

Roles of social workers in bridging the gap between social policy and social action in youth unemployment in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment remains a persistent social issue in Nigeria, despite the implementation of social welfare policies and proactive measures by stakeholders in the social sector. Current interventions often do not match ongoing social actions hence the need for multisectoral approaches to address the problem. This study investigates the roles of social workers in bridging the gap between social policy and social action in order to mitigate youth unemployment in Nigeria. A correlational survey research design was utilised for this study. The study's population consisted of 6,047 registered social workers and the sample size of 360 participants was calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan table. The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique, incorporating disproportionate simple random sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling, to select participants from the Social Work associations across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The validity of the research instrument was confirmed by expert scholars, and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained from a pilot study involving participants not included in the main sample. The questionnaire was administered electronically and responses analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study identified a relationship between social policy and social action but there is no synergy between policy formulation and social action. Consequently, the roles of social workers were not integrated into the interactions between social policy and social action. The government, Social Work professional associations, and other stakeholders should incentivise social workers to offer innovative interventions to unemployed youth in overcoming the challenges of unemployment and transitioning to entrepreneurship.

Keywords: *Advocacy, Entrepreneurship, Professional development, Social action, Social policy, Social workers, Youth unemployment.*

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Highlights of this paper

- This study establishes the relationship between social policy and social action but there is no synergy between policy formulation and innovative social action because social workers play traditional roles in solving the problem youth unemployment in Nigeria.
- Social workers can offer innovative interventions that support unemployed youths in overcoming challenges of unemployment and transitioning to entrepreneurship.
- The government and other stakeholders should integrate the roles of social workers in the interactions between social policy and social action.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a multifaceted social issue that has significant institutional and personal repercussions for young individuals. As nations in the Global South confront declining productivity and social transformation, the potential of these youths—including their energy, skills, and experiences—is undermined, contributing to socio-economic crises characterised by unrest, protests, and political instability. Research has demonstrated that unemployment is a complex problem, shaped by various economic, political, environmental, legal, and technological challenges impacting the global economy. However, its effects as a critical social issue are particularly pronounced in struggling economies of the Global South, including Nigeria (Adekola, Allen, Olawole-Isaac, Akanbi, & Adewumi, 2016; Adesina, 2013; Egunjobi, 2021; Onah & Okwuosa, 2016; Osewa, 2020; Shah & Khuhawar, 2019; Uddin & Uddin, 2013). Despite being Africa's most populous nation with a substantial youth demographic, Nigeria has struggled to effectively address youth unemployment. This persistent issue remains, even in light of social welfare policies and initiatives undertaken by the government and various stakeholders in the social sector (Ademuson, 2022; Olubusoye, Salisu, & Olofin, 2023; Onyemaechi, Okere, & Chukwuemeka, 2017; Radhi, 2019; Virk, Nelson, & Dele-Adededeji, 2023).

As of 2022, youth unemployment in Nigeria reached 53.4% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The high rate of youth unemployment has significant personal and social implications. Many unemployed individuals report that unemployment is among the most difficult experiences of their lives (McClelland & Macdonald, 1998). The ramifications of unemployment span various socio-economic dimensions, adversely affecting mental health, productivity, and social cohesion among unemployed youth (Omoniyi, 2016). It serves as an acute psychosocial stressor, exacerbating feelings of isolation, depression, and hopelessness (Petros, Alexandros, Marina, & Alexandra, 2015). A 2024 survey by the John J. Heldrich Centre for Workforce Development in the United States, titled *Left Behind: The Long-term Unemployed Struggle in an Improving Economy*, revealed that 80% of unemployed individuals experienced a decline in their lifestyle during the Great Recession (Horn, Zukin, & Kopicki, 2014). Moreover, the survey also showed that 60% of respondents indicated that their unemployment had strained their relationships with friends and family members.

The personal and social consequences of unemployment are severe, leading to financial hardship, poverty, debt, homelessness, family tensions, and breakdowns. Unemployed youths often experience feelings of boredom, alienation, shame, and stigma, as well as increased social isolation, and are at heightened risk for depression and hopelessness. Other consequences include crime, erosion of self-confidence and self-esteem, the atrophy of work skills, and deterioration of health. McClelland and Macdonald (1998) noted that these personal and social consequences tend to intensify during economic recessions. In Nigeria, the social consequences of unemployment among youths manifest in various forms, including suicidal ideation, sexual violence, cultism, advance-fee scams (“Yahoo Yahoo”), money rituals (“Yahoo Yahoo+”), and drug-related crimes. Socio-demographic factors and low socioeconomic status further aggravate the vulnerability of unemployed youth, increasing risk factors associated with suicide, mental illness, financial hardship, and poverty (Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2020).

In response to the pressing issue of youth unemployment, the Nigerian government has implemented several policies and social investment programmes, including the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) 2021-2024, the 2021 revised draft of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) and the National Development Plan (2021-2025). Recently, there are National Social Investment Programmes, such as the N-Power programme, the Government Enterprises Empowerment Programme (GEEP), YES-Power, and YouWIN, as well as various state-level and institutional initiatives that have been established to reduce youth unemployment. The government has also established a Technical Working Group (TWG) on youth employment and skills development. Members of the TWG are Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of the government. They include the Labour and Employment, Education, Women Affairs, Agriculture and Rural Development, Trade and Industry, Youth and Sports Development, and Communication and Digital Economy. The agencies are the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The other members of the TWG are National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and the office of the Senior Special Adviser to the President on Job Creation. The TWG work collaboratively with private sector organisations, development partners, and donor agencies such as the World Bank to tackle youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Despite these institutional initiatives, youth unemployment have remained high in Nigeria. The interaction between social policy and social action to mitigate youth unemployment has not been effective in the country. It is essential to assess the role of social workers in facilitating social action aimed at fostering social change and addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria. While youth unemployment is recognised as an urgent social problem, it is often not prioritised in social policy frameworks. In contrast, member states of the European Union have implemented policy responses, utilising soft law measures and financial incentives to bridge the gap between social policy and action (Andersson, 2022; Duisekova, Kerimbayeva, Mussakhanova, Turgambayeva, & Stukas, 2022). This underscores the argument that addressing unemployment in the future requires a comprehensive approach to policy formulation and implementation in relation to this social problem (Allmendinger & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2017).

Although Briar, Berglind, and Hoff (2008) suggest that social workers can play a role in addressing unemployment, this area remains underexplored. The involvement of social work as a human interventionist approach has not been sufficiently emphasised in tackling youth unemployment. Social workers are professionals dedicated to helping individuals navigate life's challenges. They engage in social action as a secondary method, collaborating with key stakeholders to address youth unemployment through advocacy for effective social policy implementation. Social workers act as facilitators, brokers, mediators, mobilisers, negotiators, and advocates to promote prosocial policies that enhance youth access to gainful employment. Additionally, they serve as case managers and counselors, assisting youths in overcoming developmental, behavioral, and psychosocial issues arising from their unemployment experiences (Fajimi, 2023). These professionals engage youths in various activities, including individual counseling, casework, advocacy, and consultations with parents, school administrators, community leaders, employers, and other service professionals, representing social actions at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Social workers provide vital support by helping unemployed individuals navigate their challenges, manage their relationships, and resolve personal and familial issues (Omokhabi & Fajimi, 2021; Omokhabi & Omokhabi, 2023). They are trained to understand the institutional dynamics of the labour market, assisting unemployed youths in contextualising their struggles, thereby alleviating self-blame. This perspective fosters the understanding that transitioning from unemployment to employment or entrepreneurship is part of a broader labour market context. In

their case management role, social workers offer emotional and mental health support to unemployed youths, helping them develop self-care plans to sustain them throughout their unemployment journey.

Furthermore, social workers connect unemployed youths with community resources for job searching. Given the disillusionment and low trust in the system among these youths, social workers facilitate connections with recruitment agencies and provide access to job listings. They also refer unemployed individuals to professionals who can assist in creating compelling resumes or curricula vitae that attract recruiters' attention. While social workers may not possess the skills to review employment applications or resumes themselves, they can refer youths to agencies or individuals who offer pro bono assistance. Additionally, social workers encourage networking and engagement with institutions during job fairs and employment events, providing guidance on career transitions and helping youths set personal and professional job search goals. They assist in crafting personal development plans and establishing daily, weekly, and monthly schedules to achieve these goals.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

There exists a significant relationship between social policy and social action in addressing the causes and manifestations of youth unemployment, which ideally should lead to evidence-based solutions. However, a notable gap persists in the effective application of this approach, underscoring the necessity for human-centered interventions (Olubusoye et al., 2023). Strengthening the enforcement of relevant labour laws and regulations could contribute to reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria (Ishaq, 2017; Ogochukwu & Ohazulike, 2021). A coordinated effort among professionals is required to align policies and programmes with viable solutions to social issues such as youth unemployment. Despite numerous institutional interventions, these efforts have largely proven ineffective, necessitating a human-driven, multi-sectoral approach to enable unemployed youth to fully realise their potential and achieve meaningful employment and psychosocial well-being (Irele, 2019; Liang, Ng, Tsui, Yan, & Lam, 2017; Lorenzini & Giugni, 2010, 2016).

Instead of fostering employment, existing government policies have failed, as evidenced by the rising rates of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Concerns persist regarding the implementation of these policies and the lack of engagement with professionals who could act as agents of change through community participation. Social workers, as trained professionals, possess the capacity to drive social change through education, community engagement, and advocacy. However, there is limited research on their role in bridging the gap between social policy and social action in addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria. This study aims to explore the relationship between social policy and social action in tackling youth unemployment and to investigate how social workers can lead innovative interventions to reduce youth unemployment in the country.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the roles of social workers in bridging the gap between social policy and social action to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria. Specifically, the study will pursue the following objectives:

1. To determine whether social workers are aware of social policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the roles of social workers in mitigating youth unemployment in Nigeria.
3. To evaluate the influence of social policy on social action regarding the reduction of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

4. To investigate how the roles of social workers are integrated into the interaction between social policy and social action to facilitate innovative interventions aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent are social workers aware of social policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria?
2. What roles do social workers play in addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria?
3. How does social policy influence social action in the effort to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria?
4. How are the roles of social workers embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action to foster innovative interventions aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past two decades, extensive scholarly research has been conducted on youth unemployment in Nigeria. Notably, several scholars have highlighted the interplay between social policy and social action as critical in addressing youth unemployment. Selected studies will be analysed to examine the existing gap between these phenomena in efforts to reduce youth unemployment in the country.

The study by [Virk et al. \(2023\)](#) acknowledged that Nigeria has an active youth policy in collaboration with development partners such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to tackle unemployment. However, it suggested that the focus is predominantly on skill enhancement and youth participation in the economy. The authors posited that while market-oriented multilateral policy directions exist to mitigate youth unemployment, weak social protection and poor implementation of social welfare programmes limit the effectiveness of various interventions in Nigeria. They recommended that youth unemployment should be reframed and driven by prosocial ideals of equality and collective action.

[Odeh and Okoye \(2014\)](#) established a correlation between youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, noting that many youths live below the poverty line due to unemployment. They found that, despite the existence of a poverty reduction policy, the governmental agencies responsible for its implementation have failed to fulfill their mandates. The study advocated for a holistic approach to policy implementation aimed at sustainable national development, which could enhance economic growth and youth employment, thereby alleviating poverty.

[Omoju et al. \(2023\)](#) identified multiple youth employment policies and programmes but concluded that they have not significantly reduced youth unemployment due to a lack of governance frameworks and limited socio-economic and political inclusivity in Nigeria. They pointed out that governmental policies and programmes are often disconnected from long-term development plans, resulting in the exclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

[Alanana \(2003\)](#) noted that youth unemployment is pervasive in Nigeria and aligned its findings with functionalist theory, which highlights the interplay between socio-economic and political contexts in policy design and implementation. The study suggested the implementation of a policy-driven Work Incentive Programme to create job corps for unemployed youths in the country. [Imhonopi and Urim \(2018\)](#) utilised a descriptive qualitative approach, concluding that youth employment in Nigeria is hindered by systemic socio-economic artificiality. They recommended the establishment of an inclusive national framework rooted in inclusive politics, economy, and sociocultural contexts to address youth unemployment.

The reviewed studies span two decades of research on youth unemployment in Nigeria, from 2002 to 2024. There is a consensus among these studies that youth unemployment remains a pervasive and enduring social problem in the country. While the government has shown some institutional attention through policy and programme design aimed

at reducing youth unemployment, significant progress remains elusive due to poor implementation arising from socio-economic and political contexts that sideline vulnerable and marginalised youth.

Although the studies agree on the necessity of addressing youth unemployment, they diverge on the prosocial actions required, as governmental policies and programmes tend to be market-driven rather than people-oriented in Nigeria. This research seeks to fill this gap in the literature by emphasising the need for institutional prosocial initiatives led by professionals such as social workers, who are trained and equipped to understand social welfare and align social policies with advocacy, community organisations, and diverse stakeholders to effectively address the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a correlational survey research design. This design was selected to facilitate the researcher's acquisition of firsthand knowledge regarding the study's variables. It was deemed appropriate as it elucidates the relationships between these variables, describes the nature of these relationships, and allows for inferences to be drawn based on their interactions, aligning with the overall objectives of the study.

3.2. Population of the Study

The study population comprised all 6,047 registered social workers affiliated with four major social work associations in Nigeria: the National Association of Social Workers (NASoW) with 4,100 members, the Institute of Social Work of Nigeria (ISWON) with 500 members, the Association of Social Work Educators of Nigeria (ASWEN) with 1,047 members, and the Association of Medical Social Workers of Nigeria (AMSWON) with 400 members.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total sample size of 360 participants was determined for the study, distributed across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The sample size was calculated using the [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#) table, aiming for a 95% level of confidence and a 5% margin of error. According to the Krejcie and Morgan table, a population of 6,000 requires a sample size of 361; thus, the study adjusted the sample size to 360 from the total population of 6,047 registered social workers in Nigeria. The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique to select participants, which enhanced logistical efficiency and data collection. The sampling process involved the following steps:

1. Stratification by Geopolitical Zones: The sample was stratified according to Nigeria's six geopolitical zones: North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West.
2. Participant Selection: Participants were selected from the six zones as follows:
 - North Central: 65.
 - North East: 25.
 - North West: 58.
 - South East: 69.
 - South South: 33.
 - South West: 110.

This distribution totaled 360 participants, employing a combination of disproportionate simple random sampling.

3. Final Participant Selection: Participants were further selected from the registered associations in each geopolitical zone through purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

3.4. Instrumentation

Data collection was facilitated using a self-developed questionnaire titled the "Gap Between Social Policy and Social Action in Youth Unemployment Scale" (GBSPSAYUS). The questionnaire consisted of 30 items organised into five sections:

- Section A: Demographic characteristics of respondents (5 items).
- Sections B to E: 25 items employing a four-point Likert scale, aligned with the study's objectives.

3.5. Validity of the Research Instrument

The survey instrument underwent review by expert scholars in the fields of Measurement and Social Work Education. Following their feedback, which included suggestions for correction and modification, a consensus emerged affirming the instrument's relevance and appropriateness. Consequently, the face and content validity of the instrument were confirmed after the necessary revisions were made.

3.6. Reliability of the Research Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using the test-retest reliability technique. A pilot study was conducted involving 20 social workers in Lagos State (South West, Nigeria), who were not included in the main study sample. The questionnaire was administered twice, with a two-week interval between the administrations. Data collected from both tests were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.86, indicating a high level of consistency across all questionnaire items.

3.7. Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was administered electronically via various digital communication platforms, with the assistance of two trained research assistants who facilitated participant responses within the designated timeline. The instrument included informed consent and ethical guidelines to promote understanding and encourage accurate responses. A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed and retrieved electronically over a two-month period. Data from the completed questionnaires were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were utilised to analyse Section A (demographic characteristics of respondents). Mean and standard deviation were applied to evaluate responses to the research questions regarding the relationships between the independent and dependent variables in Sections B, C, D, and E, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 revealed that participants were aged 20 – 29 years old (n=25, 6.94%), 30 – 39 years old (n=105, 29.17%), 40 – 49 years old (n=142, 39.44%), 50 – 59 years old (n=61, 16.94%), and 60+ years old (n=27, 7.50%) who were female (n=250, 69.44%) and male (n=110, 30.56%) with diploma (n=112, 31.11%), first degree (n=175, 48.61%), master's degree (n=58, 4.17%), and doctorate (n=15, 4.17%) and worked in public sector (n=245, 68.06%), private sector (n=34, 9.44%), and social sector (n=81, 22.50%) with industry experience of less than 5 years (n=52, 14.44%), 6 – 9 years (n=108, 30.00%), 10 – 14 years (n=178, 49.44%), and above 15 years (n=22, 6.11%).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=360).

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20 – 29 years old	25	6.94
	30 – 39 years old	105	29.17
	40 - 49 years old	142	39.44
	50 – 59 years old	61	16.94
	60+ years old	27	7.50
Sex	Female	250	69.44
	Male	110	30.56
Education	Diploma	112	31.11
	First degree	175	48.61
	Master’s degree	58	16.11
	Doctorate degree	15	4.17
Industry	Public sector	245	68.06
	Private sector	34	9.44
	Social sector	81	22.50
Experience	Less than 5 years	52	14.44
	6 – 9 years	108	30.00
	10 – 14 years	178	49.44
	Above 15 years	22	6.11

Source: Field research, 2023.

4.2. Responses on the Extent of Social Workers’ Awareness of Social Policies Aimed at Reducing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Table 2 reveals that participants were highly aware of the existence of social policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. The weighted mean of 3.95 was set as a benchmark for decision-making to provide an answer to this research question. The table confirms that all the items raised to measure the variables supported the fact that social workers were aware of the existence of social policy aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. It is evident from the respondents that Nigeria has policies engineered toward alleviating youth unemployment in the last 20 years ($\bar{x} = 3.95$). Successive government administrations implemented strategies to support young people through skills, education, employment, and social and public governance policies ($\bar{x} = 3.96$). Government policies faced challenges of inconsistencies and unqualified resource personnel handling its social action ($\bar{x} = 3.96$). The policies of successive governments have not generated enough employment opportunities for youths in the labour market ($\bar{x} = 3.95$). The Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (2021-2024) addressed the challenges of youth unemployment in the country ($\bar{x} = 3.97$).

Table 2. Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents on awareness of social policies.

Items	Mean	SD
Nigeria has policies engineered toward alleviating youth unemployment in the last 20 years	3.95	0.25
Successive administrations implemented strategies to support young people through skills, education, employment, and social and public governance policies	3.96	0.24
Government policies have faced challenges because of inconsistencies and unqualified resource personnel handling the implementation process	3.96	0.24
Policies of successive governments have not elicited employment opportunities and inclusion for decent work and job-rich recovery for the youths in the labour market	3.95	0.25
Social policy such as the Nigerian youth employment action plan (NIYEAP) 2021-2024 addresses the challenges of youth unemployment in the country	3.97	0.22
Weighted mean	3.95	

Source: Field research, 2023.

4.3. Responses on Roles the Social Workers Play in Addressing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Table 3 shows the roles of social workers in reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. The weighted mean of 3.96 was determined and set as a benchmark for decision-making to answer this research question. The table reveals

that four [items 2 ($\bar{x} = 3.97$), 3 ($\bar{x} = 3.97$), 4 ($\bar{x} = 3.98$), and 5 ($\bar{x} = 3.97$)] out of the five items supported the roles of social workers toward reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. It can be deduced from the results that the social workers are not involved in youth development programmes (social action) in the different agencies or organisations where they work toward reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria ($\bar{x} = 3.95$) because the mean score is below the determined weighted mean of 3.96.

Table 3. Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents on roles of social workers.

Items	Mean	SD
Social workers are involved in youth development programmes in the different agencies or organisations where they work	3.95	0.25
Social workers promote the social, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being of youth in their community of practice	3.97	0.18
Social workers conduct research and surveys to determine the needs of youth and formulate programmes that are relevant for youth development and employment	3.97	0.18
Social workers are involved in the advocacy and administration of social welfare programmes to mobilise different stakeholders to develop policies and programmes for youth employment and entrepreneurship	3.98	0.15
Social workers use all methods of social work such as social case work, social group work, community organisation method, social welfare method, social action method, and social work research) to mobilise and motivate the youth on community development and nation-building	3.97	0.18
Weighted mean	3.96	

Source: Field research, 2023.

4.4. Responses on the Influence of Social Policy on Social Action toward Reducing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Table 4. Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents on the influence of social policy on social action.

Items	Mean	SD
Government policies and programmes such as the N-power initiative provide job opportunities, skills development, and entrepreneurship training for unemployed youth in Nigeria	3.96	0.20
Government policies and programmes (N-Power, YES-programme, and state-level and institutional-level programmes and initiatives) are driving training and employment opportunities to scale up youth employability, entrepreneurial opportunities, and inclusion in the Nigerian labour market	3.74	0.44
Government schemes such as the youth enterprise with innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN!) programme offer support to young entrepreneurs and grant them access to finance, business enterprise training, mentoring services, and networking opportunities.	3.96	0.20
The government has created an enabling environment for public-private partnerships involving mentorship programmes, internships, and apprenticeship programmes that are private-sector driven and social sector-led by high-network individuals, foundations, non-profit organisations	3.74	0.44
The government partners with international organisations such as the United Nations Childre's Fund UNICEF to implement social protection policies and programmes for vulnerable youths to enhance their employability through vocational training, scholarships, and apprenticeship training programmes	3.96	0.20
Weighted mean	3.87	

Source: Field research, 2023.

Information from Table 4 indicates the influence of social policy on social action toward reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. The weighted mean of 3.84 was set as a benchmark for decision-making to answer this research question. The table reveals that three items [1 ($\bar{x} = 3.96$), 3 ($\bar{x} = 3.96$), and 5 ($\bar{x} = 3.96$)] out of the five items supported the fact that social policy influenced social action toward reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. It is evident from the results that government policies and programmes such as N-Power, YES-Programme, state-level programmes, and institutional-level initiatives did not scale up youth employability, entrepreneurial opportunities,

and inclusion for unemployed youths to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria. The mean score of item 2 ($\bar{x} = 3.74$) was below the weighted mean of 3.87. The government has not created an enabling environment for public-private partnership programmes that are private-sector driven and social-sector-led toward reducing youth unemployment in the country. The mean score of item 4 ($\bar{x} = 3.74$) was below the weighted mean of 3.87.

4.5. Responses on How Roles of Social Workers are Embedded in the Interaction between Social Policy and Social Action to Innovate Interventions Toward Reducing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Table 5 reveals the roles of social workers embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action toward reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. The weighted mean of 3.35 was set as a benchmark for decision-making to answer this research question. The table reveals that seven [items 1 ($\bar{x} = 3.72$), 2 ($\bar{x} = 3.52$), 3 ($\bar{x} = 3.35$), 5 ($\bar{x} = 3.35$), 7 ($\bar{x} = 3.40$), 8 ($\bar{x} = 3.31$), and 10 ($\bar{x} = 3.35$)] out of the ten items supported the fact that the roles of social workers were embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action toward reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. Assessment and evaluation of unemployed youths by social workers were not embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action. The mean score of item 4 was below the weighted mean of 3.35. Case management and intervention work by social workers for unemployed youth was not embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action. The mean score of item 3 ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) was below the weighted mean of 3.35. Secondly, social workers have not engaged in broad-based consultations and collaboration with multidimensional stakeholders and hence have not created awareness about the potential of psychosocial services to build youths' employability skills. The mean score of item 4 ($\bar{x} = 3.22$) was below the weighted mean of 3.35. Lastly, social workers have not deployed the use of technology and artificial intelligence for data gathering, research, and advocacy to tackle youth unemployment in Nigeria. The mean score of item 5 ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) was below the weighted mean of 3.35.

Table 5. Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents on embedded roles of social workers in the interaction between social policy and social action.

Items	Mean	SD
Advocacy for social justice and human rights by social workers for unemployed youths is embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.	3.72	0.70
Collaboration with other professionals and organisations for intervention in youth unemployment by social workers is embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.	3.52	0.68
Case Management and Intervention of unemployed youths by social workers are embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.	3.35	0.63
Assessment and evaluation of unemployed youths by social workers are embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.	3.20	0.58
Facilitation of programmes to enhance education, employment opportunities, and overall community well-being of unemployed youths by social workers is embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.	3.35	0.63
Social workers engage in broad-based consultations and collaboration with multidimensional stakeholders to create awareness about the potential of psychosocial services to build youths' employability skills	3.22	0.59
Social workers can use community mobilisation to educate young people on self-help and cooperative initiatives for self-employment and entrepreneurship through micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).	3.40	0.61
Social workers can advocate for multidimensional approaches to rural community development and employment inclusiveness for youths in Nigeria	3.31	0.60
Social workers can deploy the use of technology and artificial intelligence for data gathering, research, and advocacy to tackle youth unemployment in Nigeria	3.11	0.55
Social workers can promote decent work, inclusion, and equity in the labour market thereby increasing opportunities for youth employment in the country	3.35	0.63
Weighted mean	3.35	

Source: Field research, 2023.

5. DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that social workers in Nigeria are aware of the existing social policies aimed at addressing youth unemployment. This finding aligns with [Andersson \(2022\)](#) who established a connection between strategies for tackling youth unemployment and the role of social workers through knowledge and communities of practice. Furthermore, [Ishaq \(2017\)](#) and [Ogochukwu and Ohazulike \(2021\)](#) asserted that social policies and social protection measures can effectively mitigate youth unemployment, particularly within the informal sector. [Irele \(2019\)](#) further argued that social workers possess knowledge of social welfare and social action theory, which enables them to understand youth unemployment as a significant social issue in Nigeria.

The study also revealed that while social workers maintain traditional roles, they are not actively involved in youth development programmes within the agencies and organisations that aim to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria. This observation contrasts slightly with the findings of [Liang et al. \(2017\)](#) who noted that few social work programmes specifically target unemployed youth, despite the increasing unemployment rates. They suggested that this gap should be addressed through improved employability, equal opportunities, job creation, entrepreneurship, and the integration of ecological perspectives into policy development, education, training, and direct social work practice focused on youth employment. The works of [Briar et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Fajimi \(2023\)](#) emphasise the traditional roles of social workers, affirming that they assist unemployed youth in coping with the social implications of unemployment and its societal consequences. Moreover, the study supports the findings of [Olubusoye et al. \(2023\)](#) regarding the relationship between social policy and social action in the context of youth unemployment. However, it emphasises that, despite the influence of social policy on social action, governmental policies and programmes have not sufficiently enhanced youth employability, entrepreneurial opportunities, or youth inclusion in the labour market in Nigeria. This perspective resonates with [Lamidi and Igbokwe \(2021\)](#) who pointed out that various governmental policies and social investment programmes have been designed to combat youth unemployment, which continues to be a persistent issue in the country. The limited integration of social workers' roles into the interaction between social policy and social action has resulted in their minimal contribution to initiatives aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. Social workers have not effectively employed case management, intervention strategies, assessment and evaluation, or programme facilitation within their communities to combat youth unemployment. A thorough review of the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (2021-2024) and the 2021 revised draft of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) indicated a conspicuous absence of terms such as "social work," "social welfare," "social workers," and "human services industry." This finding underscores the study's conclusion that social workers' roles are not adequately integrated into the interaction between social policy and social action. Although one of the objectives of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) is to provide social welfare with the aim of reducing youth unemployment, the roles of social workers remain unacknowledged in the value chain ([Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021](#)). While social workers possess the capacity to innovate interventions, they have yet to leverage technology and artificial intelligence for data collection, research, and advocacy to address youth unemployment in Nigeria. [Lorenzini and Giugni \(2010\)](#) and [Lorenzini and Giugni \(2016\)](#) support this study's assertion that providing social support for youth fosters social integration, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with unemployment. This represents a shift from the traditional responses to youth unemployment typically offered by human services professionals.

6. CONCLUSION

The study established that social workers in Nigeria recognise the existence of social policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment, a persistent social issue in the country. Although successive governments have formulated policies and implemented strategies to mitigate this challenge, social workers have remained relatively uninvolved in

youth development programmes within the agencies and organisations where they could collaborate with other key stakeholders in the social sector. Furthermore, the research highlights a disconnect between government policy formulation and the implementation of strategies to combat youth unemployment. Current governmental policies and programmes have not effectively increased youth employability, inclusiveness, or entrepreneurial opportunities, resulting in the continuation of high youth unemployment rates. The government has also failed to create an enabling environment conducive to sustainable public-private partnerships that could engage actors from both the private and social sectors in addressing youth unemployment. The roles of social workers are not effectively integrated into the relationship between social policy and social action, contributing to the ongoing youth unemployment crisis in Nigeria. Case management, intervention work, assessment and evaluation, and programme facilitation by social workers have not been incorporated into the development and execution of social policies. Additionally, social workers have not fully utilised technology and artificial intelligence for data collection, research, and advocacy aimed at reducing youth unemployment.

6.1. Recommendations

The study offers the following recommendations to enhance the roles of social workers in bridging the gap between social policy and social action regarding youth unemployment in Nigeria:

1. **Professional Development:** Professional associations, such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASoW), should implement membership education and continuing education programmes for recertification, ensuring members stay informed about social welfare policies and programmes. This initiative will empower them to engage relevant stakeholders effectively in efforts to reduce youth unemployment.
2. **Curriculum Enhancement:** Higher education institutions offering Social Work programmes should enrich their curricula and students' fieldwork experiences to include active participation in policy consultation and advocacy for youth employment, entrepreneurship, and inclusion through community development initiatives.
3. **Collaboration with Government Agencies:** The leadership of social work professional associations should collaborate with international agencies and relevant government bodies to consistently engage in policy reviews and programme implementations that ensure the active participation of social workers in bridging the gaps between social policy and social action.
4. **Creating an Enabling Environment:** Government agencies should strive to create an environment conducive to constructive social actions from the human services sector. This environment should encourage engagement with unemployed youth and other stakeholders, harmonising various government programmes through collaborative monitoring and evaluation processes to enhance the effectiveness of pro-social initiatives for Nigerian youth.
5. **Innovative Interventions:** Social workers should collaborate with other human services practitioners to deploy innovative interventions that utilise technology and artificial intelligence. These interventions should focus on providing institutional psychosocial support, including community development, transitional life skills, and entrepreneurial training to promote self-reliance and economic independence among youth navigating unemployment challenges.

6.2. Implications of the Study

The study underscores the secondary role of social work practice through social action, emphasising the critical implications of active advocacy and stakeholder engagement in the labour market and economy. Notably, the study advocates for a paradigm shift away from traditional engagement methods that may prove disruptive in a fragile

economy like Nigeria. Although labour unions have historically engaged in strikes with the government, these actions have yielded minimal results. It is anticipated that innovative approaches from social workers will strengthen existing policies and contribute to reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

6.3. Study Limitations and Strengths

This research represents one of the first examinations of social workers' roles in addressing the social problem of youth unemployment through the interplay of social policy and social action in Nigeria. Despite the long-standing history of social work practice in Nigeria, which predates the country's independence in 1960, the profession remains underrecognised within the human services ecosystem, limiting stakeholders' understanding of social workers' roles.

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Questionnaire

SECTION A: Demographic Information

Instruction: Please tick (✓) the most appropriate answer to the question raised.

1. *How old are you?*
 - a. 20 – 29 years old
 - b. 30 – 39 years old
 - c. 40 - 49 years old
 - d. 50 – 59 years old
 - e. 60+ years old

2. *What is your sex?*
 - a. Female
 - b. Male

3. *What is your level of educational attainment?*
 - a. Diploma
 - b. First Degree
 - c. Master's Degree
 - d. Doctorate Degree

4. *Where is the industry/sector where you currently practise as a social worker?*
 - a. Public Sector
 - b. Private Sector
 - c. Social Sector

5. *How many years of experience do you have in your professional practice as a social worker?*
 - a. Public Sector
 - a. Private Sector
 - b. Social Sector

Section B: Social Worker’s Awareness of Social Policy to reduce Youth Unemployment Scale

Instruction: Please tick (√) the most appropriate statement made in each item.

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		4	3	2	1
1	Nigeria has policies engineered toward alleviating youth unemployment in the last 20 years.				
2	Successive administrations implemented strategies to support young people through skills, education, employment, social, and public governance policies.				
3	Government policies have faced challenges because of inconsistencies and unqualified resource personnel handling the implementation process.				
4	Policies of successive governments have not elicited employment opportunities and inclusion for decent work and job-rich recovery for the youths in the labour market.				
5	Social policy such as the Nigerian youth employment action plan (NIYEAP) 2021-2024 addresses the challenges of youth unemployment in the country.				

Section C: Roles of Social Workers in Reducing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria Scale

Instruction: Please tick (√) the most appropriate statement made in each item.

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		4	3	2	1
1	Social workers are involved in youth development programmes in the different agencies or organisations where they work.				
2	Social workers promote the social, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being of youth in their community of practice				
3	Social workers conduct research and surveys to determine the needs of youth and formulate programmes that are relevant for youth development and employment.				
4	Social workers are involved in the advocacy and administration of social welfare programmes to mobilise different stakeholders to develop policies and programmes for youth employment and entrepreneurship.				
5	Social workers use all methods of social work such as Social Case Work, Social Group Work, Community Organisation Method, Social Welfare Method, Social Action Method, and Social Work Research) to mobilise and motivate the youth on community development and nation-building.				

Section D: Influence of Social Policy on Social Action toward reducing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria Scale

Instruction: Please tick (√) the most appropriate statement made in each item.

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		4	3	2	1
1	Government policies and programmes such as the N-Power initiative provide job opportunities, skills development, and entrepreneurship training for unemployed youth in Nigeria.				
2	Government policies and programmes (N-Power, YES-Programme, and state-level and institutional-level programmes and initiatives) are driving training and employment opportunities to scale up youth employability, entrepreneurial opportunities, and inclusion in the Nigerian labour market.				
3	Government schemes such as the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN!) programme offer support to young entrepreneurs and grant them access to finance, business enterprise training, mentoring services, and networking opportunities.				
4	The government has created an enabling environment for public-private partnerships involving mentorship programmes, internships, and apprenticeship programmes that are private-sector driven and social sector-led by high-network individuals, foundations, and non-profit organisations.				
5	The government partners with international organisations such as UNICEF to implement social protection policies and programmes for vulnerable youths to enhance their employability through vocational training, scholarships, and apprenticeship training programmes.				

Section E: Roles of Social Workers embedded in Interaction of Social Policy and Social Action Scale

Instruction: Please tick (√) the most appropriate statement made in each item.

N.	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		4	3	2	1
1	Advocacy for social justice and human rights by social workers for unemployed youths is embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.				
2	Collaboration with other professionals and organisations for intervention in youth unemployment by social workers is embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.				
3	Case Management and Intervention of unemployed youths by social workers are embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.				
4	Assessment and evaluation of unemployed youths by social workers are embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.				
5	Facilitation of programmes to enhance education, employment opportunities, and overall community well-being of unemployed youths by social workers is embedded in the interaction between social policy and social action.				
6	Social workers engage in broad-based consultations and collaboration with multidimensional stakeholders to create awareness about the potential of psychosocial services to build youths' employability skills.				
7	Social workers can use community mobilisation to educate young people on self-help and cooperative initiatives for self-employment and entrepreneurship through micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).				
8	Social workers can advocate for multidimensional approaches to rural community development and employment inclusiveness for youths in Nigeria.				
9	Social workers can deploy the use of technology and artificial intelligence for data gathering, research, and advocacy to tackle youth unemployment in Nigeria.				
10	Social workers can promote decent work, inclusion, and equity in the labour market thereby increasing opportunities for youth employment in the country.				

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