

MOTORCYCLE TAXIS IN ENUGU: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic effects of motorcycle taxis (“okada”) in the city of Enugu, Nigeria. Motorcycle taxis in the city have directly employed about 14,000 of the city dwellers and indirectly employed people in related enterprises, such as dealers on motorcycle and its parts and repairers. Operators of motorcycle taxis (“okada” riders) comprise 80% permanent operators (formally unemployed) and 20% part-time operators (public servants, students and artisans). Okada riders have been linked to serious crime incidents, such as snatching of personal effects, grand larceny, robbery and political killings. They also present the most potent hazards both to passengers and other road users in the city, hence increasing accidents are linked to okada. Because it constitutes a quick way of making money, many youths have abandoned their skill acquisition or capacity building for it, leading to drastic reduction in the demand for big bus intra-urban services.

Introduction

One of the puzzles of African transport sector is that with a few isolated exceptions, it suffers from what has been called the "missing middle" (Pankaj, 1991). Movement of people and

goods goes from walking and head-loading to the truck and bus in one technological leap. There is nothing much in-between. In comparison with Asia, there has been little use of animal, bicycle, or motorcycle-based technologies, i.e. the transport sector in Africa lacks "flexibility in service provision". This has been equally true in urban and rural areas, although the situation is starting to change with the development of passenger-carrying motorcycle services in West Africa (Howe and Oni 1996; Anon, 1997; Atubi, 2006)

A scenario which bears striking similitude to an invasion of locusts now dots the landscape of major cities across the country. Commercial motorcyclists popularly called "Okada" riders have taken over public transportation in Nigeria (*National Concord*, 1994).

The inner roads and highways are at present awash with the activities of motorcyclists. Motorcycle transport is an example of paratransit - a term applied to small passenger transport vehicles operating informally on a fare-paying basis (Armstrong-Wright, 1993).

With the background of acute mass transit problems confronting the nation, the development of motorcycle passenger services (Okada) seems unavoidable (*National Concord*, 1994).

Most okada riders are not licensed as required by the laws of the land. The upsurge in the use of motorcycles for commercial purposes is a direct result of the rot and decay which have insidiously eaten away all sectors of Nigeria's national life. The transportation scene is one of the worst hit. Our roads are systematically divested of commercial vehicles, as there are no spare parts to repair broken down ones, while new ones are unaffordable. Urban roads are recklessly left to decay as funds to rehabilitate them had either been mismanaged or diverted into private coffers. The end results

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are chaotic traffic jams and hold-ups, which could last for several hours at times.

Motorcycle transport is an example of paratransit transport - a term applied to small-passenger transport vehicles operating informally on a fare-paying basis (Annstrong-Wright, 1993). Paratransit consists of public and semi-public transportation services that are more flexible and personalized than conventional fixed route, fixed-schedule service. On a global scale, numerous works have recognized motorcycle as a means of transportation.

Parker (1991), in his study of urban traffic, pointed out that motorcycles have become an increasingly popular form of transportation in most Third World cities, such as Lagos, Bangkok and Tehran. He also noted that congestions in Madras had been caused not by lines of motorcycles but by a disorderly mass of pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles and occasionally by cars.

Okada in Nigeria refers to commercial motorcycles. It is one of the chief modes of transport, and by far, the most common form of informal transport system in the country (Atubi, 2006; Ebimomi, 2007; Wikipedia 2007). Motorcycles have adapted easily to the prevailing economic climate in a contemporary Nigerian society plagued by a dearth of taxi and bus service, hyper-congestion, and poor state of roads (Wikipedia, 2007). Also, they have become ubiquitous in Nigerian cities because of low cost of purchase and fuel efficiency.

However, motorcycle transport services are usually more expensive for consumers than other forms of transport services. Okada riding has been described as “a unique experience” by regular passengers and tourists in many cities of the developing countries (Cervero, 2005).

In major cities of the Third World, for example, Lagos, where traffic congestions (and invariably, delay) represent an

ever-present threat to businessmen, government workers, students of various schools and colleges, okada comes into play. With smaller design, motorcycles are able to weave through traffic, and literally rescue countless customers from the organized chaos on Nigerian roads (Atubi and Onokala, 2004a and b; Wikipedia, 2007). In a similar study on Port-Harcourt, Akpogemeh (1995) collaborates this finding.

Motorcycles have a far higher rate of crippling and fatal accidents per unit distance and automobiles. A study conducted in the USA showed that while 15 cars per 100,000 ended up in fatal crashes, the rate for motorcycles was 69.3 per 100,000 (US Highway Safety Authority, 2004).

A study at the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital, Ile-Ife, showed that injuries to limb caused by motorcycle accidents were 79.3% of patients who reported at emergency department of the hospital (Oluwadiya *et al*, 2004). The same work also stated the male:female ratio of accident victims to be 2.8:1 and identified the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to be particularly nonexistent among most motorcycle riders.

A study on the pattern and features of childhood motorcycle injuries in Ilesa of South Western Nigeria revealed that road traffic injuries accounted for 8% overall children Emergency Room attendance and 17.6% deaths. Over half (50.2%) of 263 road traffic accidents were due to motorcycle injuries - 83.5% of which were for commercial commuter use (Okeniyi *et al*, 2005). The study concluded that motorcycle injuries contribute significantly to the high childhood road traffic injuries

Okafor (1990) and Umenwa (1996) in their studies in Nnewi, Anambra State identified the introduction of motorcycle in the transportation sector as an answer to the call for a more efficient means of transport in road transportation. The studies also noted that the use of motorcycle (okada)

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arose from the problems ranging from the inadequacy of good motorable roads, lack of maintenance of the existing roads, incessant traffic and inadequate traffic system. All these problems combined together to lead to the development and introduction of motorcycle as a private/commercial means of transportation in Nigeria.

Methodology

Data used in this research were obtained from surveys of (a) 252 motorcycle taxi operators from nine sampled areas in the city of Enugu (b) 320 motorcycle taxi users (c) Motorcycle taxi associations, and (d) Motorcycle repairers association. Data were also got from published materials. The data were analysed using percentages and averaging models.

Discussion of Results/Findings

The socio-economic effects of motorcycle taxis in the city of Enugu, like many other cities in Nigeria, have been very enormous. The effects have positive and negative sides socially and economically.

Economic Effects of Motorcycle Taxis

Transport is a major source of direct and indirect employment, particularly in urban areas where public transport comes in myriad forms, including small vehicles (for example motorcycle taxis) and non-motorized transport (DFID, 2002). The commercial motorcycle, otherwise known as "okada" or "inaga", is today one of the major businesses where many young and old Nigerians are employed. For instance, a survey of nine branches of motorcycle taxi operators association in the city of Enugu revealed that estimated 13,220 motorcycle taxi operators are duly registered with the association in different parts of the city (Table 7.1).

This number does not include those motorcycle taxi operators, who operate without being registered with any branch of the motorcycle operators' association. From the survey of 252 motorcycle taxi operators in the city, 80% of them are permanent in the business, while 20% of them are part-time operators (Table 7.2).

Table 7.1: *Estimated Registered Number of Motorcycle Taxi Operators in Enugu City*

| Location of Motorcycle Taxi Operators' Branch Association | Estimated Registered Members |
|---|------------------------------|
| Ogbete | 1,575 |
| Relief Market/Iva Valley | 2,420 |
| Uwani | 1,200 |
| New Haven | 1,450 |
| Emene | 1,450 |
| Abakpa Nike | 2,525 |
| Obmagu | 600 |
| Ganki (Awkunanaw) | 2,300 |
| Kenyatta | 1,300 |
| Total | 13,220 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2007

It was also found that the part-time motorcycle taxi operators (20%) comprise public servants (45%), students in tertiary institutions (27%) and artisans and traders (33%) (Table 7.3).

The implication of 45% of part-time motorcycle taxi operators being public servants is that most workers in the state are not well paid and as a result, they augment their monthly salaries with the money they generate from the operation of motorcycle taxi services. The fact that students, artisans and traders operate part-time motorcycle taxi services means that the business has positive economic impact on the

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life of many people in the city of Enugu especially the economically disadvantaged ones by giving them employment.

Table 7.2: Type of Motorcycle Taxi Operators in Enugu

| Sample Location | Number of permanent Operators Interviewed (2) | Number of permanent Operators (3) | | Number of Part-Time Operators (4) | |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| | | No. | % | No. | % |
| Ogbete Relief Market/Iva Valley | 31 | 26 | 84 | 5 | 16 |
| Uwani | 25 | 19 | 76 | 6 | 24 |
| New Haven | 43 | 35 | 81 | 8 | 19 |
| Emene | 21 | 18 | 86 | 3 | 14 |
| Abakpa Nike | 27 | 21 | 78 | 6 | 22 |
| Obinagu | 41 | 30 | 73 | 11 | 27 |
| Gariki (Awkunanaw) | 19 | 14 | 74 | 5 | 26 |
| Kenyatta | 30 | 27 | 90 | 3 | 10 |
| Total | 252 | 201 | 80 | 51 | 20 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2007

Indirectly, the operation of motorcycle taxis in the city of Enugu has helped to employ people in other business enterprises. For instance, a survey of the number of people dealing on motorcycle and its spare-parts in the city reveals that the number of dealers is on the increase since many people started to be involved in the provision of public transport services with motorcycles. In 1997, the estimated number of registered dealers on motorcycle and its spare-parts was 366, but the number has increased by to 542 within the period under review (Table 7.4). It was also revealed that the number of motorcycle repairers in the city has increased from 270 in 1997 by 48% to 382 in 2007 due mostly to the booming activities of motorcycle taxis operation in the city in which the operators patronize the dealers.

Table 7.3: *The Permanent Jobs of Part-Time Motorcycle Taxi Operators in Enugu*

| Sample Location of Operators | Number of Operators Part-Time* | Public Servants | | Students | | Artisans and Traders | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| | | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Ogbete | 5 | 2 | 40 | 2 | 40 | 1 | 20 |
| Relief Market/Iva Valley | 6 | 3 | 50 | 2 | 33 | 1 | 17 |
| Uwani | 8 | 3 | 38 | 2 | 24 | 3 | 38 |
| New Haven | 3 | 2 | 67 | 1 | 33 | 0 | 0 |
| Emene | 6 | 2 | 38 | 1 | 17 | 3 | 50 |
| Abakpa Nike | 11 | 5 | 45 | 2 | 18 | 4 | 37 |
| Obinagu | 5 | 3 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 40 |
| Gariki (Awkunanaw) | 3 | 2 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 33 |
| Kenyatta | 4 | 1 | 25 | 1 | 25 | 2 | 50 |
| Total | 51 | 23 | 45 | 11 | 27 | 17 | 33 |

Source: (Computed from Table 7.2)

It is also note-worthy that motorcycle taxi helps to generate income to the state government and the three LGAs that make up the city, as each operator pays N1,250.00 and N900.00 yearly to renew his motorcycle license and insurance certificate respectively, in addition to between N150.00 and N200.00 that each operator pays for the purchase of local government emblem.

Social Effects of Motorcycle Taxis

Social effects of motorcycle taxis in the city of Enugu involves how the services provided by the operators of the motorcycle taxis have affected inhabitants in their bid to meet their daily life activities in the society. In the city of Enugu, the motorcycle taxi is the preferred choice of the inhabitants, providing personal mobility in relatively short distances and

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frequent trips, under the condition that mass transit is underdeveloped, and motorcycles often travel faster than automobiles. For instance, a survey of 320 households in the city on how motorcycle taxis have impacted in their lives revealed that the services of motorcycle taxis have aided them to attend to their daily activities for their livelihoods.

Table 7. 4: Increase in the Number of Dealers on Motorcycle and Its Spare-parts in Enugu, 1997-2007

| Location of Dealers' Association Branches in the City | Total No. of Registered Members in 1997 | Total No. of Registered Members in 2007 | Increased Number of Members Within the Period | % Increase of Members Within the Period |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Ogbete | 63 | 97 | 34 | 54 |
| Relief Market/Iva Valley | 33 | 47 | 14 | 42 |
| Uwani | 72 | 101 | 29 | 40 |
| New Haven | 28 | 42 | 14 | 50 |
| Emene | 32 | 43 | 11 | 34 |
| Abakpa Nike | 42 | 58 | 16 | 38 |
| Obinagu | 25 | 34 | 9 | 36 |
| Gariki (Awkunanaw) | 44 | 68 | 24 | 55 |
| Kenyatta | 27 | 52 | 25 | 93 |
| Total | 366 | 542 | 176 | 48 |

Source: Association of Dealers on Motorcycle and Motorcycle Parts in the City of Enugu, 2007.

Table 7.5: Registered Members of Motorcycle Repairers Association in the City of Enugu 1997-2007

| Location of Branches of Motorcycle Repairers' Association in the City | Total No. of Members in 1997 | Total No. of Members in 2007 | Increased Number of Members Within the Period | % of Increased number of Members Within the Period |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Ogbete | 37 | 46 | 9 | 24 |
| Relief Market/Iva Valley | 17 | 28 | 11 | 64 |
| Uwani | 45 | 57 | 12 | 27 |
| New Haven | 29 | 34 | 5 | 27 |
| Emene | 31 | 48 | 17 | 55 |
| Abakpa Nike | 32 | 56 | 24 | 75 |
| Obinagu | 18 | 27 | 9 | 50 |
| Gariki (Awkunanaw) | 42 | 55 | 13 | 31 |
| Kenyatta | 19 | 31 | 12 | 63 |
| Total | 270 | 382 | 112 | 42 |

Source: Motorcycle Repairers' Association in the City of Enugu, 2007

Table 7.6 shows the percentage households by topmost primary use of motorcycle taxis in the city. Topmost primary uses of motorcycle taxi services by most households include journey to work (11%), shopping (23%), accessing health services (19%), social visits (19%), going to school (6%), trading (9%) and to access banks (13%). It can be said that most people use motorcycle taxis for multiple purposes in the city of Enugu. Motorcycle taxi is one of the pillars of public transportation in the city of Enugu. This is because motorcycle excels in flexibility, allowing the rider to make door-to-door trips at any time without waiting, walking or transfer. It is also efficient in space use, occupying about one-fourth of space on road and in parking, in comparison with a car or bus when

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motorcycles are dominant, and about one-half of space of a car or bus in mixed traffic. Its small size and agility permit faster urban travel than car or bus, which reduces congestion and overall pollution.

Table 7.6: *Percentage of Households Topmost Primary Use of Motorcycle Taxi Services in the City of Enugu by Journey Purpose*

| Sample Location | No. of household intervened | Journal Purpose | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|
| | | Work | Shopping | Health | Social Visit | Going to School | Trading | Bank |
| Ogbete | 35 | 11 | 18 | 14 | 11 | 7 | 21 | 18 |
| Relief Market/Iva Valley | 32 | 12 | 20 | 16 | 16 | 8 | 12 | 16 |
| Uwani | 44 | 5 | 24 | 19 | 22 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| New Haven | 30 | 5 | 14 | 24 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 24 |
| Emene | 33 | 17 | 25 | 8 | 21 | 8 | 4 | 17 |
| Abakpa Nike | 42 | 14 | 26 | 23 | 17 | 0 | 9 | 11 |
| Obinagu | 30 | 14 | 27 | 18 | 18 | 14 | 0 | 9 |
| Gariki (Awkunanaw) | 41 | 6 | 29 | 24 | 15 | 6 | 9 | 12 |
| Kenyatta | 33 | 15 | 19 | 23 | 27 | 0 | 12 | 9 |
| Total | 320 | 11 | 23 | 19 | 19 | 6 | 9 | 13 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2007

Negative Effect of Motorcycle Taxis in Enugu City

The positive socio-economic effects of motorcycle taxis in the city of Enugu notwithstanding, they also have negative socio-economic effects in the city. For instance, okada riders have been linked to serious crime incidents in Enugu such as

snatching of personal effects (mobile phones, purses, and bags), abduction, grand larceny, robbery and political killings. Consequently, Enugu State Government signed into law a bill passed by the State House of Assembly banning the use of motorcycles above 100-cc engine capacity for motorcycle taxis operation in the State (Edike, 2003).

Again, okada operators present the most potent hazards, both to passengers and other road users. The riders flout all road safety instructions in the city without apology. Accidents arising from motorcycle taxis due to their excessive speeding and misjudged overtaking have been on the increase in the city. These have led to deaths, breakage of joints, skin and muscle damage, concussion and brain damage and facial disfigurement of the motorcycle accident victims in the city which have brought discomfort and financial costs to many families.

Furthermore, many youths in the city have abandoned their trade skills acquisition or capacity building to operation of commercial motorcycle because of quick money making from the operation. Small bus operators in the city of Enugu are experiencing relative fall in demand for their services especially for the short distant journeys due to the motorcycle taxi operations, while the use of Mercedes Benz Luxurious Single-Deck 608D buses is no more obtainable in the city, as the motorcycle taxi operators intensified their intra-urban services. Some of the operators and conductors of 608D buses in the city have been rendered unemployed partly because of intensified operation of okada in recent years.

Issues for Policy Formulation

1. The operation of motorcycle taxis in the city of Enugu should be encouraged, as it has helped in poverty reduction by the employment of many urban poor.

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2. With the meandering movement of the motorcycle between houses, narrow paths, and bad roads, coupled with the cost-effectiveness of commercial motorcycle transport, the motorcycle taxis should be encouraged and modernized for speedy door-to-door delivery of goods and services and accessibility to social facilities in the city.
3. Okada riders' card, which has detailed information about the identity of the rider should be introduced by the governments in the city of Enugu, as it is practiced in the city of Lagos (Ebimomi, 2007) so as to combat motorcycle taxi-aided crimes in the city.
4. To address frequent occurrence of motorcycle taxi accidents and their effects, riders should be made to undergo a compulsory training where they should be taught basic rules of road safety before they should be given license to operate. Again, the use of personal protective equipment especially 'helmet' should be made compulsory for okada riders/operators and their passengers.

Conclusion

Okada - motorbike transport - provides good employment to many Nigerians. The system had since spread over to many countries in Africa, to address prevailing transportation problems. However, the resultant transport accidents constitute a menace to the extent that those who used to feel safe are now frightened by the possibility of an accident (Ojo, 2008; Asalor *et al*, 1986).

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