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Quiet Quitting Among Young Lawyers in Nigeria: Trends, Causes and Recommendations

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Abstract

"Quiet quitting," is a phrase that has been used to describe situations where employees put in only the minimal efforts required to perform the functions assigned to them or required of them. It should be noted that "quite quitting" has become a pervading issue not only in Nigeria but in many countries of the world and in different professions, but the scope of this paper is on how the legal profession in Nigeria is impacted by it. "Quiet quitting" has not only led to brain drain in Nigeria but has adversely affected the quality of legal and intellectual output especially among young lawyers. The doctrinal research methodology approach was adopted, relying on write ups from scholars in the field, statutes and other relevant materials. The objective of this paper was to do an expository of the issue of "quiet quitting" among young lawyers and proffer solutions to stem the tide. This work found out that "quiet quitting among young lawyers is majorly linked to job satisfaction and has to be immediately tackled. It recommended mentorship, flexible work timing, supportive work place culture and realistic workloads as a means of tackling quiet quitting in Nigeria

Keywords: Quiet quitting, Young Lawyers, Human resource management, legal practitioners, professional conduct.

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1. Introduction

'Quiet quitting' is a Human Resource (HR) phrase which describes a situation that occurs when employees within an organisation fulfil only the minimum requirements of their job roles without formally resigning.¹ It is a trend in which employees adhere strictly to their job responsibilities without engaging in additional efforts or exceeding their defined roles.² 'Quiet quitting' among young lawyers in Nigeria is on an all-time rise. Most young lawyers only practice law (litigation) where they do not find other better alternatives because they find the conditions unfavourable.³ The harsh realities faced by a young lawyer in Nigeria ranges from the poor remuneration, to poor work

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¹ T Mahand, and C Caldwell, 'Quiet quitting—causes and opportunities.' *Business and Management Research*, [2023] (12)(1), 9-19.

² S. Yıldız, 'Quiet Quitting: Causes, Consequences and Suggestions', *International Social Mentality and Researcher Thinkers Journal*, [2023] 9(70): 3180-3190. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/smryj.69426>

³ Unini Chioma, 'The FAMA Kaduna Law Webinar: Nigeria Young Lawyers, their many Challenges, and the way out of the Doldrums', *The Nigerian Lawyer* (July 18th, 2020) available at: <https://thenigerialawyer.com/the-fama-kaduna-law-webinar-nigerian-young-lawyers-their-many-challenges-and-the-way-out-of-the-doldrums/> (accessed on 3rd February, 2026).

environment/work tools and bad work culture, and this is leading to serious brain drain and low output among young lawyers.⁴ ‘Quiet quitting’ in Nigeria has become “a quiet pandemic” which little or no attention is being paid, but which if not tackled by giving it adequate attention with a view to solving the hydra headed problem can lead to a huge decline in the effectiveness of the legal profession in the future. The future of the legal profession would be at stake, unless the issues of quiet quitting among young lawyers in Nigeria is quickly addressed.

It is widely agreed that this phenomenon though newly coined, dates back beyond the Gallup report of 2022 that brought it to limelight.⁵ According to Lao and Pasco,⁶ the concept of ‘Quiet Quitting’ was initially introduced by economist Mark Boldger during a symposium that addressed the declining motivation among employees within corporations to pursue advancement in their careers. In the legal profession, quiet quitting among young lawyers takes the form of passive disengagement from work characterised by: avoiding extra tasks, limited participation in firm activities, or showing reduced enthusiasm for their job duties.⁷ Unlike traditional quitting, where employees resign following the due process either as required under employment and labour laws or under the contract of employment, quiet quitting involves staying in the role but without fully committing to the performance standards expected. This affects overall productivity and an organisation’s operations and raises legal issues that are not covered by employment laws.⁸

Quiet quitting typically manifests through minimal effort, compliance with only the basic job expectations, and disengagement from additional tasks or responsibilities. In law firms, this behaviour is particularly concerning because legal work often requires a high level of commitment, client-facing responsibilities, and long working hours.⁹ When young lawyers quietly quit, it can lead to delays in case management, reduced quality of legal work, and less innovation which can in turn lead to malpractice claims against law firms and legal practitioners resulting from their breach of the duties of dedication and devotion to cause of client and representing client competently.¹⁰ Young lawyers in Nigeria are particularly prone to quiet quitting due to several factors unique to the local legal industry. These include inadequate compensation, high pressure to meet client expectations, poor work-life balance, and a lack of professional development opportunities.¹¹ The high demands placed on young lawyers, combined with limited career advancement prospects and perceived inequities within the legal system, leads to dissatisfaction

⁴ D. Musa, “Noble Profession, Harsh beginnings: The Plight of Nigeria’s Young Legal Professionals” *Punch*, 26th June 2025 accessed at <https://punchng.com/noble-profession-harsh-beginnings-the-plight-of-nigerias-young-legal-professionals/> on 24th October, 2025

⁵ J.R. Johnson, ‘What’s New About Quiet Quitting (and What’s Not)’ (2023) *The Transdisciplinary Journal of Management*, 1-11.

⁶ C.J.M. Lao, and RB Pasco, ‘Why Employees Leave? A Basis for an Intervention Program to Counter Quiet Quitting.’ [2023] 1(1) *Journal Of Third World Economics (JTWE)*, 07-13.

⁷ J. Doraisamy, Are Lawyers ‘Quiet Quitting’ Their jobs? <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370440368_Quiet_Quitting_Causes_Consequences_and_Suggestions> (accessed 23 September 2024).

⁸ First Indemnity Insurance Group, There’s Nothing Quiet About Quiet Quitting Among Lawyers [2022], available at: <<https://firstindemnity.net/quiet-quitting-among-lawyers/>> (accessed 23 September 2024).

⁹ C.A. Ofoegbunam. ‘The intersection of Lawyers welfare and Justice Delivery: Challenges and Opportunities’ available at: <https://www.commonwealthlawyers.com/cia/the-intersection-of-lawyers-welfare-and-justice-delivery-challenges-and-opportunities-by-chinelo-audrey-ofoegbunam/> (accessed on 3rd February, 2026).

¹⁰ Ibid; See Rules 14 and 16 of the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners, 2007

¹¹ S. Udumezue, A Checklist of 70 Core Challenges Facing the Legal Profession in Nigeria’, *Courtroom Mail*. [2024] available at: <<https://www.courtroommail.com/a-checklist-of-70-core-challenges-facing-the-legal-profession-in-nigeria/>> (accessed 23 September 2024).

and disengagement, making quiet quitting a survival strategy in such a challenging environment.¹² Although a legal practitioner is defined in section 24 of the Legal Practitioners Act 2004 (LPA)¹³ as any person permitted by the LPA's provisions to practise law as a solicitor or barrister, either generally or for a particular purpose, there is no official definition of the term “young lawyer” in Nigeria. A universally accepted definition of a young lawyer does not exist because of varying perceptions across jurisdictions. However, structured definitions do exist in different countries, often based on age or years of practice. In the United States, for example, the American Bar Association (ABA) “for the purpose of its scholarship programme” considers a young lawyer to be one who is either under 36 years of age or has been licensed for no more than five years.¹⁴ In contrast, in Nigeria, membership in the Nigerian Bar Association's Young Lawyers Forum (YLF) is limited to those who have been at the Bar for no more than seven years. However, the definition of a young lawyer in the context of this paper is the same as the definition adopted by Abdusallam.¹⁵ Thus, a young lawyer is one who is “within the 30 to 35 years age bracket; or any lawyer who has been called to the Bar for less than ten years”.¹⁶ This paper aims to investigate the trends, underlying causes, and consequences of quiet quitting among young lawyers in Nigeria, while also providing recommendations for addressing this phenomenon. It emphasizes the examination of quiet quitting, often regarded as a human resource (HR) challenge, in relation to the legal framework that governs employment and professional behaviour. By integrating HR practices—such as remuneration, work-life balance, and career advancement—with the legal requirements set forth in the Labour Act (2004), the Legal Practitioner's Act (2004) and the Rules of Professional Conduct (2023), the paper aims to propose solutions that are both legally justified and advantageous for enhancing employee engagement within law firms.

2. Understanding Quiet Quitting as a Human Resource Challenge

The issue of quiet quitting is one that demands attention because it raises the risk of increased loss of human capital.¹⁷ It is particularly significant to discuss and address this issue of quiet quitting in the legal landscape, because it is an industry with a high performance expectation and intense professional demand.¹⁸ Generally, discussions on quiet quitting have shown that it manifests when employees limit their efforts to completing formal work tasks during paid hours without engaging in non-work-related activities, disruptive behaviours, or collective protests, while still maintaining their employment and prioritizing personal well-being over excessive work demands.¹⁹ These attributes of quiet quitting may mask its impact as a disruptive force, but it represents a considerable concern for human resources management because of its effects on productivity, employee

¹² D.K. Kip, Contemporary Issues Affecting the Legal Profession in Africa. [2023], available at: <<https://afribar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/PP-W-01-Contemporary-Issues-Affecting-the-Legal-Profession-in-Africa-By-DANIEL-K.-KIP.pdf>> (accessed 23 September 2024).

¹³ Cap L11 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.

¹⁴ Bamidele, ‘The Young Lawyer as a Mirror of Nigerian Bar’, *The Nation Online*, [2016] November 29. Available at: <[The young lawyer as mirror of Nigerian Bar - The Nation Newspaper \(thenationonline.net\)](https://thenationonline.net)> (accessed 20 September 2024).

¹⁵ G. Abdusallam, ‘Making the Legal Practice Attractive to a Young Lawyer – Any Lesson from Nigeria?’ [2022] (3)(10) *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 309-312.

¹⁶ Ibid, 309.

¹⁷ A. Serenko, ‘The Great Resignation: The Great Knowledge Exodus or the Onset of the Great Knowledge Revolution?’ [2023] (27) *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 1042-1055.

¹⁸ S. Le ‘The Legal Profession: Behind Closed Doors. Le Tran Law’, Available at: <<https://letranlaw.com/insights/legal-profession-behind-closed-door/>> (accessed 26 September 2024).

¹⁹ A. Serenko, ‘The Human Capital Management Perspective on Quiet Quitting: Recommendations for Employees, Managers, and National Policymakers’ [2023] *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 13.

engagement, and the overall morale of the organization.²⁰ By restricting their contributions to the minimum required, employees who engage in quiet quitting diminish their input towards innovation and team collaboration, which results in a decline in overall performance.²¹ This disengagement can further proliferate, negatively influencing workplace culture and impeding HR's capacity to tackle fundamental issues such as employee dissatisfaction or ineffective leadership.²² Furthermore, as found by Galanis *et al*²³ quiet quitting interferes with workforce development, obstructs employees' professional advancement and the long-term success of organizations, ultimately leading to challenges in retention and an increase in turnover rates. Quiet quitting has also been found to lead to employee disengagement²⁴ which according to the Gallup report costs the world economy about \$8.9 trillion or 9% of its gross domestic product.²⁵

Quiet quitting is generally not a phenomenon that is unprovoked but has been attributed to factors such as: job burnout, job dissatisfaction, inadequate compensation, poor work-life balance and lack of professional development opportunities. For instance, Öztürk *et al*²⁶ in their study identifying the triggers, antecedents and consequences of quiet quitting, identify work-life imbalance, toxic workplace culture, low salary, lack of career advancement opportunities, and work overload as the antecedents of quiet quitting especially among young employees. Discussions on quiet quitting in Nigeria reveal that it is generally triggered by pay discrepancies, blurred boundaries in workload expectations, lack of internal career progression, and poor leadership or toxic workplace culture.²⁷ Unjustified salary differences, tasks beyond designated roles without compensation, limited career advancement opportunities, and environments that stifle employee growth which conjunctively highlight inadequate corporate governance and ineffective management have also been identified as antecedents of quiet quitting among the Nigerian workforces.²⁸ This is like the antecedents of quiet quitting as identified in other countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. For instance, in the UK, burn-out, over-work and under-appreciation, toxic management and a lack of meaningful work have been cited as the main causes of quiet quitting.²⁹ However, in Australia,

²⁰ J. Harter, 'Is Quiet Quitting Real?' (Gallup, 2022). Available at: <https://www.celynarden.com/uploads/2/0/1/3/2013557/is_quiet_quitting_real.pdf> (accessed 26 September 2024).

²¹ J.R. Johnson, 'What's new about quiet quitting (and what's not)' *The Transdisciplinary Journal of Management*. [2023], available at: <<https://tjm.scholasticahq.com/article/72079-what-s-new-about-quiet-quitting-and-what-s-not>> (accessed 26 September 2024).

²² N. Pevec, 'The concept of identifying factors of quiet quitting in organizations: an integrative literature review' [2023] (2) *Challenges of the Future*, 128-147.

²³ P. Galanis, I. Moisoglou, M. Malliarou, I.V. Papathanasiou, A. Katsiroumpa, I. Vraha, O. Siskou, O. Konstantakopoulou, & D. Kaitelidou, 'Quiet Quitting Among Nurses Increases Their Turnover Intention: Evidence from Greece in the Post-COVID-19 Era' [2023] 12(1) *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 79.

²⁴ S. Bhaimiya, 'A Staggering 90% of Employees in the UK are Quiet Quitting as They Seek Out Other Opportunities, Gallup Report Says' *CNBC Make It* (London, 13 June 2024) Available at: <[A staggering 90% of employees in the UK are 'quiet quitting' as they seek out other opportunities, Gallup report says](#)> (accessed 26 September 2024).

²⁵ Gallup Report, 'State of the Global Workplace: from struggling to thriving' (2024), available at: <<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>> (accessed 26 September 2024).

²⁶ E. Öztürk, O.U. Arıkan, and M. Ocak, 'Understanding Quiet Quitting: Triggers, Antecedents, and Consequences' [2023] 10(18) *International Journal of Behavior, Sustainability and Management*, 57-79.

²⁷ J. Oyelade, 'Quiet Quitting- Another Workforce Pandemic' *Business Day*, (Lagos, 16 January 2023) Available at: <<https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/quiet-quitting-another-workforce-pandemic/>> (accessed 26 September 2024).

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ S. Terlesky, 'Quiet Quitting and How to Combat it' *Factorial* (26 March 2024). Available at: <<https://factorialhr.co.uk/blog/quiet-quitting/>> (accessed 28 September 2024); E. Taggart and T. Boles 'The Three Main Reasons UK Workers are 'Quietly Quitting' *The Times* (London, 24 June 2024) Available at: <<https://www.thetimes.com/business-money/companies/article/why-uk-workers-quit-gdp-economy-x2mmszvk6>> (accessed 20 September 2024).

quiet quitting is said to be driven by factors such as remote work reducing connection and engagement, burnout from workplace challenges, fear of job insecurity, and generational differences in values and expectations, particularly with Gen Z and Gen Y seeking growth opportunities and better work-life balance.

From the above, although quiet quitting in Nigeria, the UK, and Australia shares common triggers such as burnout, poor leadership, and lack of career progression, the underlying causes differ based on local work cultures. In Nigeria, pay discrepancies, blurred workload boundaries, and poor corporate governance are significant drivers, reflecting systemic management inefficiencies and workplace inequalities. The UK also emphasizes burnout and toxic management but highlights under-appreciation and a lack of meaningful work as key contributors, reflecting concerns around work recognition. In Australia, remote work, generational differences, and job insecurity due to technological change are more prominent, signalling a workplace transformation driven by digitalization and shifting work-life priorities. These variations portray the differing economic, cultural, and technological landscapes in each country, affecting how employees relate to their work and respond to organizational challenges.

3. Trends and Causes of Quiet Quitting among Young Lawyers in Nigeria

In recent years, quiet quitting has emerged as a notable trend in the legal profession despite the scarcity of discussions on the subject matter, particularly among young lawyers who are made to deal with high expectations and long hours.³⁰ The trend has increased disengagement from work without going through the process of traditionally resigning. The increase in the quiet quitting trend is attributable to the demanding nature of legal practice, where extended work hours, high caseloads, and rigid hierarchies are common.³¹ Discussions on quiet quitting among lawyers in other jurisdictions such as in the UK, Australia and the US have increased due to the impact it is having on the economy.³² For instance, a report by Employment Lawyers in the UK reveals that 90% of the UK workforce feel disengaged at work and are 'quiet quitting'.³³ Although the statistics covers not just the workforce of the legal landscape but extends to the general workforce in the UK, it has however raised high concerns and triggered discussions on how this can be curtailed across different professions.³⁴

In the UK legal profession, the concept of quiet quitting has been identified as a phenomenon driven by younger generations, however it has also been criticised on the grounds that it contrasts with the culture of law, which traditionally values long hours and high performance.³⁵ Critics of the concept have argued that disengaged lawyers should leave the legal profession entirely, but others view quiet quitting as a sign of graver problems, such as unsustainable working conditions and unrealistic expectations driven by high salaries.³⁶ The debate shows a generational divide where older lawyers may dismiss the trend as weak, while younger lawyers are concerned with better work-life balance and psychological safety in a profession that has not fully adapted to the

³⁰ H. Cullen-Jafar, 'Are Lawyers 'Quiet Quitting'?' *Law.Com International*, (14 September 2024) available at: <<https://www.law.com/international-edition/2022/09/14/are-lawyers-quiet-quitting/?slreturn=2024100180606>> (accessed 29 September 2024).

³¹ Ibid.

³² First Indemnity Insurance Group, 'There's Nothing Quiet About Quiet Quitting Among Lawyers' (2023), available at: <<https://firstindemnity.net/quiet-quitting-among-lawyers/>> accessed 29 September 2024

³³ H.K. Grewal, 'Employers must tackle 'quiet quitting through culture of mutual respect' *Facilitate Magazine*, (27 June 2024), available at: <<https://www.facilitatemagazine.com/content/news/2024/06/27/employers-must-tackle-quiet-quitting-through-culture-mutual-respect>> (accessed 28 September 2024).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ n 27.

³⁶ Ibid.

changing world of work.³⁷ Despite the varied views on the implication and importance of addressing the issue of quiet quitting in the legal profession, it is undoubted that lawyers who engage in quiet quitting exhibit minimal effort and disengagement, which can have serious consequences for law firms, including the risk of malpractice claims and reputational damage.³⁸

In Australia, the trend of quiet quitting among lawyers has gained momentum, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic which has led many legal professionals to re-evaluate their work-life balance, personal priorities, and career goals.³⁹ Quiet quitting, has emerged as a way for lawyers to reclaim boundaries between their personal and professional lives. While high achievers in law firms were traditionally expected to meet the demanding hours and pressures associated with the profession, the pandemic has triggered a shift as many lawyers, especially those unhappy with their firm's work culture or dissatisfied with the lack of career growth, are choosing to quietly reduce their efforts rather than seek new employment immediately.⁴⁰ This trend is particularly prevalent in part-time roles and among those who prioritize family responsibilities.⁴¹ The causes of quiet quitting in Australia's legal sector include the intensification of workplace demands, burnout, and the growing appeal of flexible working arrangements.⁴² As law firms push for a return to pre-pandemic office norms, many lawyers are resisting, seeking greater autonomy and rejecting the "hustle culture" traditionally associated with legal careers. The implications are significant as law firms that fail to address the root causes of quiet quitting face reduced productivity, higher turnover rates, and a loss of talent to smaller firms or public sector roles where work-life balance is more valued.⁴³ This trend has therefore raised concerns within the legal space in Australia as more lawyers are seeking sustainable work environments that align with their personal values.⁴⁴

While attention has been paid to the quiet quitting trend among lawyers in other jurisdictions, this is not the case within the Nigerian legal space as there is almost no academic or professional discussion on the quiet quitting trend. This goes to show that the issue has not received the attention it needs for it to be taken seriously enough for recommendations to be offered to contain the negative impact on the Nigerian workforce. Despite the lack of attention paid to quiet quitting among lawyers in Nigeria, several happenings and events have pointed to the existence and prevalence of quiet quitting among young lawyers in the Nigerian legal profession. This is because most of the discussions on the challenges faced by young lawyers in Nigeria, highlight inadequate remuneration, lack of decent workplaces,⁴⁵ insufficient practical skills, and limited access to resources as some of the obvious challenges.⁴⁶ Young lawyers also struggle with finding proper

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ n 29.

³⁹ J. Doraisamy, 'Are Lawyers 'Quiet Quitting' their Jobs?' *Lawyers Weekly* (15 August 2022), available at: <<https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/35208-are-lawyers-quiet-quitting-their-jobs>> (accessed 29 September 2024).

⁴⁰ A. Tufvesson, 'How Quiet Quitting is Taking Hold in Law' *Law Society Journal* [2022], available at: <[How quiet quitting is taking hold in law - Law Society Journal \(lsj.com.au\)](https://www.law.society.org.au/journal/article/how-quiet-quitting-is-taking-hold-in-law)> (accessed 29 September 2024).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² T. Carroll, 'Quiet Quitting' and 'Slow Dumping' – why breaking up is not so hard after all' *Australian Law Management Journal* [2024], available at: <['Quiet quitting' and 'slow dumping' – why breaking up is not so hard after all - Law Management Hub \(lmhub.com.au\)](https://www.lmh.com.au/articles/quiet-quitting-and-slow-dumping)> (accessed 29 September 2024).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Professions in Nigeria, 'Surviving Your First Year as a Lawyer in Nigeria' [2023], available at: <[Surviving Your First Year as a Lawyer in Nigeria \(professions.ng\)](https://www.professions.ng/surviving-your-first-year-as-a-lawyer-in-nigeria)> (accessed 29 September 2024).

⁴⁶ Bamidele, 'The Young Lawyer as a Mirror of Nigerian Bar' *The Nation Online*, (Lagos, 29 November 2016), available at: <[The young lawyer as mirror of Nigerian Bar - The Nation Newspaper \(thenationonline.net\)](https://www.thenationonline.net/the-young-lawyer-as-a-mirror-of-nigerian-bar/)> (accessed 20 September 2024).

mentorship, balancing high workloads, and adapting to technological advancements in the legal profession.⁴⁷

Despite the lack of formal acknowledgment, the challenges faced by young lawyers in Nigeria have striking similarities to the conditions fuelling quiet quitting in legal professions in the UK and Australia. Quiet quitting in the UK and Australia is largely driven by unsustainable working conditions, rigid workplace cultures, and the desire for better work-life balance, all of which resonate with the experience of young Nigerian lawyers. Even without formal research, the evidence of low morale, dissatisfaction with pay, lack of career advancement, and overwhelming workloads strongly suggests that quiet quitting is an underlying threat in the Nigerian legal profession. Addressing this issue requires acknowledgment and reform within the industry, otherwise, the legal profession risks losing its talent to more flexible and accommodating sectors or jurisdictions.

4. Quiet Quitting and the Legal Framework Governing Employment and Professional Conduct of Young Lawyers

The key Nigerian laws governing employment, and the legal profession are the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Hereinafter referred to as the constitution),⁴⁸ the Labour Act (2004), the LPA and the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners (RPC).⁴⁹ These laws provide a background for understanding the quiet quitting trend among young lawyers in Nigeria from a legal perspective.

The Constitution which has been argued to be the “*grundnorm*”, the “*fons et origo*” and the supreme law of Nigeria from whence other laws derive their validity,⁵⁰ is one of the legal frameworks for understanding the concept and trend of quiet quitting among young lawyers in Nigeria. Section 34(1) (a-c) of the Constitution (Subject to the exceptions specified in Subsection (2) paragraphs (a)-(e)) guarantee individual rights to dignity of person. Specifically, section 34(1) (a) provides that: “every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment”. The provision underpins the expectation that workers, including lawyers, are entitled to a work environment that upholds their dignity and psychological well-being. Quiet quitting can be seen as a response to the failure of many law firms to create humane and supportive work environments, which contributes to mental health challenges, burnout, and emotional disengagement. Excessive workloads, poor remuneration, and a lack of mentorship can constitute “degrading treatment”, pushing young lawyers to disengage as a means of self-preservation. Although these issues may not amount to overt physical abuse, they can lead to emotional and psychological distress, which undermines the dignity protected under Section 34.

At first glance, the Nigerian Labour Act⁵¹ appears to be the principal legislation regulating employment relationships and the obligations of employees and employers in Nigeria. However, its application as seen in the definition of a worker as used in Section 91 of the Act is limited to employees engaged under a contract of labour or clerical work in private and the public sectors.

⁴⁷ n 12.

⁴⁸ 1999 (As amended).

⁴⁹ 2023.

⁵⁰ O.V.C. Ikpeze, ‘Constitutionalism and Development in Nigeria: The 1999 Constitution and Role of Lawyers’ *African Journal Online* [2010] <[file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/ajol-file-journals 479 articles 138210 submission proof 138210-5653-369108-1-10-20160624.pdf](file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/ajol-file-journals%20479%20articles%20138210%20submission%20proof%20138210-5653-369108-1-10-20160624.pdf)> (accessed 30 September 2024).

⁵¹ Cap L1, LFN 2004 hereinafter referred to as “the Act”

The Act in the definition of “worker” expressly excludes *inter alia*, persons exercising administrative, executive or professional functions as public officers or otherwise. The implication of this is that the Labour Act does not primarily govern the relationship that exists between legal practitioners working in their professional capacity in Nigeria and their employees. This view is also maintained by Jimoh⁵² who maintains that the “Labour Act is not applicable to employment contracts between lawyers in Nigeria in an employer and employee relationship”. The reasons the author gave for his stance are that employment contracts between legal practitioners and their employers are governed by the Legal Practitioners Act (LPA), which takes precedence as a specific legal framework for the legal profession, while the Labour Act applies generally to other employment contracts. Although the view is supported to the extent that the Labour Act does not specifically apply to the contractual relationship between legal practitioners functioning in their professional capacity and their employers, the view that the LPA guides the relationship is flawed. This is because although the LPA governs professional conduct and standards but does not specifically address basic employment conditions like remuneration, hours of work, or employment benefits, which are central to the Labour Act. The exclusion of legal professionals from the Labour Act, and the LPA’s limited scope on employment matters, creates a regulatory vacuum that allows law firms to impose demanding work conditions without repercussions. This lack of protection is a significant factor contributing to quiet quitting among young Nigerian lawyers, as they silently withdraw from their jobs rather than formally resign, due to dissatisfaction with their working conditions.

The legal profession is rooted in a culture of diligence, excellence, and commitment to the rule of law, as evidenced by the high ethical standards required of lawyers. Thus, just like the LPA, the RPC the LPA and the RPC provides a robust ethical framework to ensure that lawyers uphold professional standards. As is the case with the LPA, the RPC also falls short of offering a comprehensive regulatory framework for the employment relationship between lawyers and their employers. Remuneration, working conditions, job benefits, and protections against unfair treatment are also not addressed by the RPC, leaving a regulatory gap that can lead to exploitation and dissatisfaction, particularly among young lawyers. However, while the RPC do not expressly regulate the employment relationship between lawyers and their employers, several provisions can indirectly shape and influence this dynamic by emphasizing ethical obligations, fair dealing, and the maintenance of professional integrity. These provisions create a framework that indirectly governs the behaviour and expectations of legal practitioners within their professional engagements, including the employment context. For instance, Rule 1 of the RPC states that a lawyer shall “uphold and observe the rule of law, promote, and foster the cause of justice, maintain a high standard of professional conduct, and shall not engage in any conduct unbecoming of a legal practitioner”. This provision sets the tone for how a lawyer must conduct themselves in all professional settings, including in relation to their employer employee relationship. Also, Rule 27(1) imposes an obligation on lawyers to observe good faith and fairness in dealing with other lawyers. This provision can be extended to intra-firm relationships and as such, senior lawyers acting as employers or managers are required to treat junior lawyers fairly, creating an expectation of mutual respect, transparency, and fair dealing within law firms. In practice, this provision is supposed to act as a deterrent to employers of young lawyers from exploiting them through unfair workload assignments, under-compensation, or denial of professional growth opportunities, as such conduct would violate the principles of good faith and fairness.

⁵² H.A. Jimoh, ‘Labour Act, 2004: Whether Applicable to Employment Contracts between Lawyers in Nigeria in an Employer and Employee Relationship’. *Law Pavillion* [2022], available at: <<https://lawpavilion.com/blog/labour-act-2004-whether-applicable-to-employment-contracts-between-lawyers-in-nigeria-in-an-employer-and-employee-relationship/>> (accessed 30 September 2024).

The emphasis on upholding the rule of law, fair dealing, good faith, and independent judgment⁵³ creates a framework where lawyers are protected from unethical demands by their employers. Additionally, the potential for professional misconduct sanctions under Rule 74 provides a powerful deterrent against any behaviour that would compromise the ethical integrity of the profession. Therefore, the RPC indirectly enforces a regulatory framework that ensures a balance between lawyers' employment obligations and their ethical duties, promoting a professional environment grounded in integrity, fairness, and justice. In addition to the RPC, employment contracts guide the relationship between legal practitioners and their employers and being a contract, it is subject to the general principles of contract.

5. Theoretical Framework on Employee Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the phenomenon of quiet quitting among young lawyers in Nigeria. It evidences the different levels of unmet needs that may drive disengagement and ultimately quiet quitting. At the basic levels of physiological and safety needs, young lawyers face low wages, poor working conditions, and job insecurity, which leads to frustration and dissatisfaction.⁵⁴ This is especially common in environments where long hours and demanding workloads are not matched with adequate compensation or clear career progression. When these fundamental needs are unmet, young lawyers may quietly disengage from their roles, performing only the minimum required, as they prioritize personal well-being over professional ambition.⁵⁵

At the higher levels of social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, quiet quitting can be conceived as a response to the lack of fulfilment in these areas.⁵⁶ Young lawyers may feel isolated in hierarchical law firms, experiencing limited opportunities for collaboration, recognition, or meaningful professional growth. Without a sense of belonging, recognition for their contributions, or opportunities to achieve personal and professional goals, they may lose motivation and reduce their engagement.⁵⁷ Addressing these issues requires not only better financial rewards but also fostering inclusive work environments that offer mentorship, acknowledgment of contributions, and opportunities for young lawyers to develop and advance in their careers.

6. Implications of Quiet Quitting in the Legal Profession

Quiet quitting among young lawyers in the legal profession may appear harmless but it presents significant implications, particularly when viewed through the lens of the Legal Practitioners Act (LPA) and the Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) for legal practitioners in Nigeria. The LPA and RPC set high standards for legal practitioners, expecting them to maintain integrity, promote justice, and uphold the rule of law.⁵⁸ These standards require diligence, commitment, and a high level of professional responsibility.⁵⁹ However, when young lawyers engage in quiet quitting—choosing to disengage from their work and only meet the bare minimum requirements—they risk violating key ethical obligations. The RPC emphasizes that lawyers must maintain a high standard

⁵³ Rule 1 and Rule 27 of the RPC.

⁵⁴ J.C. Rivera, 'Human Resource Trends and Perspectives: An International HEI Experience' [2019] 9(1) *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 85112.

⁵⁵ n 39.

⁵⁶ B. Frates, 'Applications to self/self-care/self-coaching, role-modelling' *Routledge International Handbook of Positive Health Sciences*, (Routledge, 2023), 173-190.

⁵⁷ A. Tufvesson n 40.

⁵⁸ S.K. Agwu and K.S. Buzugbe, 'Rethinking Professional Negligence by Legal Practitioners in Nigeria' [2023] *Journal of Public and Private Law*, UNIZIK.

⁵⁹ A. Obi Okoye, *Law in Practice in Nigeria: Professional Responsibilities and Lawyering Skills*, 1 ed. (Snaap Press Ltd., 2011) 251-254.

of professional conduct (Rule 1), exhibit good faith in their dealings with other lawyers (Rule 27), and ensure that their actions do not obstruct the administration of justice (Rule 30). Quiet quitting, which involves reduced engagement and effort, directly conflicts with these obligations, as it may lead to negligence, delay in legal proceedings, and diminished quality of legal services.⁶⁰

Moreover, quiet quitting undermines the professional reputation of both individual lawyers and the legal profession. The RPC holds that lawyers are officers of the court (Rule 30) and are expected to act in ways that advance justice. Quiet quitting, by lowering the quality of representation and delaying the resolution of cases, erodes trust in the profession. This trend results in increased scrutiny from clients, the courts, and regulatory bodies, leading to potential disciplinary actions and legal actions under the LPA, which holds lawyers accountable for professional misconduct⁶¹ (Section 11). Additionally, young lawyers who disengage from their work could inadvertently breach the duty of competence, leading to legal malpractice claims or ethical violations, which further strain the legal profession.⁶² Therefore, quiet quitting among young lawyers not only threatens individual career progression but also endangers the integrity and functioning of the Nigerian legal system, as the RPC and LPA place a premium on dedication and professional responsibility that quiet quitting directly contravenes.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations for Mitigating Quiet Quitting among Young Lawyers in Nigeria

7.1 Conclusion

Quiet quitting among young lawyers in Nigeria reflects a significant challenge within the legal profession, characterized by minimal engagement and compliance with only basic job expectations. This trend is driven by various factors, including inadequate compensation, overwhelming workloads, and a lack of professional development opportunities. The phenomenon not only affects individual morale but also poses risks to the overall productivity and reputation of law firms. Legal frameworks governing employment relationships, such as the Labour Act and the Legal Practitioners Act, fail to address fundamental issues like remuneration and working conditions, creating a regulatory vacuum that exacerbates dissatisfaction. To mitigate the impact of quiet quitting, law firms must adopt comprehensive HR practices that prioritize employee well-being, foster career growth, and cultivate a supportive work environment. By addressing these systemic issues, the legal profession can enhance engagement and retention among young lawyers, ultimately promoting a healthier workplace culture that aligns with ethical standards and professional integrity. Without such reforms, the risk of losing talent to more accommodating sectors remains high, underscoring the urgent need for change within the industry.

7.2 Recommendations

Flowing from the findings from this research, it is recommended that:

- i. On their part, young lawyers should take active steps to recognize the long-term impact of disengagement on their careers and professional reputations and take proactive measures to regain control of their work-life balance. This may include seeking mentorship to develop better coping mechanisms, negotiating flexible working hours and requesting clarity on career progression pathways. It is also recommended that young lawyers should prioritize self-care and well-being by setting realistic personal and professional goals,

⁶⁰ J. Doraisamy n 39.

⁶¹ First Indemnity Insurance Group n 32.

⁶² Ibid.

engaging in mindfulness practices, and participating in support networks such as young lawyers' forums and professional groups that can help mitigate burnout. Lastly, they should consider continuous legal education to sharpen their skills, which can open doors to more fulfilling roles and reduce frustration caused by feelings of stagnation.

- ii. Employers of young lawyers, should take steps to identify quiet quitting trends and foster an inclusive and supportive workplace culture that promotes work-life balance. This includes offering flexible work arrangements such as remote work, hybrid work options, telecommuting, flexitime schedule and reduced hours. They should also ensure equitable workloads and make provisions for fair compensation. Employees should also establish mentorship programs, where senior lawyers can guide younger lawyers through the challenges of legal practice. Employers should also openly communicate career development opportunities and create structured paths for progression. Regular feedback mechanisms should be employed to gauge employee satisfaction, and employers should be willing to adjust firm policies to accommodate employee needs. By addressing the root causes of disengagement, such as excessive workloads, poor remuneration, and lack of career growth, law firms can reduce quiet quitting and promote a more engaged workforce.
- iii. Policymakers can mitigate quiet quitting by amend existing legal frameworks, such as the Legal Practitioners Act (LPA), to address the working conditions of legal practitioners. This could involve extending certain employment protections to lawyers, including provisions for reasonable working hours, fair pay, and protections against workplace exploitation. Furthermore, regulatory bodies like the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) should conduct regular surveys on job satisfaction and well-being among legal practitioners, providing data-driven insights into the challenges faced by young lawyers. The NBA can also play a pivotal role by advocating for mental health and wellness policies within law firms and offering free or subsidized mental health services to lawyers struggling with burnout. In essence, proactive legal reform and institutional support will be key in reducing the rise of quiet quitting within the profession.