

The Motorcycle: A Dangerous Contraption used for Commercial Transportation in the Developing World

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Rapid unplanned industrialization and urbanization has led to an unprecedented growth in the number of motor vehicles worldwide. This has also led to an increase in morbidity and mortality from road traffic accidents posing a great concern globally.

It is estimated that by the year 2020, motor vehicle accidents will rank third among the causes of disability adjusted life years (DALYs) lost. This estimation is indeed worrisome.

Developing countries account for more than 85% of all road traffic deaths in the world, more so, sub-Saharan Africa. Research shows that while south-east Asia has the highest number of global road fatalities in the world, Africa records the highest mortality from road traffic injuries. This burden is due to a combination of factors which include increase in the number of vehicles per inhabitants, poor road and traffic infrastructure and the appalling behavior of road users. This is so because these factors play a lesser role in developed countries despite the fact that they are more motorized than the developing countries.

The severity of road traffic accident injuries in Africa is higher because many vulnerable road users are involved and also due to the poor transport conditions which exist such as lack of seat belts in vehicles or the outright refusal to use seat belts if available, overcrowding or overloading of vehicles, road unworthy vehicles and very bad road conditions.

In recent times the influx of motorcycles into Africa; Nigeria in particular has further worsened the scenario of road traffic accidents. Motorcycle injuries contribute a major neglected public health problem, surpassing the recorded morbidity and mortality from other vehicular accidents. Even in the developed countries with low morbidity and mortality rates from motorcycle injuries, the risk of dying from motorcycle crash is twenty times higher than from other motor vehicular crashes.

It is difficult to arrive at a true epidemiological figure of these accidents in Nigeria because of poor record keeping and because some of these accidents are unreported.

These motorcyclists are mostly male youths in their reproductive and productive stages of life. They are undisciplined, reckless, tend to over-speed, over load their motorcycles for quick returns and lack respect for other road users. Even worse is the fact that they and their passengers most times do not use helmets resulting in fatal crashes with various injury patterns especially limb and head injuries.

In Nigeria, the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) was established by decree in February 1998 by the government of The Federal Republic with the responsibility of policymaking, organization and administration of road safety. Sadly, these functions have not been effective and achieved very little going by the increasing rates of road traffic accidents being recorded daily. Traffic laws are ineffective because they are flouted. It is not unusual to see a motorcyclist disobeying traffic lights where they are available or a motorcyclist carrying two or more passengers with all of them not wearing helmets even with the enforcement of the law compelling all riders to wear helmets. This also includes women with babies strapped to their backs therefore infants and very little children have become a major group at risk of injuries and death from motorcycle accidents as well.

Environmental pollution from the exhaust fumes of these many motorcycles with their attendant unwholesome respiratory sequelae is another equally important hazard to consider.

Riding the motorcycle has become a means of livelihood for many a people in Nigeria because of poverty and the lack of gainful employment which stem from wanton corruption on the part of individuals in government who have also failed to provide other better, safer and efficient means of transportation for the citizenry. This is further worsened by the poor health facilities available for taking care of the injured from accidents that occur.

Efforts at primary and secondary prevention of these accidents should be made involving human factors such as the behavior of the motorcyclists, condition of the motorcycles and the condition of the roads. In my opinion, motorcycles as a means of commercial transportation should be completely discouraged. It is a pointer to the failure of any government with worsening economic indices and the resultant effect of impoverishing its people.

In any case, public education is important in prevention. Public perception of the risks of injury must be understood in order to adapt and apply prevention campaigns that have proved to be successful elsewhere in the world. The risks associated with riding a motorcycle under the influence of alcohol or other dangerous substances must be clearly stated, understood and completely avoided.

Adhering to traffic rules and regulations and the control of speed carries a great potential to saving lives.

The importance of proper vehicle maintenance should be stressed and regular vehicular checks by appropriate authorities effected.

Wearing of helmets by both the motorcyclist and passenger should be enforced. However, the combination of low level law enforcement, frequent corruption on the part of law enforcement agents and low public awareness militates against the success of these regimes.

Currently, road infrastructures which are the responsibility of government and funding organizations are inadequate. These need to be addressed. Good roads must be built and existing ones properly maintained.

These accidents are inevitable even in developed countries; therefore, properly equipping the hospitals and other health care systems will ensure appropriate management of the injured.

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In concluding, I will reiterate that motorcycles are the most inappropriate vehicles to use for commercial purposes and should be banned out rightly. The mostly young individuals who use that as a means of livelihood should be provided legitimate alternate sources of employment. One way to do this is to provide cars to be used as taxis to those of them who can drive with recognized driver's licenses. These taxis can be acquired using bank loans. The banks and corporate

funding organizations can be involved in this process without the government actually spending a dime on this venture.

Finally, government should be responsible enough to not only providing appropriate road infrastructures but also create laws for road users and enforce those laws to the letter. Road traffic accidents need not be inevitable and unpredictable but they are avoidable.