

## Child Neglect, Youth Involvement in Okada Transportation Business and The Incidence of Road Accident in Ado-Ekiti

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**Abstract:** The study, in the main, examines the causes and consequences of the neglect of children on the incidence of motorcycle road accidents in Ado-Ekiti, the State capital. A random selection of three hundred and nineteen commercial motorcyclists, popularly called Okada riders, were made and questions relating to their socioeconomic background, their perception of Okada transportation business and the incidence of road accidents were asked. Findings revealed a significant relationship between all the variables above which justifies the research basic objectives. Appropriate suggestion were therefore given to forestall future occurrence of such menace

**Key words:** Okada transportation business, child neglect, road accident, ado-ekiti

### INTRODUCTION

In traditional African society, high premium is placed on children to the extent that anyone without one is often viewed with scorn<sup>[1]</sup>; Bassard and Eleanor<sup>[2,3]</sup>. The reproductive behaviour of such family often determines the family size and is also a major determinant of the popularity and respect such a family is accorded by members of the society. This, in part, explains why polygamy is often practiced in most societies. Of course, there are other factors such as the need for more hands on the family farms, the importance and the desire for a male child and as well as a belief in and a strict compliance with African marriage systems such as levirate and ghost marriage among others.

The by-product of the above practices is that there exist many children than the family income can cope with since most of these families are least prepared for them. Most mothers are therefore left with the responsibility of fending for their offspring. This, no doubt, brings untold hardship on the growing child who from the very beginning is face with the problem of wrong socialization. While some lucky children in this category end up in relations' houses who, at times, assume responsibilities for them, others who are not as lucky, are often left to face the battle of survival in a society where child abandonment, child abuse and neglect are just nothing but part of life.

Judging from the foregoing, it is little wonder the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Africa. Some of these future leaders end up in various odd jobs as house-helpers, hawkers, barmen, bus-mates (conductors), car-washers and worst still, Okada riders. It is better imagined than seen the job hazards, which pose serious threats

to the life of these promising future leaders. This, no doubt, has serious implications for a country whose estimated total population of 123 million has about 45% youthful (children)<sup>[4]</sup>. It is in a bid to forestall some of these untold hardships on the children population, that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in November<sup>[5]</sup>. This, basically aimed at an improvement in the quality of life of this category of the youthful population as well as ensure the maximum enjoyment of their inalienable rights<sup>[4]</sup>.

Nigeria, a leading African country registered as one of the 178 countries which ratified this Convention in 1990, consequent upon which the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union) adopted a plan of action on the Convention of the Rights of the Child. It is also worth mentioning, at this juncture that the right to freedom from every form of discrimination for everybody, irrespective of one's sex, religion, ethnic background was also stipulated<sup>[6]</sup> Constitution of Nigeria. This was the main message of Article 9 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children.

Article 7 of the same Convention, emphasizes the need for every child to receive free and compulsory education. It also spelt out the goals for the education of the child to include a child's preparation for a life of responsibility in an egalitarian society as well as developing the talents, mental and physical potentials and the personality of the child. Governments, therefore, were made to take appropriate measures to make basic education compulsory and free for all, encourage the regular attendance at school and make higher education accessible to all irrespective of sex.

The question remains whether Nigeria respects the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child in

view of her partial or non-compliance with its Articles. This is epitomized in the refusal of the Federal Government to make free education compulsory and its seemingly rejection of the United Nations' directives to spend 26% of its annual budget on education. Others are non-payment of teacher's salaries as at when due and government's inability to reduce the problems of the high rate of unemployment in the country. Coupled with this is the lack of proper maintenance of these public schools. As if these were not enough, students were made to pay various levies under such headings as development levy, examination fees, et cetera.

Consequently, children with poor socioeconomic background were therefore left with no option than to abandon the inalienable right to education by withdrawing from schools. Faced with the problem of survival, they took to odds jobs, which were already highlighted inter-alia. On such businesses was the commercializing the use of transportation, many people take to this lucrative business and employ young boys as riders. Very many youths take to the business as their lender of last resort even without the necessary training. This, it is believed, culminates into unprecedented road accidents, especially among the commercial motorcyclists. This is the main thrust of this study. This study, therefore, examines the incidence of road mishaps occasioned by the entrance of the youthful population into this strange but lucrative commercial motorcycling business known as Okada, using the Ekiti State capital as the location of study.

## **METHODS**

A well-designed questionnaire (unstructured) was packaged and distributed to three hundred and fifty-three Okada riders who are usually within the youthful population within the Ado-Ekiti metropolis. It was done through a random selection process, which was made easier through the involvement of the Okada Riders Association's (ORA) executive officers. The importance of the exercise was made clear to them through their leaders at each of the five Okada parks for each route. Those who could read and write were given the questionnaire at the parks and they were made to return same to their leaders directly while others took theirs home to fill. Questions asked sought the respondents' opinions on their socioeconomic background, the circumstances leading them into the trade and their perceived reasons for the high incidence of Okada accidents in the town. This technique was complemented with personal interview of some of the drivers including the representatives of their union leaders. The data (319

returned questionnaires) were analyzed using the simple percentage distribution.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

It was revealed that an overwhelming majority of the respondents were under the age of 25 years. About one-third (34.5%) respondents falls within the age group 21-25 years while those within 16-20 years age group constitute 27% of the sampled population. A striking discovery from the research is the fact that over a quarter (26%) of the population sampled falls below the age of 15 years. This has serious implication on the economy as majority of this age group belongs to the economically inactive population. Demographically, they are supposed to be the dependant population. One implication this has for the future is that the society would be parading many illiterates and this does not augur well for a developing economy like Nigeria's which would have to depend on foreign expertise to tap her resources.

Findings on ethnic background revealed that over three-quarter (75.5%) respondents were of Yoruba ethnic origin, while close to one-fifth respondents were Igbos. Only a negligible proportion (1.6%) of the respondents were Hausas while 2.2% were Igbiras. This is not surprising because the study location is predominantly Yorubas town, which harbours people from all works of life.

On family type, it was discovered that most of the respondents confirmed the polygamous status of their families. Not less than two-third (65.8%) respondents were from polygamous homes. This, when compared with the question on the marital status of respondents, gives a reflection of the belief in polygamy. 52.6% of the respondents were married while only about one-third (34.8%) respondents were single as at the period of the data collection. It is noteworthy that of the proportion of the sampled population, 12.5% were from families that were either separated or divorced. This is baffling because of the fact that not less than four-fifth (88.8%) of the respondents falls below the age of 25 years. This is a reflection of broken home, which usually brings untold hardship on children. About three-quarter (73.1%) respondents were either children of farmers, petty-traders or artisans with poor financial backing, which explains in part, while some of them withdrew from school.

The data on fathers' income corroborated the above point as over 75% of the respondents indicated that their fathers' monthly income falls below N7,500. and given their positions among fathers' children, it is little expected that majority of the respondents who are the latter borns would have the same affection from their fathers, save

Appendix A

Table 1: Socioeconomic background of respondents in percentage

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age:		
Below 15 years	83	26.0
10-20 years	87	27.2
21-25 years	110	34.0
Above 25 years	39	12.2
Ethnic origin		
Yoruba	244	76.5
Igbo	63	19.7
Hausa	05	1.6
Others	07	2.2
Family type:		
Monogamy	109	34.2
Polygamy	210	65.8
Position among father's children:		
1st born	21	6.5
Latter borns(2-5)	30	9.4
Later borns (6-10)	100	31.3
Above 10	168	52.7
Father's occupation:		
Businessman	23	7.2
Salary earner	64	20.1
Petty trading	85	26.6
Farming	106	33.2
Artisan	41	12.9
Father's income (Monthly):		
Below N7,500	240	75.2
N7,500-N15,000	32	10.
N5,001-N25,000	20	6.3
N25,001-N35,000	18	5.6
	09	2.3
Highest educational Level:		
NO formal education	21	6.6
Primary education	76	23.8
Secondary/Modem education (Incomplete)	101	31.7
Secondary Education (Completed)	91	28.5
Technical education	30	9.4
Religion:		
Christianity	152	47.6
Islam	84	26.3
Traditional	13	4.7
Others	70	21.9
Marital status:		
Single	111	34.8
Marred	168	52.7
Separated	33	10.3
Divorced	07	2.2
Whether owned a motorcycle:		
Yes	57	17.9
No	262	82.1
Average proceed (per day)		
Below N500	95	29.8
N500-N1,000	214	67.1
Above N1,000	10	3.1
Duration of service:		
Under 1 year	66	20.7
1-2 years	112	35.1
Above 2 years	141	44.2
Ever had an accident:		
Yes	264	82.8
No	37	11.6
No response	18	5.6

Source's: Author's field survey, 2003

probably for those from mothers currently enjoying fathers' affection.

Findings on the educational level of the respondents revealed that no one attained a higher degree of education. About 32% of the respondents never completed secondary school education while well above 23% never went beyond primary school. About 7% of them had no formal education. This statistics on education is frightening because it revealed that majority of the sampled population are stark illiterates who cannot make meaning interpretation of many road signs, which often leads to a high incidence of road accidents among users.

The effects of broken homes on children's upbringing was also revealed, as 69% of the population involved in the research came from broken home or had their mothers separated from their natural fathers (Appendix A). Even though a reasonable proportion (82%) of the respondents did not own a motorcycle, well over two-third (67%) of them revealed realizing between N500 and N1,000 daily. When some of them were interviewed, they confirmed the above report.

A young boy of about 19 years, on the question of whether he was planning to quit the job has the following to say.

If no problem dey, that is if be no petrol shortage (scarcity), I dey ake N1,000 plus out of which I go deliver N500. At time, marketm(daily proceed) go jump up during petrol shortage (fuel scarcity) ifnyou get luck see petrol buy quick... The work good well well if yo dey get machine (motorcycle) ride every day... you go establishm yourself quick and yo no go think of stopping.

The response above shows the intention of the respondents. He had no such plan of quitting the business at east for the time being. Judging from the above, one can predict why the incidence of road accident among this category of road users is very high. This is because, nearly everyone would want to scramble for money throughout the day as to establish themselves fact in the business. This probably accounted for the high incidence of accidents (83%) among them.

Further questions were asked the respondent on why they took to the trade; how they perceived the job and the duration of time they wish to stay on the trade. Findings reveled that the poor parental background and loss of parent(s) ranked higher among others with 32.9 and 32.6% respectively. About same number of respondent (100, representing 31.3%) blamed this on the account of their poor performance in school (Appendix B). A small proportion (3%) of the respondents blamed this on their stubbornness while in school.

Appendix B

Table 2: Youth's perception of Okada transport business in percentages

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Why in the trade:		
Poor parental background	105	32.9
Loss of parent(s)	104	32.6
Not brilliant in school	100	31.3
Stubbornness	10	3.1
Perception of work:		
Very good	42	13.2
Fair	101	31.6
Not too bad	63	19.7
Bad (Risky)	108	33.9
Don't know	05	1.6
Whether planning to change job:		
Not for now	296	84.3
Yes	50	15.7

Source: Author's field survey, 2003

Appendix C

Table 3: Perception of the Incidence of road accident in percentage

Variables	Yes	No
Perceived reasons for accidents:		
Bad roads	248 (79.5)	64 (20.5)
Over speeding	110 (38.2)	178 (61.8)
Improper vehicle maintenance	253 (86.1)	41 (13.9)
Wickedness of other road users	301 (95.6)	14 (4.4)
Inexperience drivers	107 (37.8)	176 (62.2)

Source: Author's field survey, 2003

Appendix D

Table 4: On ways for improvement

Suggestions	Yes	No
	216 (100)	-
	310 (98.4)	05 (1.6)
	212 (67.3)	103 (32.7)
	310 (100)	-

Source: Author's field survey, 2003 \*Figure may not add up to- 100% because of rounding

While a sizeable number of the respondents perceived the trade as lucrative (45%) at the same time, some (appropriately 34%) said it is very risky. Despite this confession, a large proportion of the respondents (84%) never had the intention of quitting the business for now.

On the incidence of road accidents among them, a number of reasons were highlighted. Of the 312 respondents who attended to the question whether accident among Okada riders has anything to do with bad conditions of the roads, 248 people representing 79.4% of the total sampled population answered in the affirmative while only 20% disagreed. As much as 61% of the respondents did not quite agree that they do over speed while close to 40% shared this view.

Other factors highlighted include lack of proper vehicle maintenance for which 253 (86%) respondents, out of the 294 people that responded to the question, agreed leaving only an approximated 14% rejecting this view. It is important to know the reaction of this category of road users to other drivers on the road. Of the three hundred and fifteen (315) respondents on this question, an

overwhelming proportion (appropriately 96%) of them blamed their accident on the harshness and the wickedness of other drivers using big vehicles, especially the 'taxi' cab drivers. Only about one-third said that the fact of their inexperience do cause road accidents (Appendix C).

An interview with one of the executives of the Okada Riders Association hammered on the uncooperative attitude of the taxi drivers. He reported as follows:

De (taxi drivers) dey think say the only one passenger we dey carry at a time go fill their vehicles (buses) whereas as we no dey drive on (ply) the main-road (highways) but areas wey they (taxi drivers) usually reject (plying). "Oju orun t'eye fo lai f'apa kanra" (i.e the sky can accommodate countless number of flying birds conveniently), we know say they (taxi drivers) are ready (determined) to clear us out of the roads, but God go save us.

-An Okada Union Official, male 28 years)

They, however, suggested ways for improvement. One of such suggestions is that of the rehabilitation and the enlargement of the roads. 97% respondents were of this view. About one-third of the respondents (67%) advocated for public enlightenment through public lectures and advocacy workshops for Okada riders. All were of the same opinion on whether the police officers should continue to control traffic on the road. All the three hundred and ten respondents involved said they wanted the removal of all police officers on the roads (Appendix D).

## CONCLUSION

The issue of child labour, child abuse and neglect have generated debates over the years but with the United Nations Conventions on the rights of the child, most governments are formulating policies aimed at improving the social and economic condition of the child. Of the very many organizations, which have formulated such policies are the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) among others<sup>[7]</sup>. It is surprising to note that despite the huge capital outlay budgeted on improving the living condition of the youthful population, very little if any is being realized to justify all these efforts. The problems still linger on due probably to the fact that government seems not serious enough at ensuring the sole objective of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. It could also be said that most parents lack the

awareness of the inalienable rights of the child. When they seem to be having the awareness, other factors such as poverty and other cultural beliefs and practices do inhibit the realization of this noble objective.

Given the above and very many others, the realization of the goal of the right of the child may for a long time to come remain a sweet dream. It is for this reason that the following recommendations are made:

- It is suggested that government should be more actively involved not only in the formulation of policies but also in the policy execution as regards the rights of the child so as to ensure their proper upbringing and development.
- It is also suggested that parents should discountenance with the repugnant culture/tradition of subjecting children to all forms of inhuman treatments such as street hawking, housemaid/helps, etc, so as to enhance the quick realization of the goal of the rights of the child.
- All children must be given free and qualitative education so as to prepare them for the rigors of life ahead so as to make them good citizens.
- Government should therefore abide by the United Nations' directives on the exact percentage to spend on education in its budget annually.

With the above properly addressed, it is hoped that Nigeria shall, within the shortest possible time, be ranked higher among the committee of nations.

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