and unstable healthcare financing, poor management of human resources, decreased government spending on healthcare, inadequate healthcare access [3, 8].

The healthcare system in any setting is an open system consisting of different professionals each playing a specific role in the operational existence of any health organization and the entire health sector [9], and is said to be the backbone of growth and development [3]. The Nigerian healthcare system has faced a lot of crises and problems over time and much of the failure has been attributed to the retardation of its growth and development. These include; inadequate health facilities and structures, poor motivation and remuneration, inequitable and unsustainable healthcare financing, poor management of human resources, skewed economic and political relations, decreased government spending on healthcare, absence of an integrated system for prevention, inadequate healthcare access, disputes between professionals and professional unions in the health sector, industrial unrest and incessant strike actions [3, 8, 9].

This article focused on highlighting the impact of industrial disharmony on the Nigerian healthcare sector, it aimed to enlighten policymakers that policies that enhance harmony in the health sector are required, and if they are already in place, then their full implementation is urgently required.

The following are the three thematic areas of interest in the discourse on industrial disharmony amongst healthcare professionals in Nigeria:

1. Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony is a situation where the employees and management of an organization willingly cooperate for the corporate objectives of the organization (10). It also refers to the state of peace in the organization, which can be assessed in terms of the absence of strikes and distrust among working groups, peaceful relationship between the management of the organization and the unions, and also a positive perception by employees of their contribution as participants within the organization [1].

It is very important to know that industrial harmony does not mean the absence of conflict and misunderstanding among the healthcare professionals, it also doesn't show a state where all agreements and

decisions are unified [9]. Industrial disharmony often arises as a result of barriers in communication between the management and staff of an institution, and in the case of the Nigerian healthcare sector, between the various professional unions and the government, or amongst healthcare professional unions. In a situation where there exists conflict between employee unions, distrust is sure to be evident, and this, in turn, hinders the performance and commitment to the duty of the employees, thus negatively influencing the output of the organization [7].

2. Employees' Productivity and Job Satisfaction

Productivity is a measure of performance, which encompasses both effectiveness and efficiency [11]. There is no establishment that has been known to function optimally with low employee productivity. The employees are pivotal to the success of any establishment, healthcare inclusive and the level of their productivity is evident from the success of such establishment. Organizations that are performing at the highest level have a culture that promotes employee participation. Employees are more interested in being involved in productive activities, and this eventually leads to higher employee performance [12]. Job satisfaction is simply positive and happy which results from the assessment of a person's job or job experience [13]. Employee job satisfaction leads to increased productivity by increasing motivation and working capabilities at the moment of implementation [14].

In a setting where there is a positive atmosphere, the staffs become more productive and thus get more satisfaction from the work they do. However, on the other hand, if the positive atmosphere is compromised, they do not give their best, which then affects productivity, leading to poor job satisfaction.

3. Clients' Satisfaction of Service Delivery

In every functional healthcare system, one of the major parameters to measure the quality of services provided is to assess the level of satisfaction the client gets from the services delivered. In recent times, countries and institutions, especially in developing countries, have shown increasing interest in assessing the quality of healthcare provided [15]. Assessment of client satisfaction involves asking the consumer of the service not about the status of their health or treatment or care but the level of satisfaction they derive from the services that have been delivered [16]. Clients' satisfaction is commonly done as surveys [17].

Different factors such as staff attitude, cost of care, length of hospital stay and medical doctor communication have been recognized to influence patients' satisfaction [18- 20]. Clients' satisfaction has been identified as a very important component in the evaluation of the quality of healthcare [21, 22]. Therefore, its evaluation is an important input to better the quality of the healthcare system and also gives an

opportunity for close monitoring and evaluation from the perspective of a customer which in turn gives feedback for the healthcare providers and policymakers [23]. Studies have shown that client satisfaction with healthcare services in Africa is one of the most important factors that determine the utilization of services [24-26].

Need for Industrial Harmony within the Nigerian Healthcare Sector

The Nigerian healthcare professionals include Pharmacists, Nurses, Physicians/Medical Doctors, Medical Laboratory Scientists, Physiotherapists, Dietitians, Optometrists, Radiologists, Medical Health Record officers etc.

These healthcare professionals belong to different professional associations and unions that protect their members' welfare and career interests. They include but not limited to these examples; the Association of Hospital and Administrative Pharmacists of Nigeria (AHAPN), Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Medical and Dental Consultants Association of Nigeria (MDCAN), Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) which comprises of the five Labour/Trade Unions in the healthcare sector; National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM), Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN), Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals and Research Institutes, (SSAUTHRAI), National Union of Allied Health Professionals (NUAHP) and Non Academic Staff Union (NASU). Other bodies are the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) and the Assembly of Healthcare Professional Associations (AHPA) which is an umbrella body for all registered professional associations.

It is unfortunate that the polarisation of the supposedly united healthcare team into the above mentioned different groups has led to inter professional rivalry occasioned with territorial advancing of self-interests as against the collective good of all healthcare team members. It is not surprising therefore to witness industrial unrest in form of protracted long periods of strikes embarked upon by either the JOHESU members and affiliates whom are predominantly non-physicians or the NARD members whom are physicians undergoing specialty trainings, in a seeming competitive matter to demonstrate who has the wherewithal to bring the Nigerian healthcare sector to its knees. All these incessant disruption of services are at very high cost to the lives of patients and material resources lost by the public service.

The numerous negative impact of the ongoing disharmony within the Nigerian Healthcare sector as typified by the different professional associations and unions, whom hardly agree on modes of remuneration, career recognition and headship appointments in the

healthcare institutions, has continuously made the Health care indices of the country to be at abysmally low ratings.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, it is imperative to bring to the attention of relevant policymakers and all stakeholders in the Nigerian health sector, the negative effect industrial disharmony had brought on the Nigerian healthcare system and citizens that utilize such public health institutions. Also, there is the need to further reemphasize that the health sector is in dire need of policies that promote industrial harmony and encourages unity and commitment on the part of the employees, and if such policies are already in place, then their full implementation is required. For passionate health researchers, the subject matter of discourse stresses that more needs to be done in ensuring that studies are carried out on relevant issues facing the Nigerian healthcare sector, and how they can be improved.

The way forward would be to canvass for the appointment of Health administrators with expertise in Health Economics and Administration to oversee the smooth and unbiased running of public health institutions in Nigeria. Also, all healthcare professionals should be given equal and fair recognition based on the value additions they provide to efficient and effective patient management. Lastly, the realisation by all healthcare professionals that the patients' satisfaction should be taken as the most important interest to be defended by all professionals and staff working in the healthcare sector.

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