The 3 a.m. Phone Call: A Gendered Perspective on the Working Conditions of Kenyan Online Writers

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Abstract: *Working on an online labour platform, whenever time permits, would seem to provide a particular opportunity for women who are often burdened with multiple tasks. Yet, in two large phone surveys with Kenyan online platform workers (2018 and 2023), we found that the gender ratio among Kenyan online workers is around 4-1 in favour of men. This study examines the main reasons for this imbalance. We find two factors: (i) men's low expectations of women's capacity to deliver; and (ii) the need for night work on short notice and short turn-around times. Such short-notice night work with high deadline pressure induces high levels of "manager-controlled flexibility," which cannot easily be met by women who juggle multiple responsibilities. In paying particular attention to Kenya's largest online work sector, online writing, we outline the sub-sectoral differences in online work – manager-controlled flexibility is higher in some sectors (academic writing) and lower in others (transcription). Our results show that this is directly related to the proportional numbers of women in these two sectors, which in turn has implications for policy makers.*

JEL classification: F16, F66, J16, J21, J31, J46, L14, O15, O33, O55
Key words: online labour, gender disparities, working conditions, gig economy, manager-controlled flexibility.

1 Introduction

As the future of work, working from home, working from anywhere, flexible work, hybrid work, and digital freelancing are widely discussed in the years after the Covid-19 Pandemic, the literature on online platform work has long implied that the realm of online work (or online labour) can help to mitigate the work-place gender disparities found in regular office employment (Kuek et al. 2015; World Bank 2016). For Heeks (2017) notes that *"developing country participation rates for women undertaking DGE* [digital gig economy] *work – while still below those for men –* [is] *well above rates more generally for non-agricultural work."* (p, 9). But Lehdonvirta & Margaryan (2019) note the lack of knowledge on gender disparities in online labour:

> *"Some disparate statistics are available on crowdworkers' gender; for instance, one survey finds workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk to be approximately equally likely to be female and male, and CrowdFlower's (recently rebranded as FigureEight) workers to be 73% male (Berg, 2016). No research is available on how crowdworkers' learning and skill development may differ between genders"* (p. 14).

It should indeed be easier for women to find online work than offline work if online work is typically done from home and women tend to be more burdened than men with childcare and related household responsibilities (Barbulescu & Bidwell 2012; Blau et al. 2016; Chung et al. 2017; Goodman 1974). But contrary to initial hopes for online labour, our empirical findings in Kenya come to results that are more in line with findings that point to significant gender disparities in online labour (Adams-Prassl 2020; Foong & Gerber 2022). In the branch of international development cooperation that is concerned with digital jobs creation and the future of work in the global South, overall disparities have led several development aid organisations to commission studies on this question (S4YE 2018 & 2020; Singh et al. 2022; Bailur & Nababaalo 2022; IFC 2022). In this article, we theorise these disparities using the conceptual juxtaposition of 'worker-controlled flexibility' vs. 'manager-controlled flexibility' (Henly et al. 2006; Lehdonvirta 2018).

2 Background and Context

Flexibility and Gender in Online Work

Comparing the time management practices of workers on three gig work platforms, Vili Lehdonvirta (2018) follows Gold & Mustafa (2013) in bringing online labour into the wider debates around the merits and demerits of worker flexibility (Hyman et al. 2005, Henly et al. 2006; Lambert et al. 2012; Wood 2016). Particularly for the freest and seemingly most flexible workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT), Lehdonvirta points out a parallel with flexible offline work: *"Wood's (2016) finding that for workers with little bargaining power, what is formally worker-controlled flexibility will in practice turn into manager-controlled flexibility,*

negating flexibility's expected benefits to the worker" (Lehdonvirta et al. 2018). Worker-controlled flexibility is what is advertised by platforms and valued by gig workers alike as the key attribute of online work: the freedom to work when, where, and how much one pleases (Kessler 2018). Manager-controlled flexibility, by contrast, is what is demanded by employers of standby workers such as fire fighters, who, when on call, need to be ready to work in an instant when a task arises. The obvious difference is that on-call emergency workers have stand-by time factored into working hours as part of their regular employment, whereas those bottom-rung gig workers who rely on any work they can get to make ends meet are not paid for stand-by time and cannot afford ever not to be 'on call.'

In a related strand of literature, a timely article by Abi Adams-Prassl (2020) follows Cook et al. (2018) in bringing online labour into the wider literature on pay differences between men and women (Bertrand et al. 2010; Goldin & Katz 2016; Blau & Khan 2017). Adams-Prassl's (2020) findings feed into the current debates over the effects of working-from-home on worker wellbeing and productivity, particularly for women. She shows that in an otherwise gender-blind context, AMT workers experience no pay and performance differences between men and women *without* children, leaving a significant reduction for women *with* children. She shows how multi-tasking with children hampers women's productivity when working from home and their ability to remain 'on call' to capitalise on the most lucrative AMT tasks.

We merge these two strands of literature for our explanation of gender disparities among Kenyan male and female online writers. In turn, we hope our findings can contribute to theory development and will be tested in other empirical contexts.

Context – Kenyan online writing

Kenya is among the world's three leading countries in academic writing (Walker 2019; Kingori 2021; according to Lancaster, 2019, the other two countries are Pakistan and India).[2] Contrary to widely held notions of online labour as 'individualised' work (Lehdonvirta et al. 2019) that can be conducted 'from anywhere' (Kakkad et al. 2021), Kenyan online writers work in hierarchically structured groups that can be described as 'virtual small-and-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)' (Melia 2020). While often not operating from the same office, stable teams of online writers display the organisational hallmarks of firms, reducing transaction costs (Coase 1937). Geographically, these virtual SMEs tend to work in tight-knit agglomerations that can be described as digital 'survival clusters' (Melia 2020), where informal enterprises reap the benefits of proximity to one another (Altenburg & Mayer-Stamer 1998). Several studies of working conditions and remuneration on online platforms have made the distinction between workers' time spent working and time spent looking for work (Wood et al. 2019;

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[2] We use the term "online writing" or "writing" to refer to both academic writing (i.e., ghost writing for overseas' students) and article writing (i.e., blog post or review articles for websites). Even though we mainly studied the larger academic writing sector, we lump both tasks together under "writing," and deliberately keep the language vague for reasons of positionality, since this article does not address our stance on the various ethical implications of ghost writing for overseas' students (see also Walker 2019, p. 91ff).

Anwar & Graham 2022). In the Kenyan online writing sector, this labour is divided among account managers whose main task is to bring in work from the platform and redistribute it, and writers who complete the work. In this paper, we refer to the account mangers as 're-outsourcers,' and to their writers as 'outsourcees.'[3] We thus build on the literature that examines the trust, learning, and collaboration among networks of seemingly disparate but socially embedded workers (Wood 2019; Granovetter 1985; Polanyi 1957). Methodologically, in the context of Kenyan online writing, surveying through the platform would miss this division of labour as the person answering the survey request is always an account manager, never one of their writers. Another distinction in the writing industry is that different writing platforms offer either 'bid' accounts (where account managers must bid on work) or 'take' accounts, where managers have the option to allocate themselves work tasks that have been posted on the forum. 'Take' platform accounts tend to be of a higher level and more lucrative. Furthermore, writing platforms seem to have adjusted to the reality that writing is not conducted by atomized individuals but by groups of multiple writers, because 'multiple take' platform accounts exist, allowing account managers to assign themselves five or ten writing tasks at the same time. The largest multiple take account we have seen advertised for sale in a writers' social media group had '65 takes' (see online Appendix III for screenshot). Since these writing assignments are mostly short turnaround projects of one or two days, the existence of multiple take platforms is evidence that these writing platforms are consciously dealing with further intermediaries, the account managers of virtual SMEs (Melia 2020). An examination of this context through the lens of gender disparities may yield further insights into this sector and may serve as a guide for tracing broader dynamics in outwardly different sectors.

3 Methods and Baseline Findings from 2018: Generating Hypotheses

Methodologically, we follow Foong & Gerber (2021), who study gender disparities in online labour platforms using a mixed methods approach with a large venue-based survey at the core. Our study is based on two phone surveys conducted in November 2018 (N=527) and in February 2023 (N=570) with online workers in Kenya. Online workers are a hard-to-survey population, making representative sampling of population-wide pools unfeasible (Tourangeau et al. 2014). The pool of respondents was thus drawn from venue samples of various snowball tracks, consisting of lists of active online workers and online work trainees (provided in 2018 by the Kenya Private Sector Alliance) and from online worker's social media forums (WhatsApp groups).

We then categorised the (N=527) respondents into:

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[3] In the Kenan online writing industry, the former are often referred to as "account managers" or "employers" (even though none give employment contracts as all writing is conducted as freelance work), and the latter are referred to as "writers" who work "under someone". This is the terminology we adopted for the phone survey (see Appendix IV).

(i)   *Aspiring online workers:* those who had made a genuine effort to become online workers but had not (yet) succeeded in earning money online (n=170);

(ii)   *Active online workers:* those who actively earned money as online workers at the time (n=251); and

(iii)   *Retired online workers:* those who had in the past earned money in online work but were at the time no longer active in online work (107) (See also Appendix 1 for more details on the methodology and for our guide on research ethics).

The survey was complemented by longform interviews with online workers (N=84) in 2017-19 (for our initial findings, see Melia 2020), and focus group discussions (FGDs, N=8) in 2018 with online workers in six Kenyan cities (Eldoret, Kilifi, Kisumu/Maseno, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru). In these FGDs and in 24 of the interviews, we used the wisdom-of-crowds (WoC) method (Surowieky 2004; Lehrer et al. 2019), asking participants to estimate the proportional sizes of the various sub-sectors in online work (more on this below).

The questions were initially based on an earlier survey.[4] But in our team of professional online workers, our questions were changed to blend into the Kenyan context. All survey calls and the FGDs were conducted in a peer-to-peer manner by Kenyan online workers including three of the authors of this paper, and others who were employed and trained as surveyors.

Baseline Findings from 2018 Survey: The Different Types of Online Work in Kenya

According to data obtained through the Online Labour Index (OLI; Kässi & Lehdonvirta 2018), Kenya has the highest number of online workers in Sub-Saharan Africa (slightly more than South Africa or Nigeria). Cross-referencing the OLI data with our 2018 survey results, we found that the number of Kenyans who actively earned was around 36,452 (i.e., between 25,000 and 53,700, bootstrapped 95% confidence interval) (Melia & Kässi 2021). Our actively earning respondents reported average monthly incomes from online work at KES 37,000 (median KES 25,000). Regarding the types of online work conducted in Kenya, our 2018 survey indicated that most were academic writers (40% of respondents), engaged in ghost writing for university students in Anglophone countries of the global North; followed by article writers (26% of respondents), engaged in blog posting and product descriptions for websites. The third largest group was transcribers (18% of respondents), and the remaining 16% of respondents included a variety of tasks, such as marketing, data entry, web development, and virtual assistance (see Figure 1).

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[4] This survey had been used for a series of publications in the iLabour Project at the Oxford Internet Institute (we thank Alex J. Wood for making these questions available to us).

Figure 1: Prevalence of Types of Online Work Task in Kenya

Prevalence of Types of Online Work Tasks in Kenya
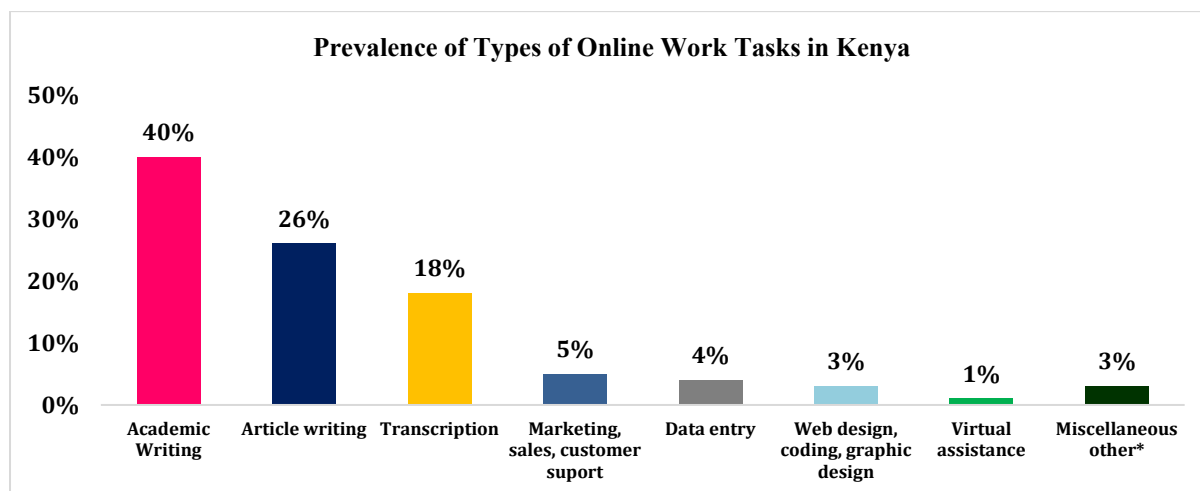
*This includes cyber security, accounting, surveys, travel advice, design.
Note: see Appendix I for the detailed methodology.

This was based on a non-representative survey, but our venue sampling used several different snowball tracks, some of which skewed against academic writing (i.e., social media forums for transcription, and trainee lists of government programs that discourage academic writing), while others skewed towards it (social media forums for academic writing).[5] Despite this non-representative mix of snowball tracks, our Wisdom-of-Crowds (WoC) method came to nearly identical results: In this method (N=73), deployed for the focus group discussions (individually with the 49 FGD participants) and for a subset of our longform interviews (n=24) – we asked respondents to estimate the proportional size of Kenya's largest online work tasks. Nearly all labelled the largest task as either "academic writing" or "writing", and the WoC method (adding all guesses and dividing them by the number of guesses) resulted in 66.5% "[academic] writers."

Focusing on the three largest tasks (academic writing, article writing, and transcription), we found differences and similarities in their attributes: income levels were similar (most online workers earning between US$ 200-400 monthly). Women were clearly in the minority – 22% of all respondents, i.e., of aspiring, active, and retired online workers (see Figure 2).

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[5] Parts of our respondent pools came from lists of government-sponsored online work trainings, which actively discouraged academic writing. The pool of respondents was filled up with contacts from various issue-specific social media groups, some focused on other tasks like transcription, but many focused on academic writing.

Figure 2: Online Worker Gender Distribution in 2018 survey (N=527)
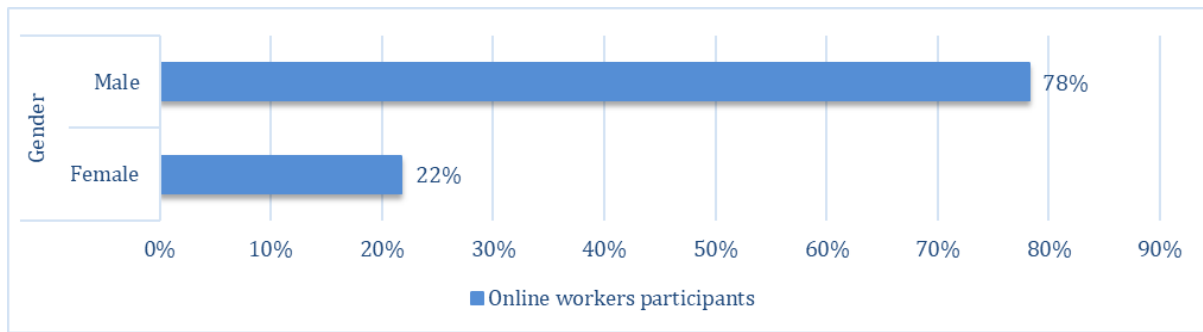
Source: authors, 2018 Survey.

The gender disparity was lowest among the group of aspiring and highest among the group of active online workers. For active online workers, among the highest proportions of women were found in transcription services (35%) and among the lowest in academic writing (13%) (see Figure 3).[6]

Figure 3: Gender Distribution of Online Workers by Type of Online Work Task Performed
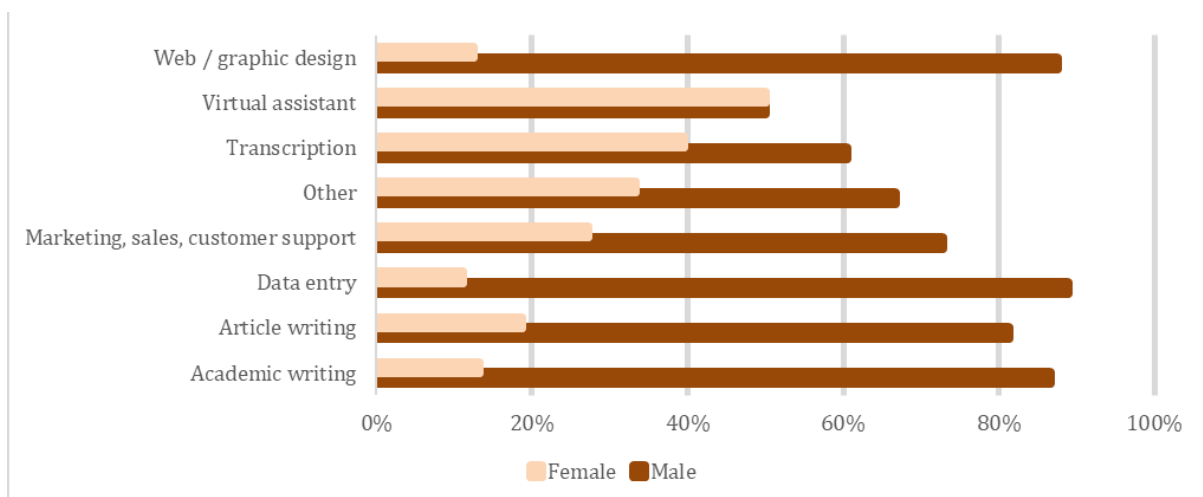
Source: authors, 2018 survey results. Note that these are not representative findings. They are based on venues sampling via various snowball tracks for a survey of N=527 active, inactive, and aspiring online workers.

Entry barriers, measured by levels of education, were high across all three tasks – most Kenyan online workers either already have or are in the process of attaining university degrees (above 80%). But entry barriers by age are different: lowest in academic writing, where the median age of respondents is 23, and highest in transcription (median age 26). Most academic writers tend to start working online whilst studying at university. More article writers and transcribers, by contrast, tend to begin online work sometime later in life. A tentative finding was that academic writers, who mostly started in their third or fourth years of undergraduate university studies, often transitioned into article writing but less frequently into transcription.

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[6] The task of Virtual Assistants has a 50% gender split, but the number of respondents was so much small (n=2) that this result needs to be discarded.

This oscillation between *academic* writing and *article* writing led many respondents not to distinguish between the two tasks (or not to articulate which type of writing task they were referring to). Transcribers may have career trajectories that are different from those of academic/article writers: besides starting later in life, transcribers may tend to work more alone or in smaller groups and might be geographically less clustered. But due to our sampling method and the smaller pool of transcribers, this was a hypothesis that was to be tested in our 2023 survey (see below).

Since the dynamics and terminology used in different online work subsectors differ, we focused the 2023 survey on Kenya's largest sub-sector of online work: online writing.[7] This approach entailed that we needed to discard potentially valuable insights from other online work sectors. We only gathered information on other online work tasks, such as transcription, in comparison to writing (i.e., we asked the 'Ex'-online writers in our survey who had moved on to different forms of online work to compare their new and old tasks).

The 2018 survey results had thus left us with five tentative findings to explore in a more focused follow-up survey. The 2023 survey is thus grouped into five sections based on separate research questions.[8] The current paper examines why there seem to be few women among Kenyan online workers, and even fewer women among Kenya's largest online work sub-sector, online writing. We zoom in to explain the reasons for gender disparities among Kenya's online writers.

4 Findings from 2023 Survey: Testing Hypotheses and Probing Deeper into Online Writers

Insights from the initial 2018 survey led us to concentrate the 2023 survey on writers, splitting the (N=570) respondents into:

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[7] The narrower definition of our subject matter is academic writing, or ghost writing. But for positionality reason, we refer to this work as 'writing' in the main text (see Fn. 2 above)

[8] The main findings of our 2018 survey were that Kenyan academic writers: (i) organize into groups that resemble virtual firms; (ii) cluster geographically in an otherwise non-distinct suburb; (iii) work in tight-knit digital networks that serve as trading platforms and as trust- and reputation-building mechanisms; (iv) need to be highly reactive to short-term emergency assignments, mostly at night; (v) are nearly nine men for every woman; (vi) tend not to sign up for new platform accounts but instead buy existing ones on the black market, working under false identities, and thus run great risks of losing their investments and livelihoods; (vii) despite their hardships, Kenyan online workers of all stripes overwhelmingly viewed their work in a positive light. We intend to address each of these in separate articles/chapters based on the 2023 survey. From this list, the current paper's research question explores the link between finding (iv) and (v). Yet to be analysed are potentially novel findings based on longitudinal insights from the two surveys – e.g., panel data on career trajectories of those online workers we reached in both surveys, regarding the influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on online work and the changing use of technology such as ChatGPT.

(i)   *Active Jr. online writers:* Those who actively earned in online writing but did not own their own platform accounts (n=105);

(ii) *Active Sr. online writers:* Those who actively earned in online writing on their own platform accounts and/or re-outsourced writing work to others (n=127);

(iii) *Retired online writers:* those who had in the past actively earned in online writing on their own platform accounts and/or had re-outsourced writing work to others, and those who had started out as Jr. online writers and were now active in other forms of online work (other than writing) (n=55).

(iv) *Terminated calls:* respondents who did not fit into any of the above categories, either because they were not actively earning online or had never been Sr online writers in the past (n=283).

Much like the 2018 survey, the 2023 survey was again conducted via phone in a peer-to-peer manner by five experienced online workers. In numerous dry runs and pilot calls, we revised and refined the survey questionnaire and then conducted the calls. The pool was again drawn from the 527 respondents of the 2018 survey (for panel data), and, due to an anticipated low call-back rate after 4.5 years between the legs of the panel, the pool was replenished with new respondents via social media forums for online writing. We followed all GDPR and academic ethics standards. We gave respondents the prior option to opt in, were transparent with respondents about the nature of the research, it's funding bodies, promised access to the results, assured respondents of their anonymity, requested verbal consent before recording, instructed surveyors on the sensitivity of the collected data, signed confidentiality/nondisclosure agreements with all surveyors, researchers and data analyst who came in contact with the data, reminded the surveyors to keep respondents' names (if known) out of the survey, eventually separated/encoded the respondents phone numbers from the final data set (all survey questions and our full methodology can be viewed in Appendix II).

Building on the Preliminary Findings from the 2018 Survey

Based on the 2018 survey alone, we had made a first attempt at examining the reasons for the overall gender disparity, and the sub-sectoral differences. Probing deeper in the accompanying long-form interviews and FGDs, three key themes emerged:

Asymmetrical dependency and poverty: One reason identified was that many of the economic hindrances experienced by both men and women – money to buy a laptop, to afford a decent internet connection, or having regular access to electricity – were experienced more by women, because, on average, women were still poorer than men (Burchi et al. 2019). This was often reported to contribute to dependencies between account managers, who tended to be male, and female writers. Grace[9] from Kisii, noted to us that:

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[9] Names of FGD participants have been changed.

> *"We are doing the footwork for* [the account managers]. *We are the ones doing the work. So they gave us the jobs. So, most of these people, you'll find are guys. And then for you ... si [so] you need jobs from them? So, they also need to give ... for you to give something in return. So, if you don't talk to them nicely, they won't give you the job. So, you find most ladies just quit doing ...* [online] *writing because they want something in return from you"* (FGD participant, Kisii, 7 December 2018).

Perceived innate preferences: Whilst most personal preferences in the survey overlapped between men and women, several interviewees during the long-form interviews suggested that, in their experiences, women preferred more stable working conditions over higher risk-reward entrepreneurial ventures. This notion is partially supported by findings from other countries (see e.g. Croson & Gneezy 2009 for a review). But if entrenched perceptions about innate differences between men and women are held widely by male online workers, this can also be a direct hindrance for women (James 2022). In our 2018 survey, we found women's personal preferences not to be a barrier, because a significant difference existed between a small share of women among successful online workers and a much larger share of women who actively tried but had thus far been unable to break into online work.

Societal pressures and temporal availability issues: more severely than men, women tended to experience cultural impediments which obstructed working online. Interviewees noted that the current nature of online work was such that more than half of the demand came from the United States and occurred on tight deadlines. Most new tasks or requests for revisions of existing tasks seemed to be posted in the late afternoon or evening hours in the US. The 8-11h time difference between Kenya and the US entailed that most new task offers or requests for revisions appeared at night (between midnight and 6 am). Hence, the most active hours for Kenyan online writers were in deep in the night.

While a majority[10] of all 2018 survey respondents, male and female, reported no differences in obstacles faced by men and women, the results of longer interviews and focus group discussions suggested that some account managers perceived women to be less reliable than men. George in Ruiru noted:

> *"At any given moment, I don't take more than two ladies for employment.* [I] *only have one, and this also, she's also a problem. She doesn't respond to the message on time. Number two, she can wake up and you, sijiskii kufanya kazi* [I don't feel like doing work] *and you've already sent the job. It's three hours down the line and she tells you that, hii kazi ni ngumu* [this work is hard]. *For the males, I just send the job and I relax"* (FGD participant, Ruiru, 30 Nov 2018).

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[10] This 'majority' who reported no difference was substantial, at 80%. But due to the order and phrasing of our survey questions, most respondents had narrowly answered it with respect to communicating disputes with global online labour platforms, disregarding other challenges, such as societal obligations, which many respondents mentioned in verbatim questions elsewhere in the survey. For the 2023 survey, this question was deliberately rephrased and placed amidst a batch of gender-related questions, which resulted in only 42% of respondents seeing no differences in challenges for women and men (see below).

Yet, this may be based less on character differences and more on cultural-societal norms and expectation. Parents or husbands tend to react particularly disapprovingly or suspiciously if daughters or wives spend entire nights at their laptops. This is in line with the wider literature (e.g. Masika & Bailur 2015). A manager of a business process outsourcing firm noted to us the difficulties with night shifts for women:

> *"…because of the time differences ….* [husbands] *call in to address a conflict. She may come to report it herself. Other times it might just be the spouse that comes in on a motorbike, saying, 'This whole thing has got to stop. There's no way this* [night work] *is going to continue this way'"* (interview, 3 March 2019).

George, the account manager cited above, pointed out the parallel with online writing:

> *"I will call you in the middle of the night and you will wake up nakwambia kimeumana amka* [and tell you there's trouble, wake up]. *… How do you call a lady at night? In the middle of the night to tell them there's a revision and her husband is sitting next to her? It's so hard, so that's that. If some of us who are married, who have wives at home, we have issues with just waking up, and they understand it's work. Imagine you being called, and your wife doesn't understand who is calling, it's going to be tough"* (FGD participant, Ruiru, 30 Nov 2018).

As the sector was young and under-researched, we took these findings as temporary hypotheses for theory building and for preparing the 2023 follow-up survey.

Findings of 2023 Survey: Manager-Controlled Flexibility and Women Online Writers

Earning an Income as an Online Writer: Of our 2023 respondents, 80% reported their earnings from online writing to be somewhere between KES 20,000-50,000 (US$ 150-380) per month. Incomes differed between active online writers categorised as Sr and Jr. On average, our respondents (N=252) claimed to be earning 62% of their incomes through online writing. Of these, male respondents (n=214) claimed to be earning 61.4% of their total incomes online, while female respondents (n=22) reported that they earned 69.8% of their total incomes online. And female respondents claimed to earn on average KES 41,000 (US$ 312) per month online, whilst men claimed on average to be earning only KES 37,000 (US$ 282) per month. These higher proportions and incomes for women do not match with our surveyors' categorisations. Of the (N=22) women surveyed, most (n=16) were deemed to be Junior writers. This categorization took place at the discretion of the surveyor after six initial questions on years of experience and seniority status within the online writing industry, which then determined the branching for the rest of the survey questions. Since the question on monthly incomes was the most sensitive, it was asked once rapport had been built, at the end of the survey, when respondents had long been channelled down the Jr, Sr, or Ex branches. This mismatch between seniority and self-reported incomes provides a conundrum (discussed below).

Are Fewer Women than Men Online Writers? Based on our 2023 survey, we first outline what we know about the gender ratio among Kenyan online writers. Determining reliable numbers can be impossible when dealing with hard-to-survey populations (Tourangeau et al. 2014), and in the 2023 survey, participation was again highly skewed towards men. Overall, of our online writers surveyed, 91% identified as men, with the smallest proportion of women (2%) among those we classified as "Senior" writers (i.e., those who tended to own or manage platform accounts and re-outsourced writing work to others), and the largest proportion of women (16%) were among those we classified as "Junior writers" (i.e., those who tended not to have direct access to platform accounts and instead received re-outsourced writing jobs from others who owned or managed one or more platform accounts; see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportions of Women Respondents Among the Online Writers We Surveyed
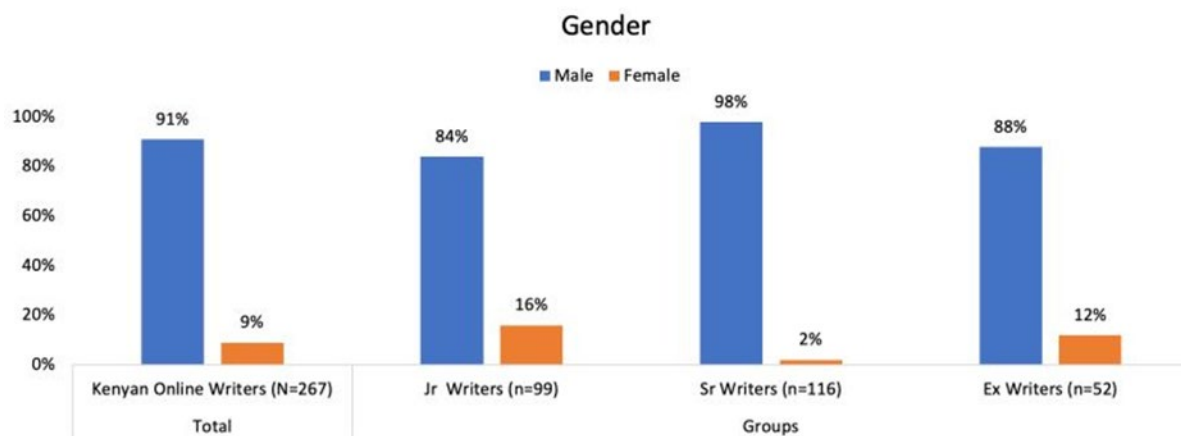
Note: these proportions are non-representative. They merely depict the results of a 2023 survey that used venue-based sampling of online writers' WhatsApp groups.

Three indicators suggest to us that the actual proportion of women among Kenyan online writers is higher.

1. In an earlier study, Walker (2019) reached a 70-30% split of men-women responses to a social media advert targeted at Kenyan academic writers.
2. In our sentiment questions, our respondents have consistently attributed higher proportions to women online writers. Among our wisdom-of-crowds (WoC) method questions was: *"In your estimate: What is the percentage of Kenyan writers who work under someone, (without their own accounts)?"* The average answer (N=257) was 68.1%, suggesting that more than two-thirds of Kenyan online writers work as re-outsourcees in virtual SMEs. This question was followed by: *"How many of them are women?"* The average answer (N=236) was 40.1%, suggesting that the actual proportion of women is significantly larger than the mere headcount of our survey respondents would have led us to believe. The counter question ensured that respondents understood the question: "*In your estimate: What percentage of Kenyan writers are 'employers' (who have their platform accounts and give work to others)?"* Here, the average answer was 28.1%. The suggestive phrasing of this question presupposes that most platform account owners/managers do indeed re-outsource to

others. This was based on the results of our 2018 survey, verified in ongoing personal communication with Kenyan online writers over the past six years, and confirmed by our 2023 respondents. The 3.8% discrepancy between the 68.1% of outsorcees and the 28.1% re-outsourcers can be attributed to the small share of online writers who own platform accounts but work on their own. The follow-up question – *"How many of these are women?"* – resulted in an average (N=236) of 24.7%. While this is proportionally in line with our other findings that fewer women are Senior online writers, it is, in absolute terms, an order of magnitude larger than the headcount of our Senior survey respondents who identified as women.

3. We further asked respondents questions about personal working relations and acquaintances.[11] Useful for this study was the question for Junior online writers: *"Are you working under a man, a woman, or both?* (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Junior Online Writers Mostly Work Under Men, But Many Also Work Under Both Men and Women
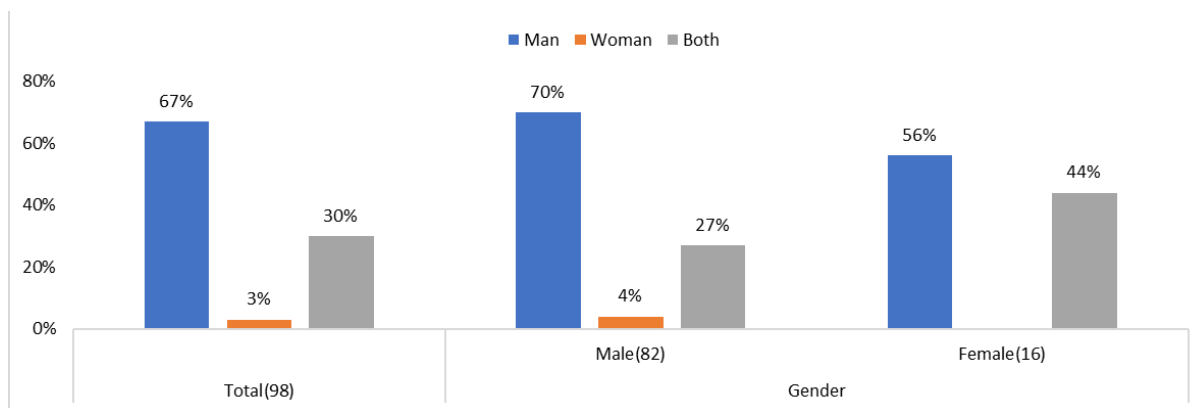
The answers yielded for 'woman' among lone employers (3%) were similar to our headcount (2% women among the Senior respondents). But surprisingly high proportions of Junior respondents claimed to be working under 'both' a man and a woman. This suggests that (i) outsourcees tend to work for multiple re-outsourcers or for female editors in larger virtual SMEs,[12] and that (ii) the writer ecosystem seems to be home to bigger proportions of female account managers than we were able to reach in both our 2018 and 2023 surveys. Reasons for this could be that women are less engaged with these issue-specific social media groups that

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[11] Unfortunately, we phrased some of these questions in ways that made it difficult for us to immediately quantify the answers. E.g., for Jr writers we asked – *"Of the writers you know, how many of them are women? (f# out of total m/f# of your acquaintances).* For Sr writers, we asked – *"Of the writers under you, how many of them tend to be women? (f# out of total m/f# of your writers)."* And for Ex writers – *"When you employed writers in the past, how many of them tend to be women? (f# out of total m/f# of your writers)".* Many respondents disclosed the numbers of women only, without the total numbers of writers. For a forthcoming paper on re-outsourcing, we may yet be able to utilize this data by comparing the average numbers for total re-outsourcees to the average numbers of female outsorceés. But for the current study, this merely gave us directional insight.

[12] We examine this in a forthcoming paper on "virtual SMEs."

served as the pool for our respondents, or that similar but *women-only* social media groups exist in parallel.[13]

What are the Challenges for Women Online Writers? Whatever the exact proportions, women online writers are still in a minority. The 2018 survey found high educational entry barriers to online work. We had found that most (83%) of actively earning online workers had (some) university education, which was roughly confirmed in the 2023 survey, where 84% of respondents reported their *level of education* to be currently enrolled in or completed a bachelors' degree or higher.[14] The skew towards online work is thus related to wider societal imbalances. In Kenya, the overall proportions of male-to-female university students are 41-59% in favour of male students (KNBS 2021).

But since the 2018 survey results showed that the online writing sector was the largest online work sub-sector and had a bigger gender gap than the other sub-sectors, in our 2023 survey, we probed from a few different angles for why there are not more women among our online writing respondents. We asked: *"What is the hardest thing about online writing?"* and *"Is there anything about online work that you don't like – such as scamming, account closures, discrimination?"* Since the verbatim answers for these two questions were similar, we could code them into the same buckets and depict them in one graph. Respondents of both genders mentioned most frequently how difficult it was to gain the right skills to become a successfully earning writer. A combined 79% of responses can be attributed to this aspect. We coded answers into buckets pertaining to the uncompromising demand for high quality papers by overseas' clients (21%), the difficulty to find a good teacher in online writing (28%), and the general lack of skills (30%) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: The Hardest Thing About Writing is Finding a Good Teacher to Learn the Skill

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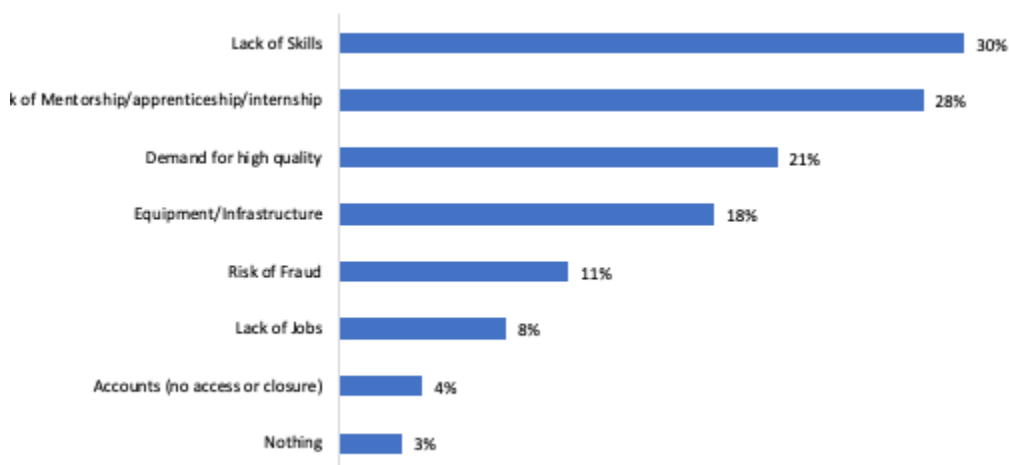
[13] The existence of such groups has been suggested to us by individual respondents, but we have yet to determine the size and prevalence of such groups.
[14] The question *"What is your current highest level of education?"* was answered by: 4.4% = 'Masters or higher'; 79.6% = 'Bachelor/professional certificate'; 8.9% = 'Diploma/technical college'; 6.7% = 'Secondary school'; 0.4% = N/A. Note that these figures may be high, because many respondents were university students, of whom some may have answered this not as "completed" but as "currently enrolled in."

Note: longer verbatim answers often entailed more than one coded response.

When disaggregated by gender, the overall trend was similar.[15] But the need to find a good teacher/employer was mentioned slightly more by women (30%, compared to 27% by men) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: The Bottleneck for Women Online Writers is Finding a Good Account Manager
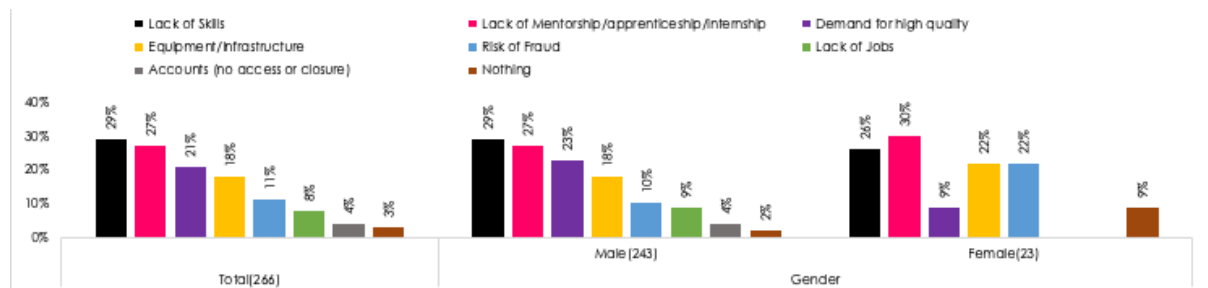
Relatedly, more women (22%) noted the risk of fraud as a serious impediment when engaging in online writing (22%, compared to only 10% of male respondents). But this alone could not explain the lower up-take of online writing by women.

We then asked Senior writers (N=126) directly: *"Do you prefer working with men or women, and why?"* Most (46%) stated a clear preference for "men." With the other answers: "women," "both," and "it depends [on the individuals involved or on the writing task at hand]" (each coming in distant second at around 18%) (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Most Senior Account Holders Prefer to Re-Outsource Writing Work to Men
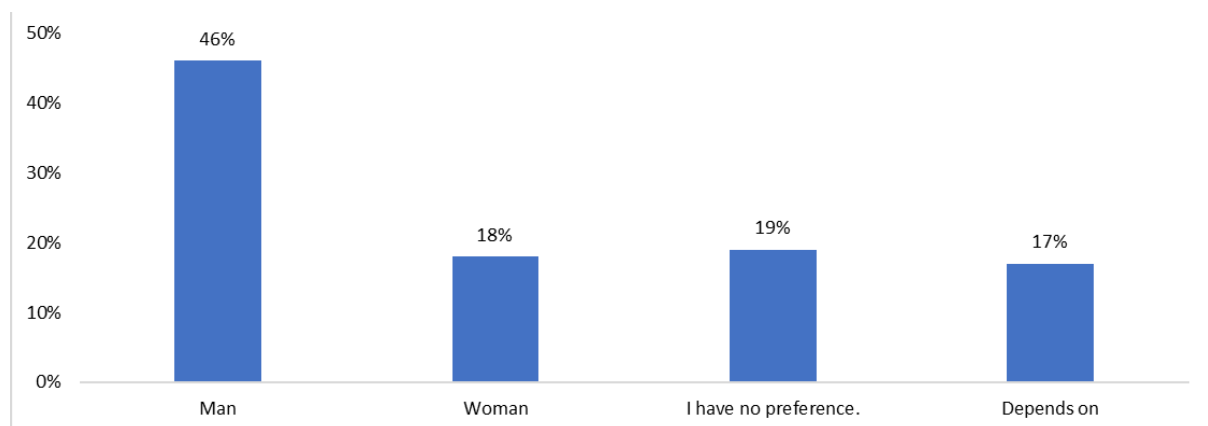
Disaggregated by gender, the numbers for male respondents were nearly the same (since only two women fell into the Senior writer category, of whom, incidentally, neither preferred female writers). Note that, while 46% answered they preferred to work with men, those who preferred

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[15] Women respondents were less concerned with client demand for high quality: mentioned by only 9% of female respondents, compared to 23% by men. But this is attributable that to the larger proportion of female respondents among Junior online writers who do not work for overseas' clients directly but for local account managers.

women writers or gave a mixed answer were a combined majority of (54%). This might suggest that male preferences to work with other males are not the main barrier to entry for women. But our surveyors were all females, who identified themselves to the respondents as fellow online workers, which could have swayed respondents to give more tolerant answers towards working with female online writers. When asked *"Why?"*, most reasons given had to do with perceived character traits. Some of these were in favour of women, referencing women's reliability, honesty, or diligence (about 3%), but most (11%) referenced negative character traits for women, including laziness and a lack of focus. Closely related responses fell in the categories we coded as *"[women's lower] pressure to earn"* (3%) or *"structural advantages for men"* (2%).

For getting to the heart of gender disparities, our most direct sentiment question was: *"In your opinion are their different challenges in doing online writing for men and women? E.g., Obligations, Societal culture, character traits, pressure to earn?* And if so: *"What challenges?"* (See Figure 9).[16]

Figure 9: Most Men See No Difference in Challenges for Men and Women
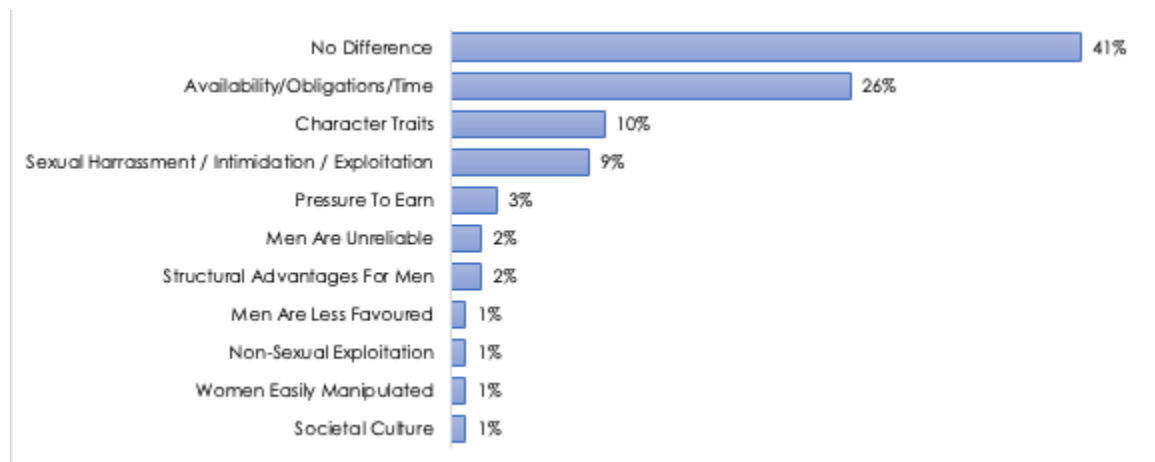
Some 41% of our (mostly male) respondents saw no gender-based differences in challenges. Of those who pointed to a difference, a combined 3% saw greater challenges for men (noting that men could become less reliable due to alcohol abuse or were sometimes less favoured by clients). But a majority (56%) saw greater challenges for women, mostly regarding a lack of short-notice availability due to other family and household obligations (26%), and regarding risks of sexual and other forms of harassment by male superiors (account managers). A significant minority of remarks by men (11%) again alluded to women's character traits (laziness, lack of commitment/persistence).

When disaggregated by gender (see Figure 10), the largest difference was that more women saw greater challenges for themselves, in a wider area, including many more mentions of sexual

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[16] Since in the 2018 survey, many respondents had misunderstood this question as narrowly focused on platform interactions, our surveyors read the latter part of the question as examples but noted any answers down in verbatim responses (the examples given in the 2023 survey were based on verbatim answers of the 2018 survey).

and non-sexual harassment/intimidation by male superiors. Female respondents also saw significantly fewer problems in women's unfavourable "character traits" (although 4% still did).

Figure 10: Women Report More Gender-Specific Challenges in Online Writing
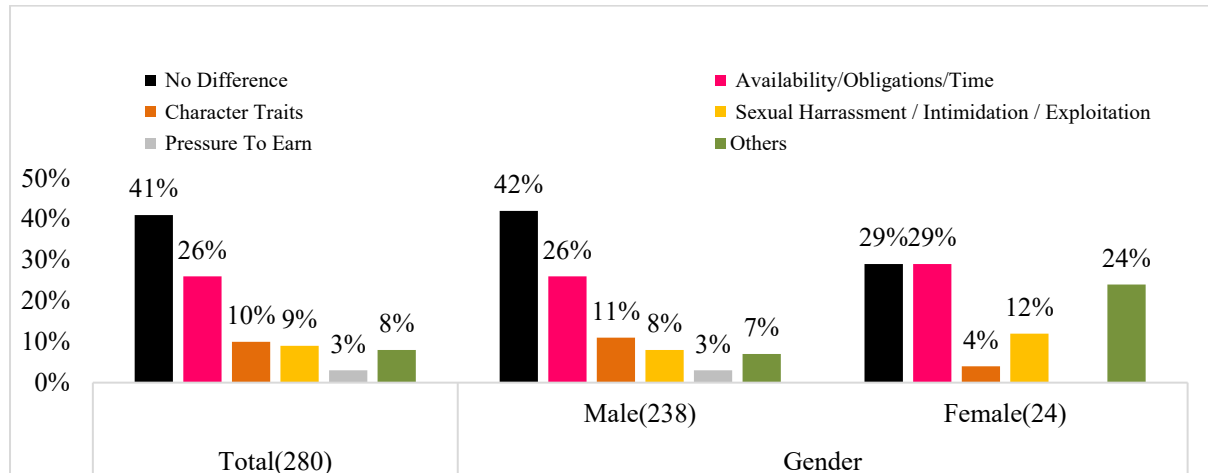
Both men and women writers saw by far the greatest problem for women in a cluster of challenges we coded as *"availability/obligations/time."* Much like in our 2018 survey, respondents' verbatim answers most often referred to the peculiarity of high-pressure night work in online writing, and alluded to this as the main obstacle for women to break into the writing sector. This provided us with the main indicator for gender-based differences.

The centrality of night work in online writing, also when compared to other forms of online work, was underscored by many respondents. Responses were nearly unanimous: 91% of men and 100% of women answering 'yes' to the question: *do you have to work late at night on tight deadlines?* (See Figure 11).

Figure 11: Night Work on Tight Deadlines is Inescapable for Kenyan Online Writers
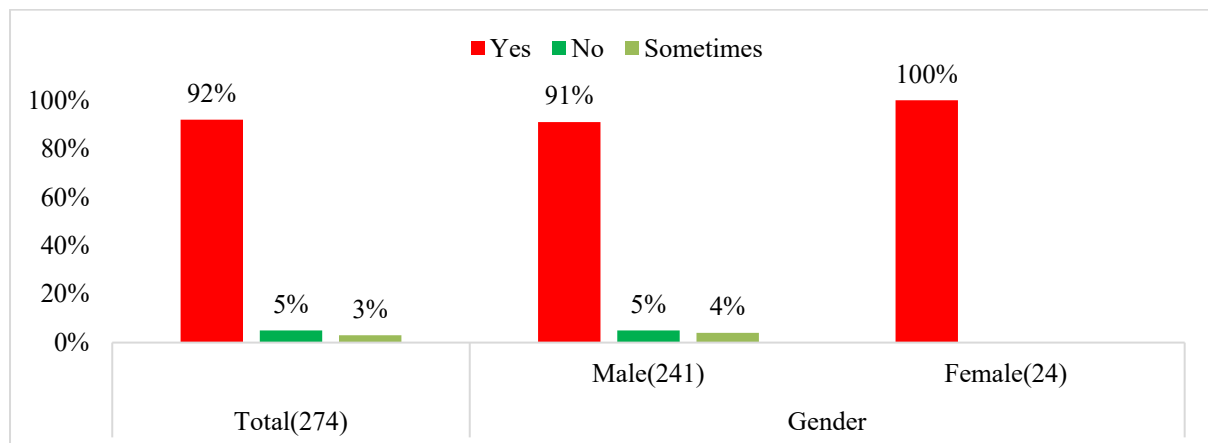
This question on night-work was open for verbatim answers, and many respondents added emphases such as *"all the time!", "yes, most nights", or "always."* Hence, in the associated

verbatim answers, the most prevalent responses by both male and female respondents were answers indicating women's difficulties to cope with high-pressure work late at night. Some of our female respondents' verbatim answers were:

> *"Women have more challenges in writing because of the responsibilities they have, you see like now, I woke up, I did cleaning and cooking, unlike a man who just woke up to work." (F-R71/Jr7a)*

> *"Men will be comfortable to receive calls even at night, unlike ladies, especially if they have kids ... men are more flexible." (F-R90/Jr7a)*

> *"For women, the ones with families, it's challenging for them." (F-R240/Ex7a)*

The most common statements by male respondents were similar. Some listed a host of challenges, but a reflection on women's lack of short-term flexibility due to other obligations was most often at the core of their answers:

> *"Harassment from male counterparts; writers who are mothers find it hard to find flexible hours, I remember back then when I had an account, I had one writer that was a mum and she used to tell me not to give her work during the day, she preferred at night when the kids were asleep. She preferred to do short essays and not long papers." (M-R56/Jr7a)*

A tentative finding is that the differentiator between writing and transcription was encapsulated in this question. Of the (N=55) Ex online writers, n=10 had ventured into transcription, and of these, 9 stated that transcription was easier in terms of setting ones' own schedule over longer time periods, and working alone on ones' own on a platform account. This seems central to the higher proportions of women among transcribers (i.e., twice as many women in our 2018 survey were transcribers).[17]

We also asked – *For the same income, would you be interested in taking an office job, e.g., in a global contact centre?* A majority of all respondents answered that they would *not* take on employment, i.e., a similar office job for that same income. 59% of Senior online writers and 55% of Jr online writers declined, using the words "freedom", and "flexibility," most frequently when explaining the reasons. Among our smaller group of female respondents alone, more than two-thirds (69%) would decline to work in an office, using the term 'flexibility' as the main reason for wanting to remain an online writer (see Figures 12 & 13).

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[17] We had fewer comparator cases in our 2023 survey, because the narrower focus on writers entailed terminating calls with non-writer transcribers (we only surveyed transcribers under the rubric of Ex writers, if we deemed them to have previously been Sr writers).

Figure 12: Some 41% of Male and Female Respondents *Would* Take an Office Job Instead of Writing – Citing Job Security as the Main Reason

For the same income, would you be interested in taking an office job, e.g. in a global contact centre? - Yes

■ Male(84) ■ Female(5)

Reason	Male	Female
Job Security	35%	40%
No Reason	14%	
Can Do Both	10%	20%
Growth	10%	
Online Work Is Demanding	8%	
Flexibility	5%	
Experience And Exposure	4%	20%
Benefits	4%	
Diversify Income Streams	4%	
Office Work Is Scheduled	4%	
Freedom	1%	
For More Money	1%	
Health Implications	1%	
Lack Of A Social Life		20%
Online Work Doesn'T Pay Well	1%	

Figure 13: Some 59% of Male and Female Respondents Would *Not* Take an Office Job Instead of Writing – Citing 'Worker-Controlled Flexibility' as the Main Reason

For the same income, would you be interested in taking an office job, e.g. in a global contact centre? - No

■ Male(104) ■ Female(13)

Reason	Male	Female
Flexibility	25%	31%
Freedom	26%	15%
No Reason	11%	
Formal Employment Doesn't Pay As Much	11%	15%
Extra Costs	6%	23%
For More Money	8%	
Office Work Is Stressful	7%	
Job Security		15%
Availability Of Jobs	1%	
Benefits	1%	
Building Online Career	1%	
Bureaucracy	1%	
Growth	1%	
Inhibits Creativity	1%	
There's No Cap To How Much You Can Earn	1%	
Can Do Both	1%	

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This indicates that despite the challenges posed by manager-controlled flexibility, online writers of both genders still valued the level of 'worker controlled' flexibility that seems to come with online writing (Lehdonvirta 2018). Furthermore, the high value place

Lastly, we asked: *Would you recommend online work and online writing to others?* In our 2018 survey, 99% of respondents (i.e., 187 out of 189) answered "yes" to this question. At the time of the 2018 survey, we had conducted a much smaller informal survey with a 'quasi-control group': Uber/Bolt/Little Cab drivers in Nairobi. This had resulted in much more heterogeneous results: 56% answered "yes, they would recommend app driving to others," whilst 44% answered 'no, they would not recommend this work to others.' For the 2023 survey, to see if the way we had asked the question had influenced the overly positive response, we placed this question immediately after three 'negative mood-setter' questions, asking for the worst thing about online work, and the one thing respondents would change in the world of online work. The average responses were indeed less positive, but only slightly so: 92.2% still answered 'yes', whilst 4.4% answered no; and another 4.8% said it would "depend" on the person's circumstances and abilities. This suggests that despite its hardships, online writers surveyed, men and women, were nearly unanimous in cherishing the opportunity to work online.[18]

5 Discussion & Conclusion

Insights from our previous long-form interviews suggested that higher-earning online workers are particularly inclined to underreport their activities in online work in order to avoid drawing attention from the Kenya Revenue Authority. Our discrepancy – between female respondents' mostly Junior statuses in the writing industry and their on average higher self-reported earning – could possibly indicate a gender dimension where women are less inclined to under-report their incomes. If this finding is in line with existing literature and can be replicated with larger numbers of female respondents, then this would suggest that due to underreporting, Kenyan online writers earn significantly more than the self-reported KES 20,000-50,000.

While most of our respondents lamented the prevalence of scamming, and the precarity of being at the whim of discrimination and harsh treatment by the platforms, hardly any respondents, including the few female respondents, lamented the late-night work and tight deadlines that online writing entails. This may well have been due to self-selection: the women in our pool were most likely those women who had no problems with the late-night work or found ways to cope with it. Our methodology did not differentiate between parents and non-parents, hence, unlike Adams-Prassl (2020), we could not determine how many women with children were in our pool (but the absolute number of female respondents was also so small, that this finding would have be limited). But our Wisdom-of-Crowds method and other sentiment questions allowed us to circumvent some of our methodological limitations.

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[18] In 2023, we again conducted a small quasi-control, asking (N=2)9 ride-hailing app drivers whether they would recommend app driving to others, the mood was more positive than in 2023. This time, (n=19) 66% said 'yes they would'. In app driving, is seems that drivers' sentiments towards their work fluctuate more, due to current events (platform prices, gasoline prices, insurance prices, worker protests).

The emphasis on needing to find good 'employers' in online writing who act as mentors and teachers speaks to the communal nature of Kenya's online writing sector. This provides us with a new view on Kenyan online writers, who work not as isolated individuals but are embedded in a tightly meshed network of learning, trust, and collaboration (Wood et al. 2019; Granovetter 1985; Polanyi 1957). Women ranked this aspect of mentorship higher than men, which also suggests that a 'good' account manager not merely teaches the skills of online work but also works with the strengths and weaknesses of their writers. In the case of women with multiple other obligations, a degree on openness to grant the writer more space (worker-controlled flexibility) may go a ways towards allowing more women to become successful in online writing. In the particular context of night work, this may not be possible, much like a good fire chief is not necessarily one who allows firefighters to skip on their stand-by time. Future research might examine whether creative solutions exist in the Kenyan writing sector, where teams with diverse members and different availabilities work together.

In this light, a mystery is the large difference between our actual headcount of surveyed women in online writing and the WoC results that point to much larger proportions of women in the sector. For future research, it would be worthwhile to establish whether all-female social media groups exist, and, if so, whether the relationships there between account managers and their writers display a dynamic that is less shaped by manager-controlled flexibility (i.e., by 3 am phone calls), and more shaped by worker-controlled flexibility, by female account managers who trust women writers to perform if given the space they need to write on their own terms.

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Appendix I: Methodology for 2018 Survey

The researchers devised a phone survey,[19] then created a Lime Survey, and, through an intermediary (Daproim Africa), hired nine Kenyan professional online workers to first help revise and then execute the phone survey. Before the campaign began, the researchers undertook two weeks of extensive training with five of these online workers, engaging first in practice runs (interviewing each other), then with pilot calls. This led to continuous changes to the survey, in order to better fit the Kenyan context. This "training" went both ways: the researchers told the online workers/phone surveyors what their premises were and the knowledge they sought to gain from the questions; and the online workers/surveyors, in turn, helped the researchers revise some of their premises and restructure the survey questions accordingly.

The online workers/surveyors became engaged and took ownership of the process. The phone surveys were thus framed as a peer-to-peer undertaking. Each call was specifically introduced as one Kenyan online worker asking another Kenyan online worker to help answer the questions in order to help find out "how online work can be made better for Kenyans." A copy of the questionnaire is attached in the Appendix. The researchers deliberately chose this methodological approach to achieve the best possible rapport with respondents and to gain the greatest possible insights into the sector.

Sample Construction

While random representative samples have various theoretically attractive properties, collecting a random sample was deemed close to impossible within the boundaries set by the budget and timeline for this project. This is because, for several reasons, online workers are a typical example of hard-to-survey populations (Tourangeau et al. 2014). First, online workers are hard to identify through screening interviews in national surveys of the working population, because the group is rather heterogeneous, and its boundaries are blurred. Second, they are

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[19] The phone survey was modelled after the survey used in Wood et al (2018).

difficult to sample because they represent a very small fraction of the general population, and there is no list of this rare population from which to draw a random sample. Third, online workers are hard to contact because of the vast geographic distribution across spatial and national borders and the lack of distinctly visible clusters or registered local communities.

To account for this, we followed the approach of other researchers studying digital labour (Wood et al 2018a, Wood et al 2018b, Lehdonvirta, 2018, Pesole et al 2018, Berg et al 2018), and utilised a non-random purposive sample. Our approach was therefore to use 'venue-based sampling', which is typically used to research populations that are geographically scattered, but who use certain spaces for regular meetings and congregations (Lee, Wagner, and Valliant 2014). In practice, we directed our sampling efforts to WhatsApp groups. Ajira trained digital workers and our surveyors' personal contacts. The sample was divided into several subsamples, each derived via several snowball tracks drawn from different pools of respondents.

While our approach does not enable us to directly estimate the share of freelance workers of the total population, the study demonstrates in the next section that combining non-representative survey data with ground truth digital trace data from a selection of online platforms combined with a suitable statistical model enables the study to both draw inferences on the size of the population of online freelancers as well as their incomes and sources of work. This is enabled by access to a purposive sample of the online workers rather than a representative sample of the total population. As response rates of traditional surveys have declined in the last decades, the statistical benefits of representative samples have diminished. Several researchers (e.g., Wang et al 2015, Blumenstock et al 2015, Zaghani et al 2015, Elliot et al 2016, to name a few) have successfully used similar approaches, utilising a combination of purposive samples and modelling.

Since we are using a self-selected survey, we cannot ascertain that our findings generalise to the full population of online workers in Kenya. Nonetheless, our quantitative findings are broadly consistent with the literature on online freelancers made in other countries. In addition, we find that the findings across our different sampling venues (WhatsApp groups, Ajira affiliated workers) are broadly consistent with one another. The following section discusses the survey sample composition in more detail.

Survey Sample Collection

The study collected data from the following venues:

1) 7,168 Ajira Digital trainees (preselected by and received from KEPSA).
2) 722 'experienced' freelancers (preselected by others, received from KEPSA).
3) 651 WhatsApp group members (own scrapes via surveyors/contacts).
4) 105 university students (preselected by others, received from surveyors).

In order to understand the different constraints to online work, this study set out to reach a mix of respondents of (a) currently successful online workers; (b) former online workers (who, for

whatever reason had stopped working online); and (c) individuals who had at some point actively tried to become online workers but had failed. Each of the above pools would have certain advantages and disadvantages in reaching these particular types of respondents. The study thus created a loose bannister framework at the outset for sample weighting within these particular groups. This would be adjusted as initial results came in "on the fly," that is, when evaluating the results of the first days of the survey calls in the evenings. The criteria used for this were based on partial information about these pools, interpreted as results began to trickle in. This means that the selection criteria were not objective (for that to be achieved a battery of several successive surveys would have needed to be conducted, which, under time constraints and with limited resources, was an unachievable target). This constrains the replicability of this study's results – a common drawback of studies conducted in new and uncertain environments (Golafshani 2003). To make the process as transparent as possible for future researchers, the criteria used for drawing on these pools more or less heavily were documented. That is, we wrote out our reasons for increasing or decreasing their sample sizes in the field (these notes can be obtained from the authors).

In brief, due to a variety of reasons – that is, varying response rates, the need to arrive at a healthy balance between (non)online workers, and the goal of reaching a higher proportion of non-Nairobi respondents – this study ended up surveying more workers in the *Ajira Beneficiaries* pool and the *WhatsApp Groups* pool, compared to other *KEPSA Experienced*, and the *University Students* pools.

The sampling strategy loosely follows Kish's (1965) formula, which dictates that the sample sizes should be increasing with uncertainty and decreasing cost.

Data Collected

Target Respondents	Population	Successful Calls (Actual)	% Penetration	% of Successful Calls *(n=528)*
Quantitative Structured Interviews - (Telephone Interviews) *Total of 528*				
WhatsApp Group experienced online workers	589	201	34%	38%
University students inexperienced & experienced	105	11	10%	2%
Online Workers - experienced	722	95	13%	18%
Ajira Digital - inexperienced but trained	7,158	222	3%	42%

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews *(Total of 8 Focus Group Discussions and 25 Key Informant Interviews)* 29	
Focus Groups Discussions (FGD's) *(Total 8 Heterogeneous Groups each with an average of 8 Participants)*	
Online Workers who were trained, working and non-working but interested across the nation	Nairobi (2), Mombasa, Kilifi, Meru, Nakuru, Maseno and Kisii
Key Informant Interviews (KII) - *(Total of 24)*	
Online Work platforms	3
Intermediaries (Impact Sourcing Service Providers)	6
Private Sector	3
Government	3
Donor Institutions	3
Research Institutions	6

The surveyors completed 528 interviews (251 with active/successfully earning online workers, and 277 with either previously experienced or currently actively interested but unsuccessful "non-online workers"). This combination of respondents provided insights from different angles:

(1) the *"successfully-working-online"* viewpoint;
(2) the *"previously-successful-but-not-working-online-anymore"* viewpoint; and
(3) the *"trying-to-work-online-but-hitherto-unsuccessful"* viewpoint.

To our knowledge, the latter two viewpoints have not been examined in the existing literature at the time of this writing.

The survey was flanked by focus group discussions (n=8), and semi-structured interviews with various key informants (n=24).

Appendix II: Methodology for 2023 Survey

Sampling and Sample Size

The 2023 pool of respondents consisted of:
  –   the numbers of the 527 respondents of the 2018 survey; and
  –   2,100 numbers from online writers social media groups (WhatsApp).

Respondents were contacted for consent to be interviewed (via thumbs-up), and interview times were then agreed via initial calls. The length of completed survey calls was on average 39 minutes.

Data Analysis

The survey calls were conducted in English (sometimes switching to Kiswahili). Each surveyor was an experienced online worker and had been centrally involved in 'translating' the research questions into tangible survey questions, phrased in language commonly used by Kenyan online writers. These researchers/surveyors filled in the survey tool in real-time during the calls. After the survey campaign, the researchers/surveyors cleaned this raw data by listening through all audio recordings and filling in gaps and adding longer verbatim quotes into the Excel cells (each of the four surveyors/researchers cleaned the survey entries of their three colleagues' calls, never their own). For numerical answers, the researchers/surveyors/cleaners replaced answers with NA whenever the conversational context in the audio revealed that the respondent had misunderstood the question. For Wisdom-of-Crowd questions, the researchers/surveyors/cleaners took midpoints for range guesses (e.g., if a respondent estimated that of Kenyan online writers "about 30-40%" were women, the researchers/surveyors/cleaners changed this response to "35%." After this round of cleaning came a round of coding. For open-ended questions, the researchers/surveyors/cleaners/coders grouped the verbatim quotes into the five most common response buckets, leaving all responses that did not fit into these buckets for the "other" category. No software was used for this coding process. For further reliability, the researchers/surveyors/cleaners/coders each took parts of the respondents, came up with their own labels for the buckets, then checked each others' coding decisions and harmonized their bucket labels afterwards. Lastly, the lead researcher (Melia) combed through all buckets for misplaced verbatim answers and the researcher/surveyor/cleaner/coder team then relabelled some buckets and combined others. For example, all challenges related to women's (fear of) abuse by male peers or superiors were grouped together under "exploitation/sexual harassment/intimidation". And all challenges for women related to other commitments, were grouped under "availability/obligations/time."

Ethical Consideration

All GDPR guidelines and ethics standards were adhered to and the full methodology is to be presented to a university ethics board (we are in contact with the Ethics Board of the Social Science Faculty of the University of Duisburg-Essen, headed by Professor Helen Baykara-Krumme).

Method Triangulation

Several methods were used in this study. The initial 2018 leg of the survey had been accompanied by long-form semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (see Appendix I above). Before both surveys, the survey questionnaires were developed and then substantially changed during extensive 'dry runs' between our online worker/surveyors. As a form of control, one question of the survey – "Would you recommend this work to others?" was also asked of ride-hailing taxi drivers (in a conversational manner). Both in 2018 (N=44) and in 2023 (N=29).

Appendix III: Screenshot of 'Unlimited Takes' Account

24Writers 3* with takes completed 190+ orders

Writershub Senior Level Done 270+ Orders With All Credentials Intact 10 Takes QUICK SALE KPI 40

Bluecorp Advanced Level Done 600+ Orders With All Credentials Intact And Profile Owner Available 🔥 🔥 Unlimited Takes

Uvocorp Complicated Disciplines (CD) 80%, one year old with payoneer and profile owner

Studypool Top Tutor, 15 orders, 100%, 3 badges (Writing, humanities, and economics🔥

Writershub senior completed 50+ orders, bei poa KPI 38

Writerbay beginner available 160 orders 4.56 very clean no warning

Appendix IV: 2023 Phone Survey Questionnaire

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR ONLINE WORKERS

Yes	1	Continue
No	2	Thank respondent and terminate

Q1. Do you do online writing?

Yes	1	Continue
No	2	Continue

Q2. Ask the respondent?

Do/did you do online writing?	Yes	No
Do/did you do under someone (as writer for someone who has a platform account/clients)	Yes	No
Do/did you do on your own platform account by yourself;	Yes	No
Do/did you work on your own platform account and distributing work task to other writers	Yes	No
Do/did you work on multiple own platform accounts and distributing work task to other writers	Yes	No
Do/did you work off platform, via direct overseas clients	Yes	No

Do/did you Manage someone else's account(s) by distributing work to writers	Yes	No
Do/did you Recruit writers for others, for MONEY; AS YOUR JOB	Yes	No
Do/did you buy & sell accounts or other things necessary for online writing	Yes	No

Q3. When did you earn your first money in online writing

Q4. Is this your major occupation, your main source of income?

Yes	1
No	2

Q5. What percentage of your income comes from this work.?

100	1
75	2
50	3
25	4
10	5
100	6

Q6. D1. Besides this, what other work (Online and Offline) do you do?

Q7. How many writers work under you (how many do you outsource work to)?

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Q8. Which category does respondent fall.?

Junior	1
Senior	2
Ex-writer	3
TERMINATE	4

SECTION A: JUNIOR WRITERS

J1   In your estimate: What is the percentage of Kenyan writers who work under someone, (without their own accounts)?

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J2   How many of them are women?

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J3   In your estimate: What percentage of Kenyan writers are "employers" (who have their platform accounts and give work to others)?

J4   How many of them are women?

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J5   Of the writers you know, how many of them are women? (f# out of total m/f# of your acquaintances)

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J6   Are you working under a ...

Man	1
Woman	2
Both	3

J7   In your opinion, are there different Responses in doing online work for men and women? E.g., Obligations, Societal culture, character traits, pressure to earn

Yes	1	Go to J8
No	2	

J8   What Responses

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J9   What was your first experience with paid online work?

Own account	1

Under someone (you got paid)	2
Under someone unpaid work as part of your training	3
Under someone (you paid for the training)	4

J10 When was that? Do you remember the year and month?

J11 What were you doing at the time?

Campus (while studying)	1
Working or looking for work (after campus graduation)	2
Working or looking for work (after high school graduation)	3

J12 What was hard about getting started in online writing?

J13 Do you think you COULD have learned this on you own, taught yourself how to be an online writer, without the help of an experienced mentor account owner?

Yes, I probably could have	1
No, I probably couldn't have Tell us why:	2
Yes, that is actually how I started, on my own, self-taught	3

J14 In your estimate, what percentage of Kenyan online writers start out on their own platform accounts, without training or working under someone else first?

J15 The largest online writing employer you know, how many writers does he/she have under him/her?

J16 How many such large online writing employers do you think exist in the area you live?

J17 Is trust important in your work? If so, how do you build trust between yourself and the account manager/ editor you work under?

J18 Have you ever not been paid for good work submitted? What do you do about it?

J19 Does social media play any role in building and maintaining trust among online writers?

J20 How do you identify and avoid Scammers, e.g do you use social media for that?

J21 Have you ever had to warn others on social media about a scammer in online writing?

J22 Did you ever (try to) sign up or buy your own account?

Signed up myself, with my own profile	1
Got a foreign profile and signed up as someone else over there;	2
Bought the account from another writer, privately	3

Bought the account through an account broker	4

J23 Which account and level was that at the time and how much did it cost?

Account Level	
Cost	

J24 Was that successful? Why don't you have it anymore?

J25 Is that account under your own profile; under another Kenyan profile; or under a foreign profile?

Own profile	1
Another Kenyan profile	2
A foreign profile >>>>>Go to J26	3

J26 From where?

J27 In your circle, how many have had their account shut down at some point?

J28 How many of them have lost more than Kshs 100,000 due to account shut-downs?

J29 Add comment to above question if necessary

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J30 In the past, how have you been paid for your online writing work? (e.g., PayPal, M-Pesa, cash, bank transfer)

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J31 What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you in online writing? (e.g., lost an account, scam, frozen PayPal). Can you tell us how that happened?

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J32 How much money did you lose in that incident??

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J33 Is there a platform you'd like to be working on?

Unemployed Professor	1
WriterBay	2
EssayShark	3
UvoCorp	4
4Writers	5
s tudyBay	6
Edusson	7
WriteZillas	8
Academia Research Writers	9

BlueCorp	10
Pensters	11
Course Hero	12
WritersHub	13
AllWriters	14
Different Platform Called	15

J34 Among the entry-level accounts, which do you think are the best entry-level accounts for junior writers to get going? How much are they?

J35 Among the mid-expert level accounts which are best, e.g., How many takes?

J36 On average, how much time do you spend in a 24h day doing online writing?

High Time	
Low Time	

J37 What's the hardest thing about online writing?

J38 Do you have to work late at night on tight deadlines?

J39 Is there anything about online work that you don't like?

J40 Would you recommend online work and online writing to others?

Yes	1
No	2
Something else, what	

J41 Is there something that (your past and present) writing employers tend to do that particularly bothers you?

J42 If there is one thing about the world of online writing you could change, what would it be?

J43 In academic writing, which are your best and worst subjects?

Best	
Worst	

J44 Do you do other forms of online work besides academic writing? If so, what?

J45 Are there other types of online work you would like to do

Yes >>> Go to Q45	1
No	2

J46 If yes, what's holding you back?

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J47 How many employers did you have in the past year? And do you usually work for one employer for long stretches of time, switching back and forth, or simultaneously for different ones?

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J48 Do they know each other. Are they happy to "share" you when the other has work, or are they more like Uber and Bolt, competing for you?

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J49 Is it easy to find online writing work from different employers?

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J50 What were your highest and lowest rates(cpp) you've ever received for paper and why

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J51 What device do you work on?

your own laptop	1
Borrowed laptop	2
Your tablet	3

Borrowed tablet	4
Your phone	5
Cyber cafe	6
Computer at writing employer work station >>> Go to J51 & J52	7
Other describe	8

J52 Expound more on **Computer at writing employer work station**

J53 How many days per week are you there

J54 How do you get internet??

Wi-Fi at home	1
Wi-Fi at my other work	2
Buy bundles	3
Cyber cafe	4
Writing employer work station	5
Other Describe	6

J55 Expound more on **Writing employer work station**

J56 Is internet an issue for you?

Prices	1
Speed	2
Accessibility	3
Reliability	4

J57 How often do you communicate about online work with other online workers face to face? Daily, weekly, monthly, almost never?

J58 Where did you go to campus?

J59 Is there a place in Kenya where you know most writers live?

Yes	1
No	2

J60 Where?

J61 Take a guess, what percentage of all writers in Kenyan live in that area?

J62 What is your personal connection to that area mentioned above

J63 Did you start writing while living/working/studying in that area mentioned above

	45
Yes	1
No	2

J64 When you first started online work, how did you meet/get to know the person you worked under?

Online (virtually/social media)	1
0ffline (physically)	2

J65 Why do you think this cluster of online work exists? Are there benefits of online workers being physically close to one another?

J66 Did you remain in the same city during pandemic?

J67 If you went to the village, were you able to deliver online writing from there? Are you still there now, or did you come back to the city?

J68 Has the Pandemic changed online writing?

Yes	1
No	2

J69 How?

J70 Do you use software? E.g., Grammarly, Turnitin, others?

Yes	1
No	2

J71 Have you used ChatGPT?

Yes	1
No	2

J72 Have you noticed any unusual changes in global demand recently [due to students using ChatGPT]?

Yes	1
No	2

J73 How?

J74 What are your estimated monthly earnings from online writing?

J75 What kind of work do you think you'll be doing five years from now?

J76 For the same income, would you be interested in taking an office job, e.g., in a global contact centre?

Yes	1
No	2

J77 Why?

SECTION B: SENIOR WRITERS

S1   In your estimate: What is the percentage of Kenyan writers who work under someone, (without their own accounts)?

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S2   How many of them are women?

S3   In your estimate: What percentage of Kenyan writers are "employers" (who have their platform accounts and give work to others)?

S4   How many of them are women?

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S5   Of the writers you know, how many of them are women? (f# out of total m/f# of your acquaintances)

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S6   In general, do you prefer working with male or female writers?

Men	1
Women	2
Men and women writers are the same, I have no preference.	3
Depends on	4

S7   Why?

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S8   In your opinion are their different Responses in doing online work for men and women? E.g., Obligations, Societal culture, character traits, pressure to earn

Yes	1	Go to J8
No	2	

S9   What Responses

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
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S10 What was your first experience with paid online work?

Own account	1
Under someone (you got paid)	2
Under someone unpaid work as part of your training	3
Under someone (you paid for the training)	4

S11 When was that? Do you remember the year and month?

S12 What were you doing at the time?

Campus (while studying)	1
Working or looking for work (after campus graduation)	2
Working or looking for work (after high school graduation)	3

S13 What was hard about getting started in online writing?

S14 Do you think you COULD have learned this on you own, taught yourself how to be an online writer, without the help of an experienced mentor account owner?

Yes, I probably could have	1
No, I probably couldn't have Tell us why:	2
Yes, that is actually how I started, on my own, self-taught	3

S15 In your estimate, what percentage of Kenyan online writers start out on their own platform accounts, without training or working under someone else first?

S16 The largest online writing employer you know, how many writers does he/she have under him/her?

S17 How many such large online writing employers do you think exist in the area you live?

S18 What do you do if a writer asks for pay on delivery for incomplete, plagiarized, or below standard work?

S19 Does social media play any role in building and maintaining trust among online writers?

S20 How do you identify and avoid Scammers, e.g do you use social media for that?

S21 Have you ever had to warn others on social media about a scammer in online writing? If so, how did that happen?

S22 Did you ever (try to) sign up or buy your own account?

Signed up myself, with my own profile	1
Got a foreign profile and signed up as someone else over there;	2

Bought the account from another writer, privately	3
Bought the account through an account broker	4

S23 Which account and level was that at the time and how much did it cost?

Account Level	
Cost	

S24 Was that successful? Is this still the account you use today?

S25 Is that account under your own profile; under another Kenyan profile; or under a foreign profile?

Own profile	1
Another Kenyan profile	2
A foreign profile >>>>>Go to S26	3

S26 From where?

S27 In your estimate: what percentage of Kenyan writer platform owners have overseas accounts, i.e., they need to run a VPN/ RDP to keep the account alive??

S28 Some platforms are better than others, but within platforms there are also levels: Rate each question on a scale of 1 to 10

How strong was your first account when you first got/bought it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
What level was that account when you sold or lost it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Your current, the main one you use now. Where was it when you first bought it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Where is that current account now?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

S29 Add comment to above question if necessary?

S30 How much was your current (main) account, and was that worth it? (If different from first account)?

S31 How much do you think you could sell that account for today?

S32 In your circle, of online workers, how many have had an account shut down?

S33 How many of them have lost more than Kshs 100,000 due to account shut-downs?

S34 Is there any communication? Have any of them ever been able to appeal to the platform and got their accounts reinstated?

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S35 In the past how have you been paid for your online writing work (e.g PayPal, M-Pesa, Cash, Bank transfer)

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S36 What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you in online writing (e.g lost an account, scam, frozen PayPal,) Can you tell us how that happened

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S37 How much money did you lose in the incident

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S38 What are your sources of online writing, which platforms?

Unemployed Professor	1
WriterBay	2
EssayShark	3
UvoCorp	4
4Writers	5
StudyBay	6
Edusson	7
WriteZillas	8
Academia Research Writers	9

BlueCorp	10
Pensters	11
Course Hero	12
WritersHub	13
AIIWriters	14
Different Platform Called	15

S39 Which of these platforms would you like to be working on?

Unemployed Professor	1
WriterBay	2
EssayShark	3
UvoCorp	4
4Writers	5
StudyBay	6
Edusson	7
WriteZillas	8
Academia Research Writers	9
BlueCorp	10
Pensters	11
Course Hero	12
WritersHub	13

AllWriters	14
Different Platform Called	15

S40 What would such an account cost you?

S41 Among the entry-level accounts, which do you think are the best entry-level accounts for junior writers to get going? How much are they?

S42 Among the mid-expert level accounts which are best, e.g., How many takes?

S43 Which of the platforms are particularly difficult, known as risky for getting accounts shut down??

Unemployed Professor	1
WriterBay	2
EssayShark	3
UvoCorp	4
4Writers	5
StudyBay	6
Edusson	7
WriteZillas	8
Academia Research Writers	9

BlueCorp	10
Pensters	11
Course Hero	12
WritersHub	13
AllWriters	14
Different Platform Called	15

S44 What is the greatest risk factor on that/those platform(s)?

S45 Which platform has the best (most lenient) platform managers?

S46 On average, how much time do you spend in a 24h (during high time and during low time?) day doing online writing directly or indirectly (e.g., outsourcing, editing, coaching, selling, recruiting)?

High Time	
Low Time	

S47 How many months of the year is high-time?

S48 What's the hardest thing about online writing?

S49 Do you have to work late at night on tight deadlines?

S50 Would you recommend online work and online writing to others?

Yes	1
No	2
Something else, what	

S51 Is there something that the platforms do that particularly bothers you?

S52 If there is one thing about the world of online writing you could change, what would it be?

S53 In academic writing, which are your best and worst subjects?

Best	
Worst	

S54 Do you do other forms of online work besides academic writing? If so, what?

S55 Are there other types of online work you would like to do

Yes >>> Go to S56	1
No	2

S56 If yes, what's holding you back?

S57 Where do you get the new online writers?

S58 Is it easy to find online writers with the right skills/determination?

S59 How do you ensure you get the right ones?

S60 On average, how much do you pay subcontracted persons per online writing project done? Cpp? (State in kes)

S61 For what types of writing jobs do you pay the most? How much do you pay for those?

S62 Which types of writing jobs do you pay the least for and how much do you pay for those?

S63 Do you get online writing work outside of the platforms e.g via social media, e.g Facebook, LinkedIn, or email or referrals

Yes	1
No	2

S64 Is it from within Kenya or from outside the country

S65 Is there any difference between getting work within online platforms and getting work directly from client

S66 Do you ever still get online work via other people's accounts e.g work tasks outsourced from another freelancer who then submits the completed work in his/her name back to the platform

S67 Who is your internet service provider and are you satisfied? (Price, speed, reliability?)

S68 How often do you communicate about online work with other online workers face to face? Daily, weekly, monthly, almost never?

S69 Where did you go to campus?

S70 Is there a place in Kenya where you know most writers live?

Yes	1
No	2

S71 Where?

```



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S72 Take a guess, what percentage of all writers in Kenyan live in that area?

```



```

S73 What is your personal connection to that area mentioned above

```



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S74 Did you start writing while living/working/studying in that area mentioned above

Yes	1
No	2

S75 Did you move there because of your writing work or did you always live there? Or did you move there for a different reason?

```



```

S76 When you first started online work, how did you meet/get to know the person you worked under?

Online (virtually/social media)	1
0ffline (physically)	2

S77 Why do you think this cluster of online work exists? Are there benefits of online workers being physically close to one another?

S78 How do you think did OLW in the area mentioned above first get started?

S79 When do you think this got started?

S80 Did you remain in the same city during pandemic?

S81 If you went to the village, were you able to deliver online writing from there? Are you still there now, or did you come back to the city?

S82 Has the Pandemic changed the global demand for academic writing?

Yes	1
No	2

S83 How?

S84 Which software do you use? E.g., Grammarly, Turnitin, NordVPN, MS Word, others?

S85 Have you used ChatGPT?

Yes	1
No	2

S86 Have you noticed any unusual changes in global demand recently in the last months due to artificial intelligence [due to students using ChatGPT]?

Yes	1
No	2

S87 How?

S88 What are your estimated monthly earnings from online writing?

S89 What kind of work do you think you'll be doing five years from now?

S90 For the same income, would you be interested in taking an office job, e.g. in a global contact centre?

Yes	1
No	2

S91 Why?

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SECTION C: EX - WRITERS

EX1   Why did you stop online writing? When was this?

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EX2   Did you do other forms of online work besides academic writing? If so, what?

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EX3   When you left online writing, did you venture into other types of online work? (E.g., article writing, transcription, or data entry) or did you leave online work altogether behind?

Yes	1
No	2

EX4   Are you an online worker in another task? Which one?

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EX5   In your estimate: What percentage of Kenyan writers work under someone, (without their own accounts)?

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EX6   How many of them are women?

```
                                    64
```

EX7   In your estimate: What percentage of Kenyan writers are "employers" (who have their platform accounts and give work to others)?

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```

EX8   How many of these are women?

```
```

EX9   In your other/new online work task, are these percentages different than in academic writing;

```
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EX10   How is it different;

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EX11   When you employed writers in the past, of the writers under you, how many of them tend to be women? (f# out of total m/f# of your writers)

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EX12   In general, do you prefer working with male or female writers?

Men	1
Women	2
Men and women writers are the same, I have no preference.	3
Depends on	4

EX13   Why?

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EX14   Is this different in your new online work?

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EX15 In your opinion are their different Responses in doing online work for men and women? E.g., Obligations, Societal culture, character traits, pressure to earn

Yes	1	Go to J8
No	2	

EX16   What Responses

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EX17   What was your first experience with paid online work?

Own account	1
Under someone (you got paid)	2
Under someone unpaid work as part of your training	3
Under someone (you paid for the training)	4

EX18   When was that? Do you remember the year and month?

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EX19   What were you doing at the time?

Campus (while studying)	1
Working or looking for work (after campus graduation)	2
Working or looking for work (after high school graduation)	3

EX20   What was hard about getting started in online writing?

EX21   Do you think you COULD have learned this on you own, taught yourself how to be an online writer, without the help of an experienced mentor account owner?

Yes, I probably could have	1
No, I probably couldn't have Tell us why:	2
Yes, that is actually how I started, on my own, self-taught	3

EX22   In your estimate, what percentage of Kenyan online writers start out on their own platform accounts, without training or working under someone else first?

EX23   In your other online work is it easier to start out alone that it is in academic writing

EX24   The largest online writing employer you know, how many writers does he/she have under him/her?

EX25　How many such large online writing employers do you think exist in the area you live?

EX26　Is your other work structured differently [e.g more individual accounts, less re-outsourcing to others]

EX27　Did you train and mentor others in online writing/Online work? How many people?

Yes	1
No	2

EX28　How many people

In academic writing		
In your other online work		

EX29　For the people you have trained/mentored, what in your opinion was the greatest challenge for them in trying to become:

In academic writing		
In your other online work		

EX30　How did you build trust with and discipline among:

Your academic writers?		
Your workers of other online work		

EX31   What did you do if a writer asked you for pay on delivery for incomplete, plagiarized, or below standard work?

EX32   Does social media play any role in building and maintaining trust among online writers?

EX33   How do you identify and avoid Scammers, e.g do you use social media for that?

EX34   Have you ever had to warn others on social media about a scammer in online writing/work? If so, how did that happen?

EX35   Did you ever (try to) sign up or buy your own account?

Signed up myself, with my own profile	1
Got a foreign profile and signed up as someone else over there;	2
Bought the account from another writer, privately	3
Bought the account through an account broker	4

EX36   Which account and level was that at the time and how much did it cost?

Account Level	
Cost	

EX37   Was that successful? Is this still the account you use today?

EX38   Is that account under your own profile; under another Kenyan profile; or under a foreign profile?

Own profile	1
Another Kenyan profile	2
A foreign profile >>>>>Go to EX39	3

EX39   From where?

EX40   In your estimate: what percentage of Kenyan writer platform owners have overseas accounts, i.e., they need to run a VPN/ RDP to keep the account alive??

EX41   Is it easier in your other online work to set up your own online work account from Kenya (easier than in academic writing)?

Yes	1
No	2

It's the same	3
It depends on	4

EX42 Why?

EX43 Some platforms are better than others, but within platforms there are also levels: Rate each question on a scale of 1 to 10

How strong was your first account when you first got/bought it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
What level was that account when you sold or lost it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Your current, the main one you use now. Where was it when you first bought it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Where is that current account now?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

EX44 Add comment to above question if necessary?

EX45 How much was your current (main) account, and was that worth it? (If different from first account)?

EX46 How much do you think you could sell that account for today?

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EX47   In your circle, of online workers, how many have had an account shut down?

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EX48   How many of them have lost more than Kshs 100,000 due to account shut-downs?

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EX49   Is there any communication? Have any of them ever been able to appeal to the platform and got their accounts reinstated?

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EX50   In the past how have you been paid for your online writing work (e.g PayPal, M-Pesa, Cash, Bank transfer)

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EX51   What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you in online writing (e.g lost an account, scam, frozen PayPal,) Can you tell us how that happened

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EX52   How much money did you lose in the incident

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EX53   What were your sources of online writing, which platforms?

Unemployed Professor	1
WriterBay	2

EssayShark	3
UvoCorp	4
4Writers	5
StudyBay	6
Edusson	7
WriteZillas	8
Academia Research Writers	9
BlueCorp	10
Pensters	11
Course Hero	12
WritersHub	13
AllWriters	14
Different Platform Called	15

EX54   Which of these platforms would you like to be working on?

Unemployed Professor	1
WriterBay	2
EssayShark	3
UvoCorp	4
4Writers	5
StudyBay	6

Edusson	7
WriteZillas	8
Academia Research Writers	9
BlueCorp	10
Pensters	11
Course Hero	12
WritersHub	13
AllWriters	14
Different Platform Called	15

EX55   What would such an account cost you?

EX56   What is the greatest risk factor on that/those platform(s)?

EX57   On average, how much time did you spend in a 24h day doing online writing directly or indirectly (e.g., outsourcing, editing, coaching, selling, recruiting?

High Time	
Low Time	

EX58   What was the hardest thing about online writing?

EX59   Do/Did you have to work late at night on tight deadlines?

EX60   Would you recommend online work and online writing to others?

Yes	1
No	2
Something else, what	

EX61   Did you leave online writing because you wanted to get away from it, or merely because you found something better.

EX62   Was there something that the platforms did that particularly bothered you?

EX63   Is this different in your other online work

EX64   If there is one thing about the world of online writing or other online work you could change, what would it be?

EX65   If this changed, would you go back to online writing?

EX66   In academic writing, which were your best and worst subjects?

Best	
Worst	

EX67   Was it easy to find online writers with the right skills/determination?

EX68   How do you ensure you get the right ones?

EX69   On average, how much did you pay subcontracted persons per online writing project done? Cpp? (State in kes) and when was this? (State in year)

EX70   For what types of writing jobs did you pay the most? How much did you pay writers for those?

EX71   For which types of writing jobs did you pay the least? and how much did you pay for those? cpp?

EX72   Did you get online writing work outside of the platforms e.g., via social media, e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn or email or referrals?

Yes	1
No	2

EX73   Were this from within Kenya or from outside the country

EX74 Is there any difference between getting work within online platforms and getting work directly from client

EX75 Was your last platform account a Kenyan profile or a non-Kenyan Profile? From which country?

EX76 Who is your internet service provider and are you satisfied? (Price, speed, reliability?)

EX77 How often did you communicate about online work with other online workers face to face? Daily, weekly, monthly, almost never?

EX78 Where did you go to campus?

EX79 Is there a place in Kenya where you know most writers live?

Yes	1
No	2

EX80 Where?

EX81 Take a guess, what percentage of all writers in Kenyan live in that area?

EX82 What was your personal connection to that area mentioned above

EX83   Did you start writing while living/working/studying in that area mentioned above

Yes	1
No	2

EX84   Did you move there because of your writing work or did you always live there? Or did you move there for a different reason?

EX85   When you first started online work, how did you meet/get to know the person you worked under?

Online (virtually/social media)	1
Offline (physically)	2

EX86   Why do you think this cluster of online work exists? Are there benefits of online workers being physically close to one another?

EX87   How do you think did OLW in the area mentioned above first get started?

EX88   When do you think this got started?

EX89   Did you remain in the same city during pandemic?

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EX90   If you went to the village, were you able to deliver online writing from there? Are you still there now, or did you come back to the city?

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EX91   Has the Pandemic changed the global demand for academic writing?

Yes	1
No	2

EX92   How?

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EX93   Which software did you use? E.g., Grammarly, Turnitin, others?

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EX94   Have you used ChatGPT?

Yes	1
No	2

EX95   Have you noticed any unusual changes in global demand recently [due to students using ChatGPT]?

Yes	1
No	2

EX96 How?

EX97 What were your estimated monthly earnings from online writing?

EX98 What kind of work do you think you'll be doing five years from now?

EX99 What is your Gender (**Do not ask**)

Male	1
Female	2

EX100 How old are you? **DO NOT READ**

Under18	1
18 – 23	2
24 – 29	3
30 – 35	4
Over 35	5
Other/NA	6

EX101 What is your current highest level of education? **[Do not read options]?**

Secondary school	1
Diploma/technical college	2
Bachelor/professional certificate	3
Masters or higher	4
Other/N A	5

EX102 In Which Field

EX103 In which county where you born?

INSERT LIST OF COUNTIES

EX104 In which county do you currently live in?

INSERT LIST OF COUNTIES

EX105 In which Area

INSERT LIST OF COUNTIES

EX106 Would you like us to invite you to our online workers forum

Yes	1
No	2

END