

SOCIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF COMMERCIAL MOTORCYCLE RIDERS (*OKADA*)¹ IN IBADAN, SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The growing popularity of use of commercial motorcycle by the commuters as means of transportation in most urban centres in Nigeria and problems associated with it has resulted into public resentment and government action against the okada riders. Consequently, okada riders have devised various strategies to survive. This issues surrounding this has attracted little or empirical sociological investigation. The research design for the study was cross sectional survey and descriptive. Qualitative and qualitative data were collected from a sample size of 214 respondents made up of okada riders, commuters, law enforcement officer and okada union leaders selected through simple random and purposive sampling techniques in four locations in Ibadan. Results showed that okada riders varied in their socio-demographic characteristics such as age, income, religion, ethnic affiliation and so on. Most okada riders were motivated into the occupation ~~due to unemployment, poverty and infrastructural constraint.~~ Challenges the riders faced ranged from government ban, indiscriminate arrest and harassment by law enforcement officer, negative public perception to health challenges. The riders had devised vary degree of strategies to cope with the challenges. Using structural functionalism and rational choice theory, this paper argues that

¹ In the study area commercial motorcyclists are consistently referred to as *Okada* riders. They are called different named in different parts of Nigeria. For instance, in Jos, they are referred as *achaba*, in Calabar, they are called 'ukauke' 'going?', in some northern part of Nigeria, they are called 'kabukabu'. Also, in some parts of southeast OF Nigeria, they are called by various names such as 'okada', 'onweowa', 'ina-aga?' *Okada* is a town in Edo state and Chief Gabriel Igbinedoin's defunct airline was called *Okada* Air. In this sense, 'okada' in the way it applies to commercial motorcyclists in urban centres, refers to a 'flight' which nothing can stop, not even, hold-up, 'go-slow' bad road, human or vehicular traffic.

though the okada riders perform some indispensable functions in the society due to collapse of public transportation system, however, as rational beings they were motivated into the occupation due to widespread unemployment and poverty in the system. The study recommended that to curtail the menace of okada riders government should go beyond banning them but should address social conditions and situations that threw up and sustained okada riding in major urban centres in Nigeria

Key words: Commercial motorcycle, *okada* riders, government regulation, coping strategies, unemployment.

Introduction

The operation of commercial motorcycle cannot be entirely separated from the concept of public transportation in modern day Nigeria. In recent times, commercial motorcycle popularly called *okada* has assumed important position in meeting people's need for transportation, particularly in strategic places of urban centres and rural areas. Some decades ago, motorcycle was dominantly used for personal purpose other than commercial. Thus, the major means of public commercial transportation were bus, paratransit, streetcar, light rail, heavy rail, commuter rail, automated guided transit, and ferry (Filani and Osayimwense, 1974; Filani, 1988; Filani, 2002). Though some of these aforementioned public transportation means such as light rail, automated guided transit do not exist in Nigeria for use, it can be stated that motorcycle had little or no impact for commercial transportation during the mid twentieth century (Onakomaiya, (1978; Osoyibo, 2004).

The prevailing situation in the Nigerian as regards collapse of public transportation and creeping unemployment has made commercial motorcycle become increasingly significant. This argument can be sustained from different perspectives. Hence, commercial motorcycle has become a source of career and employment for considerable proportion of Nigerian population. Many societies around the world are faced with problem of unemployment, and African continent is not insulated from this the structural problem (Ayoade, 2010). For example, it is estimated that over 70.0% of the Nigerian youths, graduate inclusive are either unemployed or underemployed (Okafor, 2011; Garba, 2012). In order to sustain living, many of these youths have ventured into different economic activities, one of which is commercial motorcycle. In this wise, in the absence of any social support system, the increasing importance of motorcycle as source of commercial transportation has served as economic empowerment for the operators. (Akinlolu, 2010 The significant aspect

of this argument is that operation of the business is not only limited to illiterates, individuals of enviable academic qualifications (literate) are also actively involved. (Onumah, 2012). Paradoxically, commercial motorcycle has become an integral part of the economic system which helps to create jobs for numerous unemployed citizens both in urban and rural areas. It is important to note that as result of bad road network in most urban centres like Ibadan, some commuters preferred *okada* to other means of transportation as it is seem as faster and could get where taxis and buses could not reach easily.

As much as this new occupation seems, most commercial motorcycle riders are facing quite a lot of challenges relating to government and law enforcement officers like the police and road safety officials which require sociological investigation which has been rarely investigated and well as how they cope with the challenges of this occupation dominating most segments of urban centres like Ibadan. Against this background, this study addressed the four following research questions: What is the demographic profile of *okada* riders in the study area? What factors motivated *okada* riders to venture into such occupation? What are the challenges facing the *okada* riders in the study area? And what are coping strategies adopted by these *okada* riders in dealing with their various challenges?

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Ibadan, South Western Nigeria. Ibadan is a cosmopolitan city and a former capital of the Western Region. Like many cities that have been swelled by recent immigration, Ibadan is very large. The core population of Ibadan is Yoruba, one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups in Africa. But its population has always been ethnically mixed and is becoming increasing so. Although industry is less developed than in Lagos or Kano, it services the city with many of its needs and there are large numbers of traders and artisans. Ibadan also houses one of African's first and premier rank universities, (University of Ibadan) which lends its economy a significant intellectual, professional and artistic profile. By virtue of the university presence, there are ethnic and class varieties. In a nutshell, Ibadan city encapsulates many characteristics of modern Nigeria (Agbaje, 2002; Guyer, Denzer and Agbaje, 2002).

The city of Ibadan is predominantly a Yoruba speaking community in the South Western region of Nigeria. The approximate population is 2.8 million (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). Ibadan is a composition of different ethnic groups resident in the city thereby making it a multi-ethnic area. Moreover, Ibadan is predominantly a composition of Christian worshipers, though Islamic religion also thrives in the area.

However, the means of transportation in Ibadan is dominantly high way roads comprising both private and commercial motor vehicles as well as motorcycle and tricycle. Though there are other transport carriage systems such as rail road and air ways, road transportation is most utilized and accessible to wide range of users in Ibadan.

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods in studying the target population (*okada* riders). A sample size of two hundred and four (204) consisting *okada* riders, law enforcement agents, *okada* passengers, *okada* union executives were purposively selected from four strategic locations of Ibadan with large concentration of *okada* riders namely; *Orogun, Makola, Apete* and *Sango*. Instrument for data collection consisted of a hundred and ninety four (194) copies of questionnaire administered to *okada* riders while ten (10) in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with *okada* riders, law enforcement agents, *okada* passengers and *okada* union executives. Thus quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Also, quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used, whereas the former involved univariate analysis, the latter involved content analysis and verbatim quotations.

Results

1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of *Okada* Riders

The significance of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, sex, income in any social research cannot be overemphasized because it tells about the biography of subjected being studied. As regards, the age distribution indicates that the majority of *okada* operators in the study locations were under the ages of forty years (42.3%) and thirty years (38.7%). This means majority of *okada* riders in the study areas were adults and youths in their economic active age. However, one isolated fact in the table is the percentage existence of operators whose ages were above fifty one years (2.1%). This may be due to the fact that at that age level of risk involved is very high as there is no social security available to elderly in Nigeria.

Also, the result shows that a higher percentage of *okada* riders in the study areas were married (80.4%), while only 19.6% were single. The implication here is that most *okada* riders had family responsibility and therefore would cater and provide for their families. This finding encapsulates Gbadamosi's (2006) view who emphasized the significance of *okada* economy on family life and sustenance in modern Nigerian society.

Furthermore, the religious affiliation of the respondents showed that 54.1% were Christians while 42.3% were Muslims. This shows the popularity of this occupation to persons of both religions in the study area. The importance of religion in shaping the worldview of individuals cannot be overemphasized. This much as been captured in Weber's (1905) work in which he argued that certain Protestant ethics like hard work, austere lifestyle, frugality and asceticism facilitated the development of capitalism in Western Europe in the 19th century.

As regards the educational qualifications of the *okada* riders in the study area, result shows that 5.7% had Bachelor Degree or Higher National Diploma, 59.8% had secondary school and 24.7% had primacy education. This shows most *okada* riders had formal education. It also show the plight of most Nigeria graduates who had to engage in *okada* riding to make ends meet as labour market is saturated. For instance, it was reported in the national dailies that Dangote Group advertised for positions of truck drivers for its fleet of haulage trucks and about six PhD and 704 masters holders applied (Oladokun, 2012; Onyekakeyah, 2012). This underscores the precarious nature of education and job in Nigeria. Moreover, the income distribution of *okada* riders revealed that substantial percentage (42.8%) earned between N15,001 and N23,001 monthly. Also, only 2.1% earned

N39,001 and 14.4% earned less than N7,500. The implication here is that most *okada* riders in Ibadan were barely earning enough to cover their expenses. However, considering that most of these *okada* riders were married, they were able to provide for their families and take solace in the dignity of labour. On their mode of operation, result shows that most of them (90.7%) were riding their own *okada* while only 9.3% were riding for someone else. The implication is that that due they are all *okada* riders; however, their life style may be different as the former is likely to far better than the latter. In any case riding for oneself or for someone else is a function of cost of a motorcycle or duration of being in the occupation.

To underscore the cosmopolitan nature of the study area, result showed that 78.4% were Yoruba, 12.9% were Igbo and 8.7% consisted of others such as the Hasua, Idoma, Igala, Urhobo, Efik, Tiv and Edo. This underscores the cosmopolitan nature of Ibadan city (Agbaje, 2002). There is a clear indication that some *okada* riders in the study were also engaging in other occupation besides *okada* riding. For instance only 17.0% were riding *okada* exclusively, while 11.3%, 24.2% and 40.2% were combining *okada* riding with business, artisanship and trading respectively. The implication here is that most *okada* riders were enraged in dual job holding so as to make best of the situation they found themselves

following the collapse of infrastructure that support economic activities

especially power supply.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Socio Demographic Characteristics

Age (in Years)	Frequency	Percentage
10-20	15	7.7
21-30	75	38.7
31-40	82	42.3
41-50	18	9.3
51 and above	4	2.1
Total	194	100.0
Marital status		
Married	156	80.4
Single	38	19.6
Total	194	100.0
Religion affiliation		
Christian	105	54.1
Islam	82	42.3
Traditional	7	3.6
Total	194	100.0
Educational qualification		
B.sc/HND	11	5.7
OND/NCE	19	9.8
Post Primary	116	59.8
Primary	48	24.7
Total	194	100.0
Monthly income (in NGN)		
<7,500	28	14.4
7,501- 15,000	83	42.8
15,001- 23,000	38	19.6
23,001- 31,000	34	17.5
31,001- 39,000	7	3.6
>39,001	4	2.1
Total	194	100.0
Mode of operation		
Riding for self	176	90.7
Riding for somebody	18	9.3
Total	194	100.0
Ethnic origin		
Yoruba	152	78.4
Igbo	25	12.9
Others	17	8.7
Total	194	100.0

Occupational status	Frequency	Percentage
Business	22	11.3
Trading	78	40.2
Artisan	47	24.2
<i>Okada</i> rider	33	17.0
Others	14	7.2
Total	194	100.0
Years of duration in the business	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 years	113	58.2
Between 5 and 10 years	76	39.2
Between 11 and 20 years	2	1.0
Over 20 years	3	1.5
Total	194	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2011)

Finally, on the duration the respondents had been riding *okada*, result showed that most (58.2%) had been in the occupation for less than five years, while 39.2% had being engaging in the business between five and ten years. Deduction that could be made here is that *okada* riding though may not be a recent phenomenon; however, it has become very prevalent and common in most major urban centres in Nigeria the last ten years in Nigeria.

2. Factors that motivated *Okada* riders into the Business

Table 2 provides information on wide range of issues relating to why *okada* riders took up the occupation. From the table it was evident that most *okada* riders (75.3%) had engaged other occupations prior to their engagement in the *okada* business. This is goes to reinforce the finding made in the

previous section in which most *okada* riders said they had engaged or engaging in other occupation in addition to comer motorcycle riding. Only 24.7% had it as their first occupation. On why they were in the business, result revealed that most of *okada* riders were into the business for a number of reasons. These included; unemployment (34.0%); poverty (32.0%); lack of capital to start business (22.7%) electricity problem (3.6%) and poor salary (7.7%). The implication of this is that Nigeria environment is harsh and challenging that compels people to engage in all manners of occupation to survive. Furthermore, on how satisfied these *okada* riders are in relation to their occupation, result showed that most of them (72.2%) were not satisfied while only 27.8% were satisfied. This may not be unconnected with the challenges that

riders faced. In the word of one *okada* rider, he said:

This business is no longer profitable like before. Government has imposed ban on our operations in on major high ways. The daily money you get is not as fat as before. The police are not even helping the matter. They collect bribe from us, charge us unnecessary fee to pay. The motor vehicle drivers are not friendly us at all. They drive without consideration for our safety (IDI/ *Okada* association leader/ Orogun/ 2011).

This goes to ahead that most of the *okada* riders in the study area were engaging in the occupation out of compulsion to survive not necessary because they were enjoying what they were doing. This is not surprising as there were a number of these riders with university degree or Higher who should have been in a better occupation in the society rather than riding *okada* to survive. The also has implication for future of tertiary education in Nigeria. Responses from one of riders confirmed this. He said:

Unemployment and lack of money to set up a business is the reason of my engagement in *okada*. I am a university graduate for more than 7 years now without job. What do you expect me do? I must survive. I am a married man. The business is o.k. for now (IDI/ *okada* rider/ Apete/ March 2011).

Also corroborating, another rider said:

I am in the business just because I want to make money and feed my family. I have my own skilled work, but light is too bad and irregular in my area. I have no capital to start my desired business. I want to make some money to start the business. If I can get the money, I will quit *okada* (IDI/ *okada* rider/ Apete/ March 2011).

The above responses show that graduate unemployment is a social reality in Nigeria as in other African countries with devastating consequences for the nation (Abane, 1994). On whether they had union that protects them, most *okada* riders (90.7%) said yes, while only few 9.3% said no. Form IDI it was found that the *okada* riders belong to a union called Association of Commercial Motorcycle Riders Association of Nigeria (ACCOMORAN). This association protects the business interest of their members and also engages in other activities that benefit their members such as liaising with law enforcement officers on behalf of their members, granting of loans to their members, education/seminars for members and public enlightenment. An official of the union in the course of IDI:

Our union always protects registered members whenever there is trouble, particularly relating to careless attitudes of motor vehicle drivers. We make sure that no member is unfairly treated by either police or motor drivers. We are registered under

the state government. We lend loans to our members for their petty business (IDI/*Okada* union leader/Mokola/ 2011).

Also, on the issue of whether they will permanently like to engage in *okada* business if you have an alternative, 51.0% said yes, while 49.0% said no. As a follow up to this the respondent were asked if they contemplating quitting *okada* business, 85.1% said yes and 14.9% said no. These results go further show that most *okada* riders were engaging in such occupation simply to survive, make ends meet and not out of the love or likeness for the occupation. A response form an *okada* passenger

captures this sentiment succinctly. She said:

Okada accident is always fatal. Many have died in the business. If you go to University Teaching Hospital in Ibadan, there are many riders whose legs are seriously damaged beyond treatment and correction. The problem is that some *okada* riders are very careless. The motor drivers on roads do not even help the matter. This is very bad. *Okada* is a necessary evil (IDI/Female/ *Okada* passenger/ Mokola/ 2011).

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Factors that Motivated *Okada* Riders into the Business

Is this your first job ever?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	48	24.7
No	146	75.3
Total	194	100.0
Why are you in the business?	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployment	66	34.0
Poverty	62	32.0
Lack of capital to start business	44	22.7
Electricity	7	3.6
Poor salary	15	7.7
Total	194	100.0
Are you satisfied in the business?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	27.8
No	140	72.2
Total	194	100.0
Do you have association that protects your operation?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	176	90.7
No	18	9.3
Total	194	100.0

Will you like permanently engage in <i>okada</i> business if you have an alternative?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	99	51.0
No	95	49.0
Total	194	100.0
Are you considering possibility of quitting the business?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	165	85.1
No	29	14.9
Total	194	100.0
Why do you wish to quit?	Frequency	Percentage
It is very risky to life	53	27.3
It is not good	44	22.7
It is very dangerous	41	21.1
I don't like the job	11	5.7
If I get another job	9	4.6
Health challenges	8	4.1
Others	28	14.4
Total	194	100.0
Do you think <i>okada</i> business is profitable?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	131	67.5
No	63	32.5
Total	194	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2011)

On why some may wish to quit *okada* business, result shows that there were various reasons why they wish to quit. These reasons included risk (27.3%); not a good occupation (22.7%), dangerous occupation (21.1%) and a host of other reasons. Clearly most *okada* riders would want to quit the occupation if they had a choice. Finally, on whether, the *okada* business is profitable to them, most respondents (67.5%) said yes, while 32.5% said no. The implication here is that *okada* business may be profitable for large number of respondents to earn a living however, as most of them had indicated it a risky and dangerous considering driving deviant habit and

attitude of both *okada* riders and commercial vehicle operators in major cities in Nigeria. A police man attached to Sango Police station had this said about *okada* riders:

Okada is a major menace in Ibadan, there is no day that passes without one case or the other involving an *okada* man. They always quarrel with there passenger, fight along the street and flout traffic rules and regulation. Robbers use *okada* riders to committee crime and do all sorts of atrocities. *Okada* is one of the greatest headache we have as law enforcement officers in Ibadan (IDI/ Male/ Police Officer/ Sango/ 2011).

From the above response, there is an indication that *okada* riding has provided a means of livelihood for people, help to alleviate some problems of commuters, but it has created new problems in urban centres.

3. The Challenges of *Okada* riders

From the previous section there are some problems and challenges implicit in *okada* business. The section wants to further probe into the nature of such challenges. On the statement: 'there is high level of accident in commercial motorcycle operation' result showed that most respondents (30.9%) agreed with this statement, 28.9% strongly agreed while 11.9% disagreed.

Buttressing this point, a union leader said:

The problem of *okada* accident is mainly caused by the impatient attitude of motor drivers. They over-speed on high way and this makes them to lose control which sometimes results in collision with *okada* motorcycle (IDI/*Okada* union leader chairman/Apete/2011).

In another dimension, a respondent expressed his opinion thus:

There is high rate of accident in *okada* operation. The riders are too careless, rough and impatient. They disobeyed traffic law with flagrance. They over-speed on high ways, lost control of the

machine, which result in fatal accident (IDI/Road Safety Official/Orogun/2011).

Further, a police officer said:

Okada riders hardly obey the government regulation. They don't stop for traffic control light or traffic warden given signals and any other road regulations. They ride recklessly without particulars (IDI/Male/Police Officer/Sango/ 2011).

Also, on indiscriminate arrest of *okada* operators by law enforcement agents, most respondents (36.1%) agreed to this, while 19.6% and 14.4% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Only 5.7% strongly agreed and 24.2% remained undecided. Deduction one can make here is that law enforcement officers and *okada* operators in the study area were not best of friends.

Furthermore, on the use of helmet constituting a challenge to the riders and commuters, 46.4% agreed to this while only 16.0% and 13.4% strongly agreed and disagreed respectively. In addition to this, 44.8% and 36.1% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the reckless attitude of taxi drivers and private cars was a serious problem to *okada* operators. However, only 14.4% and 3.1% strongly disagreed and disagreed respective to this notion.

Stressing this point further, an *okada* operators said: According to a respondent:

What *okada* faced in the hands of police is not good. They arrest us without any tangible offence. The police delayed and disturbed our business just in the name of collecting bribery. Though some *okada* riders do have license to operate, yet the police arrest everybody without any offence. Many vehicle drivers do not have fear of God at all. They do not show consideration for *okada* man. They are too careless. Drivers are the major cause of *okada* accident on the high way. Despite our wide accessibility and coverage of inner cities and villages, government still impose ban on our services. This is not fair (IDI/Male/*Okada* rider/Sango/2011).

As regards ever involved in an accident since they started this *okada* riding, 68.0% of *okada* respondents admitted that they had ever had accident, while 32.05 claimed that had not. Of those admitted that they had ever had accidents, 62.9% described such an accident as minor, while 37.1% described it as major. This shows that many *okada* may not have

been sufficiently trained and such are prone to accidents. This confirms Solagberu's (2006) findings in which commuters identified safety as their major concern when boarding *okada*. On the aspect *okada* operation affecting the health of the riders such as stress, tiredness, weariness, most respondents (32.0%) and 31.0% agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Also, only 12.9% and 8.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Confirming this in the course of IDI, an *okada* operator:

I always leave home early and close late. It's not an easy job. As an *okada* operator you can go anywhere, but with government ban and clamp down on *okada* riders we are always careful where we go. Sometime when I come home I will be worn out, very tired and stressful. This makes me aggressive sometimes. But what do I do, one must survive (IDI/Male/ *Okada* rider/Makola/2011).

Deduction that can be made here is that *okada* riding has the tendency to affect the health of the operators.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Views on the Challenges Associated with *Okada* Operations

There is high level of accident in commercial motorcycle operation	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	15	7.7
Disagree	23	11.9
Undecided	40	20.6
Agree	60	30.9
Strongly Disagree	56	28.9
Total	194	100.0

There is indiscriminate arrest of operators by law enforcement agents	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	28	14.4
Disagree	38	19.6
Undecided	47	24.2
Agree	70	36.1
Strongly agree	11	5.7
Total	194	100.0
The use of helmet for both rider and commuter is challenging?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	31	16.0
Disagree	26	13.4
Neither agree nor disagree	31	16.0
Agree	90	46.4
Strongly agree	16	8.2
Total	194	100.0
Reckless attitude of taxis drivers/private cars is a serious problem to <i>okada</i> operation?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	28	14.4
Disagree	6	3.1
Neither agree nor disagree	3	1.5
Agree	70	36.1
Strongly agree	87	44.8
Total	194	100.0
Have ever been involved in an accident since your start this business?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	132	68.0
No	62	32.0
Total	194	100.0
If yes, how would you describe it?	Frequency	Percentage
Minor	83	62.9
Major	49	37.1
Total	132	100.0
Riding <i>Okada</i> affect my health such as stress, tiredness, weariness	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	16	8.2
Disagree	25	12.9
Undecided	31	16.0
Agree	62	32.0
Strongly agree	60	31.0
Total	194	100.0

What is your greatest Challenge as an <i>okada</i> rider in ?	Frequency	Percentage
Government ban to ply major highways	31	16.0
Incriminate arrest and harassment by law enforcement officers	19	10.0
Negative public perception about <i>okada</i> riders	21	10.8
Reckless attitude of taxi drivers/private cars	36	18.6
Health challenges	25	12.9
All of the above	62	32.0
Total	194	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2011)

On the greatest challenge facing the *okada* riders in the study area, respondents identified the as government ban (16.0%), indiscriminate arrest and harassment by law enforcement officers (10.0%) and negative public perception of *okada* riders (10.8%). Other challenges identified included; reckless attitude of taxi drivers/private cars (18.6%) health challenges (12.9%) and all the challenges combined (32.0%). The implication here is that most *okada* riders in the study area had faced a multiple challenges from various sources in the course of their attempt to serve the public and by extension eke out a living in a increasingly hostile environment.

4. Coping Strategies of *Okada* riders

Okada riders face a lot of challenges in the course of their business. Some of these challenges emanated from government ban, arrests and harassments from law

enforcement officers, negative public perception and health challenges. This section deals with wide range of coping strategies adopted by these operators in dealing with these challenges as presented on table 4 below.

As regards strategies adopted by the *okada* rider to cope with government ban, 14.9.% indicated they kept and obey the rule, while only 9.7% said they avoided the banned areas and highways. Also, 17.5% said they flouted the law and 13.9% said they engaged in limited operation. Greater number of respondents (35.1%) said they opened shop and engaged in another business to supplement their incomes as a result of the ban while only 8.8% adopted all the strategies mentioned above. The implication here is that each operator adopted whatever strategy or strategies he though would help him to cope with government banning them form operation in the major highways. An

operator who was flouting the law said:

Sometimes I take the risk of plying the highway if the fare is attractive enough. Well I had never been caught. I know it is risky but what do you expect me to do. How can government make law to ban us from operating the major high way without taking us into consideration or without input from *okada* people. That law is punitive; it was imposed on us.... (IDI/ Male/*Okada* rider/Orogun/ 2011).

Moreover, *okada* riders were adopted several strategies to deal harassment by law enforcement officers. Result showed that 18.6% were avoiding law enforcement officers while 13.4% were using confrontation. Also, 27.8% were using diplomacy, friendliness posture and begging in dealing law enforcement

officers. On the negative side the relatively large number of the respondents (29.9%) were using bribery and settlement in dealing law enforcement officers. However, only 10.3% were adopting all the strategies above as dictated by situation on ground. An operator while lamenting about the harassment by law enforcement officers and insensitivity of government in providing infrastructure said:

I don't think I'm longer interested in this business. The daily income is falling due to police arrest and harassment from Road Safety officials. I want to return to my original skill. I am a radio technician. You see, the problem is electricity. Government should help us improve the electricity situation in Nigeria (IDI/ Male/*Okada* rider/Mokola/ 2011).

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents Coping Strategies

What strategy have you adopted to cope with Government ban?	Frequency	Percentage
Keep and obey to the law	29	14.9
Avoid ban the area/highways	19	9.7
Flout the rule	34	17.5
Engage in limited operation	27	13.9
Opened a shop/engaging another business to supplement income	68	35.1
All of the above	17	8.8
Total	194	100.0

What strategy have you adopted to cope with the challenge of arrests and harassments by law enforcement agents?	Frequency	Percentage
Avoidance	36	18.6
Confrontation	26	13.4
Diplomacy/ cultivating friendliness/begging	54	27.8
Use of bribery/ settlement	58	29.9
All of the above	20	10.3
Total	194	100.0
What strategy have you adopted to cope with the challenges of negative public perception?	Frequency	Percentage
Obey traffic rules to avoid accidents	51	26.3
Being friendly, honest and polite to the commuters	66	34.0
Being rude and assertive	23	11.9
Being non chalant to their perception	16	8.2
All of the above	38	19.6
Total	194	100.0
What strategy have you adopted to cope with health challenges?	Frequency	Percentage
Prayers	25	12.9
Closing early	72	37.1
Taking medication to reduce headache, stress etc	11	5.6
Giving out <i>okada</i> to another operator for a fee	16	8.2
Taking enough rest	40	20.6
All of the above	30	15.5
Total	194	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2011)

In dealing with negative public perception of *okada* riders as being

reckless and necessary evils, the operators adopted several strategies in

coping with this. These included obeying traffic rules to avoid accidents (26.3%), being friendly, honest and polite to the commuters (34.0%). Also on the negative side some operator said were rude and assertive (11.9%) while few (8.8%) were non-chalant to negative public perception about the. Only 19.6% said they had ever combined all the strategies above. An *okada* operator who had ever adopted all the strategies said:

Look let me tell you. We know people don't like us may be for one reason or the other. Sometimes I work to correct such perception. The kind of strategy you will adopt depends on the situation you find you self. If a commuter is polite, fair and just to you why should you not reciprocate? Some commuters are real very trouble and quarrelsome. What do you expect me to do? I will definitely give it back to him ...I will assert my right...(IDI/Male/*Okada* rider/ Apete/2011).

In coping with health challenges associated with *okada* riding, respondents were adopting various strategies. These include; use of prayers (12.9%), closing early (37.1%), taking medication to reduce headache (5.6%), renting out *okada* for a fee (8.2%) and taking enough rest (20.6%). Also only (15.5%) adopted all the strategies mentioned above. In this wise, an *okada* operator who has

being in the business for over seven years said:

I ride my own *okada*...riding *okada* is a tedious business and a risk one too. Sometime to remain healthy I have to take this native medicine called *agbo* which drive away malaria and headache. But sometimes I close early and go home or to church for prayers. However, I you riding for another person you have to cover you money and that of the owner. So it's not an easy job and with all these government and police continues to disturb us.... (IDI/Male/*okada* rider/Sango/ 2011).

From all the responses above, it is evident that *okada* riders in the study area were adopting all kinds for strategies to cope a number of challenges confronting them in their attempt to survive.

Theoretical Discussion of Findings

This study was predicated on two theories namely Structural Functionalism and Rational Choice Theory. While the former is a macro sociological theory, the latter is a micro sociological theory. According to Structural functionalism society could be conceived as a social system with a number of independent parts working for the maintenance of order and stability in the society (Parsons, 1951; 1970). These parts (structures)

include the family, marriage, economy, politics kinship law and so on (Ritzer, 2008). Thus transportation sub system where a commercial cyclist has the major function of moving the people from one place to another. Through this, the sector is seemed to performing some functions in order to maintain order and stability in the system. The ability of *okada* riders to meander through the rough roads in urban centre, their ability to deal with road congestion, gridlocks and hold-ups, its affordability and convenience, all combine to *okada* riders the delight of many commuters who are always in a hurry to get to their destinations (Lartey, 2007). For instance, in a study conducted in Akure showed that *okada* was valued mainly because it was fast and readily available. However, commuters disliked it because it was considered to be unsafe and a bit expensive. The survey further revealed that commuters; concerns were mostly over safety, about 61.0% felt operators drove too fast and 31.0% felt they drove too recklessly. Left with few mobility options, many patronize *okada* well knowing the significant risks involved (Solagberu, 2006).

In as much as this function is manifest, there are some functions which are latent and unintended (Merton, 1968; Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). For instance, in as much as *okada* riders contribute in transporting people to their various destinations for a fare, however, in the process of performing this function

accidents and other infractions do occur. The rise of *okada* has been linked to an increase in the crime rates in cities throughout Nigeria, particularly in the city centers, urban slums and, red light districts (Solagberu, 2006). This criminal activities range from (the typical) snatching of personal effects (such as mobile phones, purses, bags) to abduction, grand larceny, and (political) killings. Similarly, *okadas* have been criticized for their roles in causing or exacerbating traffic congestions in the cities where they operate. Cases also occur of gang beatings where *okada* riders take on offending/innocent motorists during accidents. Fights have been known to flare up in rioting, and setting of vehicles on fire (Abane, 1994; Solagberu, 2006). In a nutshell, there have been instance in which *okada* has been used to commit crimes, armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, reckless driving and constant road accidents. This has contributed in exacerbating security crisis in major urban centres in Nigeria (Kevin, 1995; Iheanacho, 2000). All these latent and unintended consequences have large influenced negative public perception of *okada* riders as necessary devils. Consequently, government has intervened to regulate and limit the activities of *okada* riders as part of overall measure address accidents and insecurity challenge in order to preserve the entire system.

Rational choice theory (RCT) on the other hand, assumes a man is an economic man (*homo economicus*) that uses instrumental rationality to calculate the means and ends to determine his action and plot his life course. Choice is seen an active process in which agents weight the pros and cons, and then come up with their decisions. An active agent weighs his or her current circumstances against the attainment of his or goals, and he/she alone determine whether the price can be afforded (Archer, 2000; Shavarts, 2002). A central tent of RCT is a view of *homo economicus* as the bearer of given sets of discreet, fixed, hierarchal preferences. The assumption is that the actor will choose the action with the best (i.e. optimal outcome) which maximizes the difference between the benefits and costs. To be rational, in this sense, is to act in way which is consistent with one's stable preference rankings, establishing the optimal 'relation' between the goals and beliefs of the agent. Actions which are 'rational' for actor at the individual level can combine to produce a variety of systemic social outcome, which are sometimes intended by actors, sometimes unintended, sometimes socially optimal, and sometimes non-optimal (Archer, 2000).

For this theory, *okada* riders are conceptualized as rational pursuers of self-interest and self preservation. The rationality involved is instrumental rationality because it

involves the most efficient means to the goal of realizing individual material interests. This theory studies how individuals seek to realize their 'preferences' which are taken to be stable. In addition to having preferences which are stable, preferences are also assumed to be ranked in order of priority. According to this theory *okada* riders seek to realize the fully ordered preferences and thus maximize utility (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1977; Kiser and Hechter, 1998). In a nutshell RCT portrays *okada* riders as rational, self-interested, instrumental, and optimizing, with a fixed set of preferences (Beckford, 2000).

The import of this theory in relation to the findings made in this study is based on the fact collapse of public transportation and debilitating unemployment in the system have led to the emergency of commercial motorcyclists in the last two decades in Nigeria (Awoyemi, 2012). The *okada* riders are being rational in their attempting to seek means of livelihood and survive in the system that has more or less failed to provide for their needs (Ayoade, 2010). This is more evident considering the fact that most of these *okada* riders that form part of the respondents were literate and even graduates of higher institutions. Hence, most *okada* riders are considered rational to the extent they have calculated the means and ends as well as cost and benefits in the pursuit of their business. Also, in dealing with

the challenges facing them, most *okada* riders have adopted quite of number of strategies that work for them. As clandestine as these coping strategies may be, they all rest on the prevailing fact that the *okada* riders wanted to remain and survive in the business because the cost of quitting the business is higher than the benefits of quitting.

In a nutshell, it is safe to mention that commercial motorcycle is one of numerous ways of adapting to change (i.e. downturn in the Nigeria economy) in situation where social security is non-existence. For example, it is estimated that over 60 per cent of Nigerian unemployed youths are currently empowered in the commercial motor cycle economy (Ogunsaya and Galtima. 1995). It then follows that at the micro level, man is an adaptive being wanting to survive at every slightest economic opportunity. The adaptive feature of man in this context refers to rational choice. That is individual tends to participate in rational social action which economic gains are highest for survival and satisfaction. Conversely, at the macro level (social system) there are resources that are consciously or unconsciously available for survival. Hence, in response to changes within the larger system, rational individual takes solace in the utilization of resources available at the societal level. By implication, one may argue that the social change observed at the macro level of society informed the

economic action of the rational micro individual. In other words, the functions of commercial motorcycle appear indispensable not only for stability of the entire social system in terms of economic opportunities for people thereby preventing tendency for poverty but also complement significantly the obvious vacuum in urban transportation system.

Conclusion

With the realm of sociology of work, it is evident that man works to sustain himself, his family and his society. Therefore, man is a creature of work. In the situation of Nigeria all kinds of legitimate is functional to the extent that they function for the maintenance of social system. In the case of *okada* riders, their work though informed by desperation to survive and escape the pain of poverty may be functional, however, some of clandestine activities constitutes real challenges to the riders themselves, members of the public and the entire social system and government has intervened in response to this to place some bans on the operations and activities of the *okada* riders. These bans as well as other responses from members of the public and law enforcement officers have eliciting all kinds coping strategies on the part of the *okada* riders. It is instructive to conclude that banning the *okada* from plying certain highway routes or even outright ban of their operation may not solve the problem. Therefore government must go beyond bans and

fix urban transportation system and create jobs for teeming youths who are seeking means of livelihood and survival. Taking to riding *okada* by these youths who have tertiary education qualifications but with little or no training in *okada* riding and traffic laws may be coping with government bans, arrest and

harassment by law enforcement officers, negative public perception and health challenges with varying levels of success but in reality through their reckless driving they are endangering their lives, that of members of the public and the entire society.

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