Non-Standard Work and Quality of Work Life in the Informal Sector: A Conceptual Model of Occupational Stress and Work Climate

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Abstract

This paper explores the linkages of non-standard work (NSW), occupational stress (OCS), work climate (WC) and quality of work life (QWL) in the informal sector of emerging economies. The process of systematic literature review consisted of three stages: identification, screening and eligibility. Searches were conducted on the Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and ResearchGate databases, covering publications in the English language between 2020 and 2026 in the form of Book chapters and journal articles. For the conceptual model development, 25 articles were synthesised. Findings: The empirical evidence supports that, in general, non-standard work negatively affects QWL, and OCS is a mechanism of mediation, while the WC is a moderating factor. There are, however, significant gaps: very limited research has explored such relationships in informal sector settings, and none of the research has explicitly tested occupational stress as a mediator and WC as a moderator between NSW and QWL in informal sectors of emerging economies. Therefore, policy interventions should target stress reduction and WC improvement for informal sector workers. The study recommends that portable benefits and extended social protection floors are provided for non-standard workers.

Keywords: Informal Sector, Non-Standard Work, Occupational Stress, Quality of Work Life, Work Climate

Introduction

The term "quality of work life" (QWL) describes the general experience of work exhibited by employees, encompassing aspects beyond pay or job titles, including overall well-being, job security, satisfaction, dignity, and the conditions in which work is carried out (Walton, 1973; Sirgy et al., 2001). The nature of work arrangements, employment security, workload, interpersonal relationships, autonomy, and the work environment influence QWL in the informal sector (Reddy, 2019). Irregular schedules, low income predictability, role duplication, and unclear boundaries between jobs and self-employment characterise non-standard employment in the informal sector, directly affecting employees' instability, security, and overall satisfaction (Kalleberg, 2009).

As a result, QWL in the informal sector is not only a personalised outcome but also a consequence of the relationship between employment structures, working conditions, and organisational practices. However, the adoption of non-standard work (NSW) raises concerns about employees' QWL. Literature indicates that the NSW-QWL relationship is complex and often adverse. For instance, Ray et al. (2017) found that employees in contingent or non-standard arrangements experienced more stress and had lower health-related QWL than standard workers. This study assumes that occupational stress (OCS) is an important mediating variable in this association, drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The hypothesis is that the negative relationship between NSW and QWL is indirect, via increased OCS. Work climate (WC) is also key to understanding this dynamic. Positive WC can contribute to increased job satisfaction, decreased perceived stress, and increased well-being (Castillo-López & Domínguez, 2024), while unfavourable climate can exacerbate stressors and reduce QWL. Thus, WC may moderate the NSW-QWL relationship.

NSW arrangements such as part-time, temporary, triangular, self-employment, and gig jobs have significantly increased globally, with this trend growing substantially in emerging economies like Nigeria, from 16.3% in 2010 to 25.4% in 2023 (Oseni et al., 2025). While these arrangements offer flexibility and cost savings for employers, they often come at the expense of employee well-being, characterised by job insecurity, limited benefits, irregular hours, and income volatility. The informal sector, which accounts for about 96.9% of businesses and 46.32% of GDP in Nigeria (PwC, 2024), is particularly vulnerable, operating with minimal regulatory oversight, limited social protection, and weak enforcement of labour standards. Symptoms of limited job satisfaction, job insecurity, and physical and mental stress are widespread, reflecting declining QWL (Mukhlis et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problem

However, the specific effects of NSW on QWL among workers in the informal sector of emerging economies remain underexplored. The psychological mechanisms through which this relationship operates are unclear, and the contextual conditions that may aggravate or alleviate these effects are not well researched. This lack of knowledge impedes the development of evidence-based human resource practices and policy frameworks that would protect worker well-being while accommodating the flexibility needs of informal enterprises. Although the applicability of OCS and WC to the conceptualisation of QWL is evident, research has rarely investigated these two variables as mediating and moderating factors between NSW and QWL, especially in the context of the informal sector in emerging economies.

The bulk of previous literature has focused on formal or large organisations in developed economies (Kalleberg, 2009), leaving a significant gap regarding informal, micro-enterprise-based organisations in developing economic contexts. Specifically, three interrelated gaps exist: first, a lack of empirical data on the direct relationship between NSW and QWL among informal sector workers in emerging economies; second, a lack of explanatory data on the mediating role of OCS; and third, a lack of knowledge about how WC moderates these dynamics within informal work settings. This conceptual paper addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated model that positions OCS as a mediator and WC as a moderator in the NSW-QWL relationship within the informal sector of emerging economies such as Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This conceptual paper aims to:

i. Develop a conceptual model that integrates the relationships among NSW, OCS, WC, and QWL in the

informal sector.

ii. Propose that OCS mediates the relationship between NSW and QWL.

iii. Propose that WC moderates the relationship between NSW and QWL.

iv. Provide a theoretical foundation for empirical investigation of these relationships in the informal sector of emerging economies.

v. Offer policy and practical recommendations for promoting decent work and QWL in the informal sector.

The next section presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on NSW, QWL, OCS, and WC, with particular attention to the informal sector context of emerging economies, leading to the development of the conceptual framework and hypotheses. The subsequent section describes the proposed conceptual model, including the mediating and moderating pathways. Finally, the paper discusses the theoretical and practical implications and offers conclusions and recommendations for future empirical research and policy development.

Literature Review

Non-standard Work (NSW)

Non-standard work deviates from full-time, permanent employment as defined by the ILO (2016). It includes temporary, triangular, self-employment, and part-time arrangements that emerged in response to globalisation, economic liberalisation, and organisational restructuring aimed at flexibility and cost-efficiency (Kalleberg, 2009). The impact of temporary and contract work on workers' performance, job security and organisational relations is significant. found that employee initiative and managerial gatekeeping influence how individualised work deals are negotiated in Nigeria, highlighting the role of power dynamics and organisational culture in enabling flexibility (Ayeni et al., 2023).

Part-time job means fewer hours than a full-time job and generally has fewer full benefits and protections (ILO, 2016). Part-time work has been expanding in OECD member countries, as reflected in higher rates of part-time employment among women, and in work-life balance policies, but sometimes at less favourable wages and more often in situations of involuntary part-time employment (OECD, 2022). Harding et al. (2022) noted that part-time workers have lower average tax rates, but higher marginal tax rates, which could hinder the willingness to work more hours. Furthermore, it is a tripartite situation between the employee, the agency as employer, and the client company. This model divides responsibilities and controls between three parties, leading to accountability gaps and enforcement difficulties, which are not seen in direct employment, Liang (2024) states.

The employment situations of outsourced employees tend to be precarious and have adverse effects on their health. Labour practices include outsourcing, which is broadly used by organisations to cut their costs. Outsourcing, however, is the transfer of a company's non-core activities to an external company so that the company can focus on its core competencies (Ikenwa & Olusegun, 2019). The phenomenon of self-employment without other people's employees is growing in number (Cieślik & van Stel, 2024). It defies binaries, ranging from a continuum of security to precarity, from autonomy to vulnerability, as noted by Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2021).

The gig economy is a type of labour market in which the worker is not employed in a conventional, year-round job, but rather is hired through online platforms such as Fiverr, TaskRabbit or Uber to perform short-term tasks. They are gigs that are task-based, on-demand, and workers are considered independent contractors (Omar & Jamil, 2025). It includes both platform-based (online) and on-demand (offline) tasks, including tasks such as data entry and micro-tasks, as well as tasks such as home delivery and ride-hailing.

Occupational Stress

Every behaviour and environmental circumstance that puts an individual under undue psychological and physical strain results in stress. Employees who feel under pressure at work are said to be experiencing job stress (Maghfira et al., 2021). Therefore, occupational stress can be commonly understood as the mental and physical pressure that develops when work demands surpass resources or the ability to withstand such demands among workers. Excessive stress disrupts mental, emotional, and physical processes, leading to weariness, inability to concentrate, low motivation, and trouble finishing activities (Handayani et al., 2025).

Work Climate

The human relationists introduced the concept of organisational climate in the late 1940s, which originated from the field of organisational behaviour. The climate perceptions in an organisation include the notions of cooperation, leadership support, trust, fairness, friendliness, conflicts, performance standards and commitment (Saeed et al., 2019). Organisational climate has to do with psychological factors related to employees' perceptions of the work environment (Osmani et al., 2022). Therefore, work climate can be described as a psychological atmosphere of the working environment within an organisation.

Quality of Work Life

QWL has increasingly gained scholarly attention as organisations recognise its central role in fostering employee satisfaction, well-being, and organisational performance (Reddy, 2019). The concept broadly encompasses aspects such as work-life balance, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and safe and supportive work environments. QWL generally refers to the degree to which employees enjoy favourable working conditions that support both their work performance and overall life satisfaction (Sirisha & Sai-Lakshmi, 2019). Rifai and Tirtoprojo (2023) assert that QWL includes factors such as fair compensation, work autonomy, occupational health, and supportive management practices.

Review of Empirical Literature

Non-Standard Work and Quality of Work Life

A study on the impact of short-term contracts (STCs) on the quality of working life (QWL) in the hospitality industry in Jordan (Alrousan et al., 2025). The study was a cross-sectional survey of workers who have STCs in Jordanian hotels, and a purposive sample of 197. A multiple regression analysis was used for the study, and the most significant findings included STCs being positively related to perceived compensation and overall QWL, but negatively related to work-life balance, development opportunities, and inclusion. The study by Katsaouni et al. (2024) compared the quality of life, job insecurity, and work ability of Greek nurses with temporary and permanent contracts. It was a cross-sectional survey with a convenience sampling of 223 registered nurses from Greece's hospitals. The study used T-tests, ANOVA, and multiple regression analytical tools and found that temporary nurses reported significantly lower QWL and work ability, higher job insecurity, and that contract type strongly predicted well-being outcomes.

Bech-Wysocka et al. (2024) investigated whether there is a relationship between NSW contracts and job satisfaction and QWL when matching worker preferences. The research design for the study was a cross-national panel study across EU countries. The sample Size is 8,700 European employees who are in temporary, part-time and fixed-term employment, and who were selected using quota sampling from EU Labour Force Survey data. Logistic and linear regression analytical tools were used for the study, and the results indicated that workers who had chosen non-standard contracts for flexibility had higher QWL results than those placed into temporary contracts, suggesting that voluntariness will buffer the negative effects.

Muszyński and Pulignano (2024) examined the platform economy, self-employment and QWL during COVID-19. The study used a book chapter with a mixed-method synthesis research design. The population consisted of platform workers in EU countries who used a secondary dataset and case studies. Data were analysed through qualitative thematic synthesis. The results found that, although platform employment opportunities have increased, their job quality has deteriorated due to the pandemic, furthering precarious employment, which has affected workers in this situation. Litsardopoulos et al. (2022) analysed long-term well-being effects of self-employment. A longitudinal panel study research design was used, and the population comprised participants in the UK Labour Force Survey. The sample size was 5,000; representative sampling was used, and fixed effects regression was used to analyse the data. Results revealed that, although self-employment had initially positive impacts on well-being, negative impacts occurred over time because of stress and economic insecurity.

Non-Standard Work, Occupational Stress and Quality of Work Life

Pour et al. (2025) studied the dimensions of QWL among teachers in Tehran with a focus on emotional harassment, job stress, and conflict resolution. The study used a cross-sectional survey of 400 respondents selected through multi-stage cluster random sampling; data were analysed using multiple regression. The results showed that occupational stressors and emotional harassment had a significant negative impact on QWL, while effective conflict management had a positive impact. Professional stress emerged as a strong contributor to poor QWL. This empirical evidence supports that stress caused by unfavourable work conditions negatively affects QWL, confirming stress as a significant pathway through which work arrangements influence employee outcomes.

Castillo-López and Domínguez (2024) examined emotional intelligence and its explicitly tested WC and job stress as mediators of job satisfaction. A cross-sectional survey. The sample size was 203 employees recruited via snowball sampling. The study concludes that WC was closely related to reduced job stress and increased job satisfaction. Satisfaction was negatively related to job stress. The indirect relationship through WC, job stress and job satisfaction was statistically significant. Even though the main emphasis of the study is not placed on NSW, the study offers a clear empirical precedent when it comes to conceptualising job stress as an arbiter of workplace conditions and a QWL outcome (job satisfaction).

Rai (2025) examined the connections among technostress, psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and QWL. Using a cross-sectional survey of 388 employees. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling revealed that technostress had a significant negative effect on QWL, psychological health, and job satisfaction, partially mediating this relationship. Although the study did not specifically analyse NSW, it provides strong empirical support that stress-related factors serve as the mechanism linking work conditions to QWL outcomes, reinforcing the role of OCS as a mediating variable. Kong et al. (2020) investigated how job satisfaction and occupational stress mediated the connection between neuroticism and QWL in Chinese public

officials. Using a cross-sectional survey of 559 respondents and Structural Equation Modelling, the study discovered that the linkage among neuroticism and quality of work life was mostly mediated by occupational stress, with increased stress linked to worse quality of work life. These results strongly support occupational stress as a crucial intervening factor between work-related antecedents and quality of work life outcomes.

Non-Standard Work, Work Climate and Quality of Work Life

Jayaraman et al. (2023) examined how QWL relates to work-life balance among Indian construction workers, with collegiality and job security as moderators. The study employed a survey method for 592 respondents who were selected using a convenience sampling method and the results of the study indicated that the relationship between QWL and work-life balance was positive and significant, mediated by job satisfaction. Importantly, this relationship was strengthened by a supportive WC, with more support from supervisors and co-workers, and it was weakened when the WC was unsupportive. This indicates that organisational climate may either act to buffer or reinforce the benefits of QWL.

Bhattacharya and Ray (2021) created a scale of work precariousness and examined the association of the scale to job stress and health-related quality of life (HRQL). This study employed a survey design and surveyed the U.S. workers sample from the General Social Survey (QWL module; pooled 2002-2014; N=4,534). A multi-item precariousness index was created for the study, and regression analyses were performed to evaluate the relationships between precariousness and self-reported job stress and health outcomes. The findings revealed that higher precariousness is strongly associated with greater job stress and worse health-related QOL. Specifically, workers scoring high on precariousness reported more days with limited activity and poor mental and physical health. However, work climate specifically was not tested, but poor conditions, such as involuntary schedules, dominate precariousness.

Kim et al. (2023) investigated platform gig workers' perceptions of working conditions and their influence on work-life balance and quality of life using a cross-sectional survey of 447 online platform workers in Korea. Structural equation modelling was used for analysis and revealed that emotional and economic factors significantly predicted quality of life, while management control and work environment had no significant effect, indicating that tangible rewards and emotional well-being drive perceived quality of life for gig workers more than platform control aspects.

Review of Theoretical Literature

This study adopted a theoretical approach that captures both the macro-structural and micro-psychological dimensions of work. It is therefore anchored centrally on Kalleberg theory of Precarious Work (2009), while Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) were used to complement this structural perspective.

Precarious Work Theory

Renowned sociologist Arne Kalleberg teaches at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is widely recognised as one of the leading scholars on precarious work, having significantly advanced the concept through his influential work. In 2009, his pioneering paper “Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition” was published in the American Sociological Review. Kalleberg has brought attention to the increasing precarity of employment in developed countries to the academic sphere. These ideas were

expanded upon in his book, Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies, published in 2018. Precarious labour was said to be a risky, unclear and unpredictable type of employment from the worker's perspective (Kalleberg, 2018). Kalleberg reiterates the point that precarious jobs are jobs with little or no social benefits, statutory support for the worker and little stability.

Kalleberg contends that precarious employment has become so pervasive in developed economies that even middle-class workers are unable to depend on steady employment. This theory is relevant to NSW arrangements such as temporary work, part-time work, freelance contracting, and hybrid self-employment because they reflect the core attributes of precarious work identified by Kalleberg. Most especially in developing economies, employees often operate under uncertain contractual conditions, irregular earnings, and limited access to organisational benefits. Based on this theory, NSW is imagined as a structural vulnerability and risk to workers. From the above, Kalleberg theory is used as a theoretical basis in this research, which explains NSW as an independent variable. It outlines how employment insecurity and instability as part of NSW arrangements allow for conditions to develop which endanger workers' QWL and contribute to workers' susceptibility to OCS.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

Demerouti et al. (2001) initially presented the job demands-resources (JD-R) idea, which has grown to be one of the most important frameworks for comprehending how working circumstances impact employee engagement, burnout, and well-being. According to the original model, work environment is defined as the sum of job demands (sustained effort) and job resources (achievement of work goals, reduction of job demands and personal growth) that can lead to strain (Demerouti et al., 2001).

The original model conceptualised work environments as containing two broad classes: job demands, which call for consistent effort and might cause strain, and job resources, which aid in achieving work objectives, lessen stress and foster personal growth (Demerouti et al., 2001). Over the years, the JD-R model has been expanded into a comprehensive theoretical model that not only explains burnout and stress but also positive experiences such as work engagement and performance. This further illustrates the flexibility of the model, indicating that it can be used in a range of occupational contexts, as it does not specify fixed demands and resources, but rather they refer to the context of the work.

Therefore, within this study, the JD-R theory is used to conceptualise NSW as typically demanding, strain-inducing, and resource-limited, through OCS creating risks for employee well-being and QWL. The role of WC, particularly whether it provides sufficient resources such as social support, respect, and autonomy, is crucial to understanding whether the negative consequences of NSW are amplified or mitigated. By framing WC as a moderating resource, this study examines how work environments can be shaped to protect and promote the QWL of non-standard employees. This aligns with the JD-R theory central claim that constructive organisational climates can offset the strain caused by high demands and limited control, a reality common in precarious work contexts.

Herzberg Two-Factor Theory

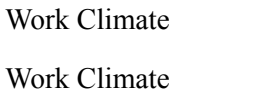
Frederick Herzberg and associates Mausner and Snyderman initially created the Herzberg two-factor hypothesis, sometimes referred to as the Motivation-Hygiene hypothesis, in The Motivation to Work (1959). Grounded in empirical studies of employee attitudes, the theory makes a distinction between two categories of variables that affect job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. That is, the extrinsic conditions are the hygiene

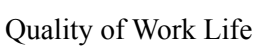
factors, while the inner variables are the motivators. Higher job satisfaction and motivation are a result of factors including accomplishment, acknowledgement, and the nature of the work itself. On the other hand, if they are insufficient, hygienic variables like pay, supervision, and working conditions lead to discontent but do not by themselves generate long-term motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959).

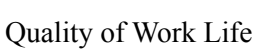
Herzberg theory is relevant in understanding traditional and NSW settings in modern work settings. In a more recent study, in summary, the findings of these studies indicate that Herzberg Two-Factor theory is a useful tool to examine the relationship between NSW and QWL. This theory is especially applicable to QWL. QWL is defined as employees' collective judgment of their job satisfaction, job security and wellbeing. Herzberg model can assist in understanding the impact of the lack of a component of employment on QWL, mainly through low satisfaction and stress. It also provides an opportunity to include OCS as an intervening psychological response that occurs as a result of poor hygiene factors.

Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1 Work-life Sustainability Model

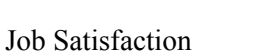


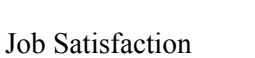


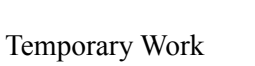












Temporary Work

Job Security

Job Security

Part-Time Work

Part-Time Work

Employee Well-being

Employee Well-being

Self-Empoyment

Self-Empoyment

Occupational Stress

Occupational Stress

Source: Self-Constructed, 2026

The conceptual model is used to describe the relationships between NSW, OCS and WC as a mediator and moderator, respectively, of NSW's influence on QWL. The model suggests that the way of employment is not the only factor influencing QWL, but rather the psychological and organisational implications that the employment creates. The main independent (IV) is NSW, which covers part-time, temporary, irregular work, and self-employment. These employment arrangements are based on the precarious work theory of Kalleberg, and involve uncertainty of income, weak job security and employment protections, and ambiguous work roles. These situations result in unpredictable workloads, long hours and ambiguous employer-employee boundaries.

The model considers that OCS acts as a mediator between NSW and QWL and seeks to understand why and how OCS has this effect. The JD-R theory suggests that job demands (particularly time demands, workload demands, and role conflict) increase, while job resources (particularly supervisory support, predictability, and autonomy) decrease in NSW. This imbalance creates OCS, which are experienced as role overload, role ambiguity, responsibility pressure and powerlessness. The model thus suggests that OCS increases in NSW will lead to a decrease in staff members' QWL by depleting well-being, satisfaction and security.

The model also considers WC as a mediation variable and a moderation variable. Based on the resource portion of the JD-R theory, a positive WC is conceptualised as a contextual resource that moderates the negative impact of NSW on QWL. That is, in supportive, respectful and fair work contexts, employees may feel less strained and more psychologically safe even in stressful work situations. Likewise, a poor WC is likely to exacerbate the negative impact on QWL. In general, the WLS Model indicates that employment contracts are not the only factor that makes work sustainable, but rather the extent to which they create stress

and what kind of organisational climate makes the stress worse or better. The conceptual model joins the mediating mechanism of OCS and WC as a moderating condition, broadening the framework for understanding NSW.

Methodology

Research Design

The methodological approach used in this conceptual paper is a systematic literature review (SLR), and the conceptual model to be developed is an informal-sector conceptual model for NSW and QWL, in which OCS is a mediator, and WC is a moderator. It was felt that a systematic review would be appropriate as it ensures a rigorous framework, transparency and reproducibility for synthesising existing evidence, identifying theoretical gaps and conceptual foundations (Tranfield et al., 2003). The systematic review approach is different from narrative reviews, which may be subject to selection bias, because it allows for comprehensive coverage of literature pertinent to the study to provide a conceptual framework grounded in theory and empirical evidence. Because of the multidisciplinary and/or context-specificity of studies of NSW in emerging economies, a systematic review can be used to synthesise the various findings, providing a solid basis for hypothesis generation and model specification.

Sources of Data

The review was carried out in three stages: identification, screening, and eligibility, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) recommendations (Page et al., 2021). In the first stage, literature was found using keyword combinations and Boolean operators in the identification stage. The keywords used for the primary search were: “non-standard work” OR “precarious work” OR “temporary employment” OR “part-time work” OR “gig work” OR “informal employment”, AND “quality of work life” AND “work-life quality” OR "employee well-being" AND "occupational stress" OR "job stress" OR "work stress" AND "work climate" OR "organisational climate" OR "work environment". Additional synonyms and phrases were added to enhance coverage. The following databases were used for searching: ResearchGate, Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar from 2020 to 2026. At this point, an initial pool of 685 documents was generated.

In the second stage, duplicates were eliminated during the screening stage, and irrelevant articles were discarded after title and abstract evaluations. Articles were considered irrelevant if they focused exclusively on standard employment arrangements, examined outcomes unrelated to quality of work life or occupational stress, or were conducted in non-organisational settings. This screening process yielded 85 articles in all for full-text analysis.

In the third stage, publications were thoroughly reviewed in using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles were included if they were published in English between 2020 and 2026 as peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters, focused on NSW, OCS, WC, or QWL, and were conducted in public or private sector settings, with preference given to studies addressing informal sector contexts. Articles were excluded if they were conference abstracts, reports, non-English publications, published before 2020, focused on unrelated outcomes, or were conducted in non-organisational settings. 25 articles were determined to be the most pertinent for conceptual synthesis as a consequence of this method. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are summarised in Table 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Journal articles, book chapters	Conference abstracts, reports
Language	English	Non-English publications
Time frame	2020-2026	Studies before 2020
Focus	Non-standard work, occupational stress, work climate, quality of work life	Research concentrating solely on unrelated results
Context	Public and private sectors, with a focus on studies from the informal sector when accessible	Research unrelated to workplace or organisational environments

Source: Researcher, 2026

Results and Discussion

The systematic review of empirical literature yielded several key findings that inform the proposed conceptual model. First, across multiple studies, NSW arrangements consistently demonstrated negative associations with QWL, though the mechanisms and boundary conditions varied across contexts.

Direct Relationship Between Non-Standard Work and Quality of Work Life

Katsaouni et al. (2024) determined that there were significant differences between temporary nurses and their permanent colleagues with regard to both QWL and work ability, in which QWL was significantly predicted by contract type. Likewise, Alrousan et al. (2025) found that short-term contracts had a positive influence on perceived compensation, but a negative impact on work-life balance, growth opportunities, and inclusion. Despite the opportunities provided by digital technologies, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated precariousness for platform self-employed workers and made their jobs poorer (Muszyński & Pulignano, 2024). Litsardopoulos et al. (2022) also found that there was a positive initial impact of self-employment on overall well-being, but over time the impact of stress and economic insecurity weakened.

The results are consistent with the Precarious Work Theory (PWT) of Kalleberg (2009), which views NSW as a place that is dangerous, murky and uncertain to the worker. According to the theory, the non-standard arrangements shift the risk from the employer to the worker, leading to instability and fewer benefits and protections for the worker, which is reflected in lower QWL. But an important moderating condition emerged from the literature. Bech-Wysocka et al. (2024) observed that, as predicted, workers who took up non-standard contracts for flexibility had better QWL outcomes than those who were placed in NSW by their employers, thus adding to the evidence that voluntariness is a moderator of the negative effects. This finding suggests that the negative impact of NSW on QWL is not consistent but varies as a function of worker choice of such arrangements.

The Mediating Role of Occupational Stress

There is strong empirical evidence to support OCS as a mediator between NSW and QWL. Pour et al. (2025) revealed that occupational stressors as well as emotional harassment were found to have a significant negative influence on QWL, with professional stress as a significant factor affecting QWL. Kong et al. (2020) showed that the association between neuroticism and QWL was largely mediated by OCS, which was associated with poorer QWL. A similar study by Rai (2025) showed that there was a significant negative relationship between technostress and QWL, with job satisfaction partially mediating this relationship. In the direct path, the work climate was shown to be highly related to low levels of job stress and high levels of job satisfaction, and the indirect path (WC, job stress, and job satisfaction) was statistically significant, according to Castillo-López and Domínguez (2024).

These findings provide strong empirical support for the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2001). In line with this theory, NSW increases job demands such as role ambiguity, job insecurity, income volatility, and workload pressure while simultaneously reducing job resources such as supervisory support, predictability, and autonomy. Employees' mental and physical resources are depleted by this imbalance, resulting in chronic occupational stress, which subsequently undermines quality of work life by diminishing well-being, satisfaction, and perceived security.

The Moderating Role of Work Climate

The empirical evidence also supports WC as a moderating factor in the NSW-QWL relationship. Jayaraman et al. (2023) found that a supportive WC characterised by high supervisor and co-worker support and rewards strengthened the positive relationship between QWL and job satisfaction through collegiality, while unsupportive climates weakened this effect. This confirms that organisational climate can buffer or enhance the benefits of QWL. Kim et al. (2023) found that emotional and economic factors significantly predicted quality of life for gig workers, while management control and work environment had no significant effect, indicating that tangible rewards and emotional well-being drive perceived quality of life more than platform control aspects. Bhattacharya and Ray (2021) found that higher precariousness was strongly associated with greater job stress and worse health-related quality of life, with poor conditions such as involuntary schedules dominating precariousness.

These findings align with the resource component of the JD-R theory, which postulates that job resources, including support, autonomy, and positive workplace relationships, cushion the negative effects of job demands. A positive WC functions as a contextual resource that provides psychological safety, social support, and a sense of control, thereby reducing the strain generated by NSW demands. Conversely, a negative WC amplifies the stressors associated with NSW, accelerating the depletion of employee resources and

exacerbating negative QWL outcomes.

Theoretical Integration

The empirical findings collectively support the integration of three complementary theories. Kalleberg (2009) Precarious Work Theory explains the structural nature of NSW, characterising it by instability, unpredictability, and risk transfer from employers to workers. The JD-R theory by Bakker and Demerouti (2001) explains the psychological mechanism of OCS through which NSW affects QWL, as well as the buffering role of job resources such as WC. Herzberg Two-Factor Theory (1959) further explains QWL as an outcome shaped by both hygiene factors (job security and well-being) that avert dissatisfaction and motivators (job satisfaction) that create positive fulfilment.

Addressing the Research Gaps

The empirical review confirms the three interrelated gaps identified in this study.

i. While studies have established negative associations between NSW and QWL, most have focused on formal sector employees in developed economies, leaving a gap regarding informal sector workers in emerging economies like Nigeria.

ii. Although OCS has been established as a mediator in various work contexts, no study has explicitly tested this mediating pathway between NSW and QWL within the informal sector of emerging economies.

iii. While WC has been shown to moderate workplace relationships, empirical evidence on its moderating role in the NSW-QWL relationship within informal sector settings remains absent.

Discussion

The findings observed from the empirical review reveal that some important patterns emerge that help to inform the proposed conceptual model.

The negative correlation between NSW and QWL found in various sectors such as hospitality (Alrousan et al., 2025), healthcare (Katsaouni et al., 2024), platform work (Kim et al., 2023) and self-employment (Litsardopoulos eta al., 2022; Muszyński & Pulignano, 2024) indicates a strong and robust relationship across sectors. The informal sector setting characteristic of emerging economies, however, is unique and involves low levels of regulatory controls, lack of enforcement of labour standards, lack of social protection, and high-power imbalance between employers and workers that can aggravate these bad features. This indicates that the adverse effects of NSW on QWL may be stronger in the informal sector than those associated with studies on the formal sector.

The theory that NSW impacts QWL indirectly via the psychological stress it creates is supported by consistent evidence that occupational stress is a mediator (Kong et al., 2020; Pour et al., 2025; Rai, 2025; Castillo-López & Domínguez, 2024). This bring into line with the JD-R theory's core proposition that job demands lead to strain, which subsequently affects outcomes. The stress of the informal sector can further inflate the stress of non-standard workers, given the lack of formal grievance processes, access to health services, and social support systems in this environment; OCS is even more important in this context.

The results indicate that WC is a moderating factor as proposed by Jayaraman et al. (2023) and Bhattacharya

& Ray (2021), in that it influences the strength and the trajectory of the relationship between NSW and QWL. If formal policies and procedures are absent, the immediate WC, one that is characterised by support, respect and autonomy, may be especially important in shaping the impact of NSW on employee outcomes in the informal sector. The positive effect of a positive WC can act as a substitute for formal protections as a buffer between the negative effect of NSW, and the negative effect of a negative WC will add to the precariousness of non-standard arrangements.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

This study conceptual model is a result of addressing the gaps in the literature by incorporating OCS as a mediator and WC as a moderator in the relationship between NSW and QWL life in the informal sector of emerging economies. The evidence presented suggests generally that NSW has a negative relationship with QWL, that OCS is an important explanatory mechanism and that WC is capable of modifying this relationship. Studies that directly test these relationships in the informal sector, however, are lacking, especially in emerging economies like Nigeria, and require further empirical research to be conducted.

The value of this study is in its implications for theory, policy and practice. Theoretically, the study contributes to the amalgamation of Kalleberg Precarious Work Theory, the JD-R Theory and Herzberg Two-Factor Theory in a single perspective that will encompass both macro-structural conditions as found in NSW and the micro-psychological mechanisms linking these two sets of conditions to worker outcomes. This integration provides a more comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of NSW in situations where formal protections are not in place. In practice, the model indicates that there are two leverage points for interventions to enhance the QWL of non-standard workers in the informal sector: reducing OCS through stress management programmes and accessible health support, and enhancing WC through the supervisor, peer support network and participatory decision-making structure.

From a policy perspective, the model raises the question of whether there should be policies that provide minimum labour standards, such as minimum wage, social security and occupational health and safety, for non-standard workers in the informal sector. In the absence of such safeguards, the adverse impacts of these documented in the formal sector are expected to be magnified in the informal sector.

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Recommendations

The results of this conceptual paper have several policy recommendations, especially in developing countries like Nigeria where the informal sector is a significant part of the workforce.

i. Occupational stress is a mediating factor between NSW and the QWL, highlighting that policies to improve workers' wellbeing should focus on reducing stress as a key intervention.

ii. The moderating role of WC suggests that the negative impacts of NSW are not inevitable, and that workplace relationships and conditions can protect against these impacts even though there is no formal workplace protection. Regulatory measures that would encourage supportive WCs, such as regular worker-manager meetings, peer support networks and clear communication of work expectations, could be implemented with little to no regulatory impact.

iii. The fact that NSW disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, such as workers with low education and women, means that there is a need for targeted policy interventions. Access to essential health care and basic income security should be provided through a social protection floor, covering all employees,

irrespective of their job position.

iv. No empirical evidence of NSW collection. Regular surveys should be conducted to document and measure the prevalence and impact of NSW arrangements, broken down by sector, gender, age and education level.

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