

Workplace Flexibility and Millennial Engagement among Healthcare Professionals in Ogun West, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of workplace flexibility on millennial job engagement in state hospitals within Ogun West Senatorial District, Nigeria, drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among healthcare professionals in two state hospitals in Ogun West, with a total population of 246 and a proportionate sample of 151 respondents selected through probability-based methods. The study employed a structured questionnaire comprising 16 items on workplace flexibility, 15 on autonomy, 14 on professional growth, and 13 on engagement, all measured on a 5-point Likert scale. A pilot study with 30 healthcare professionals was used to validate the instrument. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28.0), including descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. The study found that workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth are positively linked to engagement, with autonomy and professional growth identified as significant predictors, and the regression model explaining 42% of the variance in engagement ($R^2 = 0.42$; $F(2, 148) = 24.87$; $p < 0.01$). A small minority reported that excessive autonomy created ambiguity and stress, suggesting that autonomy should be structured by clear expectations and feedback. The findings are situated within emerging evidence on generational differences in Nigerian healthcare. The study recommends that hospital administrators and policymakers implement structured autonomy, strengthen professional development systems, and institutionalise flexible work policies to enhance millennial engagement and retention.

Keywords: Autonomy, Generational cohorts, Healthcare professionals, JD-R Model, Millennial engagement, Nigeria, Ogun State, Workplace flexibility.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's public health sector is experiencing significant changes, influenced in part by demographic trends such as the increasing presence of millennials (born 1981–1996) among healthcare professionals. Millennials are generally associated with a preference for greater autonomy, flexible work arrangements, ongoing professional development, and meaningful work, as well as a decreased tolerance for strict bureaucratic systems (Flexible work arrangements, 2025; LASUPSJ, 2024). Recent work by Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo has documented marked generational differences in job satisfaction and work attitudes among healthcare staff in Nigeria, underscoring the need for cohort-sensitive HR strategies in hospitals (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025). In Ogun West Senatorial District, state hospitals face persistent challenges of staff motivation and retention, especially among younger cadres, raising concerns about the sustainability of service delivery.

Studies from around the world and in Africa show that workplace flexibility and job resources, such as autonomy and development opportunities, are important for keeping healthcare workers engaged and reducing turnover (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Szilvassy, 2022; Opoku et al., 2024). But in Nigeria, public hospitals often have fixed schedules, limited staff input during shifts, and weak career development, leading to dissatisfaction among younger professionals (Ujah et al., 2023; Embugus et al., 2023; Magaji et al., 2023). While some Nigerian research has examined flexible work and performance in hospitals, there is limited data on millennial engagement in state-owned health facilities in Ogun State (Ujah et al., 2023; Embugus et al., 2023). This is important because different generations have different expectations and reactions to HR practices (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025).

This study, therefore, investigates how workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth influence millennial engagement among healthcare professionals in selected state hospitals in Ogun West. Guided by the JD-R Model, the study addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between workplace flexibility and millennial job engagement.
2. To determine the influence of autonomy on millennial job engagement.
3. To assess the effect of professional growth opportunities on millennial job engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Engagement

Work engagement is conceptualised as a positive, work-related state of fulfilment characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Szilvassy, 2022). Engaged healthcare workers display high energy, psychological involvement, and a strong sense of significance in their roles, which are linked with better patient care, lower absenteeism, and improved performance (Opoku et al., 2024). In healthcare contexts, sustained engagement is critical given the high demands and emotional labour inherent in patient care (Opoku et al., 2024).

Millennials (Generation Y), Generational Cohorts and Engagement

Millennials, usually defined as people born between 1981 and 1996, make up a large part of today's healthcare workforce and are often seen as tech-savvy, eager for feedback, and motivated by purpose and growth (Akinbode et al., 2021; Onukwuba, 2020). In Nigeria, studies show that millennial engagement is influenced by a workplace culture that values employees, open communication, meaningful work, and clear career paths (Jobberman Nigeria, 2019). Research also shows that generations in Nigerian healthcare differ in their levels of job satisfaction and expectations. Generation Y, in particular, reports higher satisfaction when they receive recognition, feedback, and career opportunities (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025). These results suggest that hospitals should adjust their engagement strategies to align with the primary generational group, especially when millennials are the majority.

Workplace Flexibility

Workplace flexibility refers to policies and practices that provide employees with some discretion over when, where, and how work is carried out, including flexible scheduling, shift swaps, compressed work weeks, and, where feasible, remote or hybrid work (Ujah et al., 2023; LASUPSJ, 2024). Studies in the Nigerian service sector indicate that flexible work arrangements, such as flexible work hours, remote-hybrid options, and flexible time-off, have a significant positive effect on employee retention (Jamie et al., 2025). However, in many public hospitals, flexibility remains constrained by staffing shortages, rigid rosters, and limited managerial support, resulting in challenges with engagement (LASUPSJ, 2024).

Autonomy

Autonomy means how much control employees have over their schedules, work methods, and decisions in their jobs (Onukwuba, 2020). According to Job Characteristics Theory and the JD-R framework, autonomy is a key job resource that boosts motivation, learning, and engagement by giving people a sense of responsibility and control (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Szilvassy, 2022). However, Contingency Theory and recent studies warn that if autonomy is not clearly structured or supported by feedback, it can lead to confusion, slow decision-making, and increase stress, especially in complex fields like healthcare (Onukwuba, 2020; Embugus et al., 2023).

Professional Growth

Professional growth encompasses training, upskilling, mentorship, promotion opportunities, and support for further education or certification. Evidence from Nigerian and sub-Saharan African health systems demonstrates that systematic investment in career development is associated with higher engagement, performance, and retention among healthcare staff (Ogbuma, 2025; Opoku et al., 2024). Millennials, in particular, place strong emphasis on continuous learning and clear career trajectories, making professional growth a critical resource for sustaining their engagement (Jobberman Nigeria, 2019; Akinbode et al., 2021). Generational studies reveal that younger healthcare workers in Ogun State, Nigeria, are more likely to disengage from or leave organisations that fail to provide clear opportunities for professional development (Akinbo & Al'Hassan, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The study is primarily based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, with additional ideas from Self-Determination Theory, Job Characteristics Theory, and Contingency Theory.

The JD-R Model posits that job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and development opportunities buffer the negative effects of job demands and promote engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In this study, workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth are conceptualised as key job resources that can energise millennials and foster engagement amid high healthcare demands.

Self-Determination Theory emphasises basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as drivers of intrinsic motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy and professional growth directly support the needs for autonomy and competence, helping to sustain engaged, self-determined behaviour among millennial staff.

Job Characteristics Theory holds that autonomy, variety of skills, and meaningful tasks are key job features that lead to strong motivation and good work outcomes (Szilvassy, 2022). In hospitals, giving staff structured autonomy and chances to use and grow their skills should help increase engagement.

Contingency Theory says that how well flexibility and autonomy work depends on factors such as structure, supervision, and clear roles (Onukwuba, 2020). Too much autonomy without clear expectations can cause confusion and stress, potentially lowering engagement among some staff.

While theories suggest that job resources such as workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth may influence employee engagement, the current study provides empirical evidence regarding their impact on millennial engagement in the Nigerian context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Setting

The study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to examine relationships among variables at a single point in time. It took place in two state hospitals in Ogun West Senatorial District, Nigeria: State Hospital, Ilaro, and State Hospital, Ota. Both hospitals offer secondary healthcare and employ clinical staff (including nurses, doctors, and laboratory scientists) and support staff.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The study focused on 246 healthcare professionals in the two hospitals, including nurses, doctors, lab staff, and administrative or support staff. A sample of 151 respondents was chosen from the total population using Yamane's formula, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample size is suitable for multiple regression analysis with a few predictors. Each hospital contributed to the sample in proportion to its share of the total population, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Hospital	Staff Population
State Hospital, Ilaro	68
State Hospital, Ota	178
Total	246

Table 1: Population of Healthcare Professionals in Selected State Hospitals, Ogun West

Hospital	Staff Population	Proportion (%)	Sample Size
State Hospital, Ilaro	68	27.6	42
State Hospital, Ota	178	72.4	109
Total	246	100	151

Table 2: Sample Size Proportion by Hospital

Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, with special attention given to millennial employees (born 1981–1996), who comprised the majority of respondents for this analysis; staff from older cohorts were also included in the data to ensure comprehensive representation.

Instrumentation and Measures

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into five sections: demographic information, workplace flexibility, autonomy, professional growth, and millennial engagement. Items for engagement were adapted from established measures of work engagement that capture vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Szilvassy, 2022). Workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth were measured using Likert-type items derived from prior surveys on flexible work arrangements, job resources, and career development in healthcare.

The final instrument comprised 16 items on workplace flexibility, 15 items on autonomy, 14 items on professional growth, and 13 items on engagement (measuring vigour, dedication, and absorption), in addition to 7 demographic items (age, gender, professional cadre, years of experience, education level, marital status, and hospital location). All items utilised a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated higher perceived workplace flexibility, autonomy, professional growth, and engagement.

Instrument Validation and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by two academics in human resource management and two senior healthcare managers, who examined each item for clarity, relevance, and coverage of the underlying constructs; their suggestions led to minor rewording and the removal of items considered ambiguous or redundant. Face validity and clarity were further assessed through a pilot study involving 30 healthcare professionals drawn from a state hospital outside the study sites; data from the pilot were used only for instrument refinement and were not included in the main analysis.

Using the pilot and main-study data, item–total correlations were examined in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28.0), and poorly performing items (very low correlations and weak conceptual alignment) were considered for modification or deletion. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and all scales recorded coefficients above the 0.70 threshold, indicating acceptable reliability for research use:

- Workplace flexibility: $\alpha = 0.78$
- Autonomy: $\alpha = 0.81$
- Professional growth: $\alpha = 0.75$
- Engagement: $\alpha = 0.79$

To minimise careless responding and to check that respondents answered with a reasonable level of attention, each scale included at least one reverse-coded item; response patterns on these items were inspected, and questionnaires showing obvious straight-lining or inconsistent patterns were flagged. All 151 questionnaires were retained as valid, indicating respondents answered with an acceptable level of confidence and consistency.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaires were distributed in person during working hours with hospital management's permission. Participation was voluntary, and respondents gave informed consent. Their anonymity and confidentiality were protected by using identification codes rather than names. Ethics approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review committee prior to data collection.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28.0). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were computed to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and the distribution of the main study variables. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis in SPSS was employed to examine the bivariate relationships between workplace flexibility, autonomy, professional growth, and millennial engagement.

To determine the predictive influence of the job resources on millennial engagement, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted in SPSS, with engagement as the dependent variable and autonomy and professional growth as independent variables. (Workplace flexibility was not included as a predictor in the final regression model due to multicollinearity concerns with autonomy; however, it was retained in descriptive and correlational analyses.) The model produced an R^2 of 0.42, indicating that the predictors jointly explained 42% of the variance in engagement among millennial healthcare professionals, and the overall F-statistic was $F(2, 148) = 24.87$, which was statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. All tests were conducted at the 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Prior to the regression analysis, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were assessed using residual plots, skewness and kurtosis values, variance inflation factors (VIF), and tolerance statistics. Tolerance values ranged from 0.62 to 0.68, and VIF values ranged from 1.47 to 1.61, all falling within acceptable limits ($VIF < 10$; tolerance > 0.1). Residual plots showed approximately normal distributions with relatively even scatter around the regression line, suggesting that the assumptions were adequately met for the data.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

A total of 151 healthcare professionals participated in the study. Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		

Male	67	44.4
Female	84	55.6
Age Group		
21–30	54	35.8
31–40	69	45.7
41–50	22	14.6
51 and above	6	4.0
Professional Cadre		
Nurse	90	59.6
Medical Doctor	34	22.5
Lab Scientist/Officer	16	10.6
Admin/Support Staff	11	7.3

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The age distribution confirms that the workforce is predominantly millennial, with 81.5% of respondents aged between 21 and 40 years. Female respondents comprised 55.6% of the sample. Nursing staff represented the largest professional cadre at 59.6%, followed by medical doctors at 22.5%. These demographic patterns align with current trends in Nigerian healthcare systems, where nursing is the largest professional group, and millennials are the dominant cohort.

Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for the main study variables.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Workplace Flexibility	151	3.28	0.92	1.00–5.00
Autonomy	151	3.41	0.88	1.13–5.00
Professional Growth	151	3.35	0.85	1.43–5.00
Engagement	151	3.52	0.76	1.69–5.00

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Main Variables

Respondents reported moderate to high levels on all four main variables, with engagement showing the highest mean ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.76$), followed by autonomy ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.88$), professional growth ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.85$), and workplace flexibility ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.92$). The relatively high engagement scores suggest that millennial healthcare professionals in the study hospitals do experience meaningful engagement, despite recognised systemic constraints.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between the predictor variables and engagement. Table 5 presents the results.

Variable	Correlation Engagement	with	Significance	Key Insight
Flexibility Index	0.56		$p < 0.01$	Flexibility increases engagement
Autonomy	0.51		$p < 0.01$	High autonomy boosts engagement
Professional Growth	0.48		$p < 0.01$	Growth opportunities drive motivation
Excess Autonomy	—		—	Can cause ambiguity for a minority

Table 5: Correlation of Variables with Engagement

Workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth each showed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship with engagement, all at $p < 0.01$. The strongest correlation was between workplace flexibility and engagement ($r = 0.56$), followed by autonomy and engagement ($r = 0.51$), and professional growth and engagement ($r = 0.48$). These results align with the Job Demands–Resources Model's prediction that job resources promote engagement.

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with engagement as the dependent variable and autonomy and professional growth as independent variables. Table 6 presents the unstandardised (B) and standardised (Beta) regression coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and significance levels.

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t-value	Sig. (p)
Constant	2.14	0.27	—	7.93	0.000
Autonomy	0.37	0.08	0.31	4.63	0.000
Professional Growth	0.29	0.09	0.26	3.22	0.002

Table 6: Regression Analysis—Predictors of Millennial Engagement

The regression model was statistically significant: $F(2, 148) = 24.87$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.42$. Both autonomy ($B = 0.37$, $t = 4.63$, $p < 0.001$) and professional growth ($B = 0.29$, $t = 3.22$, $p = 0.002$) were significant positive predictors of millennial engagement. The standardised coefficients (Beta) indicate that autonomy had a slightly stronger relative influence ($\beta = 0.31$) on engagement compared to professional growth ($\beta = 0.26$). The model explained 42% of the variance in engagement ($R^2 = 0.42$), with the remaining 58% attributable to other factors not included in this analysis.

Experiences of Excess Autonomy

Although autonomy emerged as a significant predictor of engagement, the study also examined whether excessive or poorly structured autonomy created challenges for respondents. Table 7 presents the frequency and percentage of respondents who reported experiencing challenges due to excess autonomy.

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Unclear job expectations	14	9.3
Delayed decision-making	5	3.3
Increased stress or burnout	7	4.6
No significant challenge	125	82.8

Table 7: Frequency of Challenges Experienced Due to Excess Autonomy

While the vast majority (82.8%) of respondents reported no significant challenges from excess autonomy, 26 respondents (17.2%) indicated experiencing some difficulties. The most commonly reported challenge was unclear job expectations (9.3%), followed by increased stress or burnout (4.6%) and delayed decision-making (3.3%). These findings align with Contingency Theory predictions that autonomy must be paired with clear role definitions and supportive supervision to prevent negative outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth are positively related to millennial engagement in Ogun West state hospitals, aligning with the JD-R assumption that job resources foster engagement in high-demand environments (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The positive regression coefficients for autonomy and professional growth reinforce prior evidence that empowering employees and investing in their development lead to more energetic, dedicated, and engaged workers in healthcare (Opoku et al., 2024; Embugus et al., 2023; Ujah et al., 2023).

The prominence of autonomy and professional growth as predictors reflects millennial preferences for control over how work is done and for visible development pathways, echoing broader Nigerian and African studies on workforce expectations among younger cohorts (Akinbode et al., 2021; Jobberman Nigeria, 2019; Onukwuba, 2020). This pattern aligns with findings by Akinbo and Al'Hassan-Ewuoso, who report that Generation Y in Nigerian healthcare settings had the highest job satisfaction ratings (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025, pp. 1569–1578).

At the same time, the minority experience of ambiguity and stress under excess autonomy supports contingency arguments that autonomy must be balanced with role clarity and supportive supervision, and with feedback mechanisms, especially in settings where errors can have serious consequences for patients (Onukwuba, 2020; Embugus et al., 2023). This suggests that simply granting autonomy without structural supports may not improve engagement for all staff; rather, autonomy must be intentionally designed to clarify decision boundaries, foster accountability, and enable timely feedback.

The strong correlation between workplace flexibility and engagement ($r = 0.56$), despite resource constraints in public hospitals, underscores the value that millennials place on work arrangement options. This study provides specific evidence from Ogun West's public hospitals, where strict schedules and limited resources make implementing full workplace flexibility challenging. Still, engagement can be improved by offering well-designed job resources. These findings add to Nigerian research on flexible work and engagement, showing that millennials' engagement is strongly influenced by how much autonomy and growth they feel they have, even if full flexible work is not possible (Ujah et al., 2023; Embugus et al., 2023; Magaji et al., 2023; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025).

The R^2 of 0.42 indicates that while the three job resources examined are important, other factors, such as compensation, organisational commitment, supervisor support, peer relationships, and individual personality traits, also contribute significantly to millennial engagement in healthcare. Future research should explore these additional predictors to build a more comprehensive model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Hospital Administrators

- Implement **structured autonomy** by formalising autonomy policies that define decision boundaries, scheduling options, and supervisory expectations, combining flexibility with regular performance feedback and coaching.
- Strengthen **professional development systems** through annual training plans, mentorship programmes, and transparent criteria for promotion and sponsorship of certifications, prioritising areas aligned with hospital needs and millennial career aspirations (Ogbuma, 2025; Opoku et al., 2024).
- Institutionalise **flexibility where feasible** by using flexible shift systems and shift swaps, and, where clinically appropriate, limited remote tasks such as teleconsultation and virtual meetings, without compromising patient care (Embugus et al., 2023; Magaji et al., 2023).
- Monitor **engagement continuously** through periodic surveys and data dashboards that track engagement, absenteeism, and turnover by cadre and age group, with attention to generational patterns (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025).
- Provide **leadership training** for supervisors and managers on feedback, coaching, and team engagement to help leaders utilise autonomy and flexibility without sacrificing clarity and accountability.

For Healthcare Professionals

- Actively engage in available learning and development opportunities, seek mentorship, and provide constructive feedback on the implementation of autonomy and flexibility policies.
- Strengthen peer support and knowledge sharing through team-based learning, case discussions, and informal mentoring to help colleagues navigate flexible arrangements and avoid role ambiguity.
- Contribute to inclusive policy design processes by participating in staff forums and suggestion systems, ensuring that millennial perspectives and needs are represented.

For Policymakers and Regulators

- Integrate evidence-based flexible work practices and structured career development into state and national health human resource policies, guidelines, and performance frameworks (Ogbuma, 2025; LASUPSJ, 2024).
- Invest in enabling infrastructure such as digital health systems, e-learning platforms, and adequate staffing to support flexible scheduling, remote learning, and blended work models where appropriate.
- Establish minimum standards for autonomy and professional development support in public sector healthcare facilities.

For NGOs and Development Partners

- Support capacity building and mentorship by funding targeted training, leadership development, and mentorship schemes in public hospitals, especially in underserved areas of Ogun West.
- Use research evidence on engagement, flexibility, generational dynamics, and performance to advocate for reforms in public sector HR policies and to design pilot interventions that can be evaluated and scaled (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso & Akinbo, 2025).

By Cadre and Organisational Level

- For **clinical staff**, ensure that flexible shifts are combined with adequate staffing, peer support, and mechanisms to manage stress and burnout.
- For **supervisors and managers**, provide leadership training on feedback, coaching, and team engagement to help managers utilise autonomy and flexibility without sacrificing clarity and accountability.
- At the **organisation-wide level**, build a strong feedback culture through regular staff forums, suggestion systems, and inclusive policy design processes involving millennial representatives and other generational cohorts.

CONCLUSION

Millennial engagement in Ogun West's state hospitals is strongly influenced by perceived workplace flexibility, autonomy, and professional growth, which operate as key job resources within the JD-R framework. Autonomy and professional growth emerge as significant predictors of engagement, together explaining 42% of the variance in engagement. At the same time, a small subset of staff (17.2%) experience ambiguity and stress due to poorly structured autonomy, underscoring the need for a balance between flexibility and clear expectations. Incorporating generational insights, such as those from Al'Hassan-Ewuoso and colleagues, underscores the importance of tailoring HR practices to cohort-specific expectations.

The use of a validated 58-item instrument (16 flexibility, 15 autonomy, 14 professional growth, and 13 engagement items) measured on a 5-point Likert scale, combined with rigorous validity and reliability testing (Cronbach's alpha values > 0.75), and data analysis via IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28.0), ensured methodological robustness. The descriptive cross-sectional design captures important associations in the Nigerian context, though causality cannot be inferred.

Institutional reforms that prioritise structured autonomy, robust professional development, and context-appropriate flexibility are essential for retaining millennial talent, improving service quality, and advancing health system goals in Nigeria. Hospitals should view these investments not as luxuries but as strategic necessities for workforce sustainability and improved patient outcomes.

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