

## HIV/AIDS-related sexual behaviour among commercial motorcyclists in Sagamu, South-West, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Commercial motorcyclists in Nigeria are predominantly young males with high risk behaviour for HIV/AIDS. They may have become a reservoir for the continued transmission of HIV but they are often neglected in efforts to control the disease. It is important to pay special attention to this group. **Aim:** To assess the awareness of HIV/AIDS and related sexual behaviour among commercial motorcyclists. **Methods:** Cross-sectional descriptive study of 300 commercial motorcyclists using a standardized structured questionnaire. **Results:** The primary school completion rate among the commercial motorcyclist was high (91.7%). Eighty four (44.7%) of the one hundred and eighty eight (188) married respondents were in polygamous relationship. The level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among the respondent was 94.0% while the prevalence of multiple sexual partnership was 81.0%. The regular condom use rate was 57% while only 8% of the respondents had done VCT. **Conclusion:** There is a high prevalence of risk behaviour for HIV and hence increased predisposition to HIV/AIDS among commercial motorcyclists in Sagamu despite the relatively high level of awareness of the disease and the high rate of primary school completion.

**Key words:** HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour, commercial motorcyclists, multiple sexual partners, voluntary counseling and testing

### INTRODUCTION

The recent upsurge in the unemployment rate among youth coupled with the poor economic situation in Nigeria has coincided with the rise in the use of motorcycles as means of commercial transportation. Commercial motorcycling has also been further enhanced by the absence of proper transport facilities

and road networks in the urban areas in Nigeria.<sup>[1,2]</sup> The cheap cost of purchasing motorcycles (about 100,000 Naira, ≈ 625USD), relatively affordable operating cost and huge potential market has made commercial motorcycling quite attractive to young, active men who are in their prime.

Due to this job, motorcyclists (also called okada riders) spend more than 10 hours daily

on the road<sup>[3]</sup> and are directly exposed to environmental hazards such as air pollution, noise pollution with harsh climatic conditions having significant adverse conditions on their health status.<sup>[4-6]</sup> This occupation exposes them daily to very close interaction with different segments of the population. Coupled with the typical 'garage life' that is full of social vices, they have unbridled access to psychoactive drugs, alcohol, cigarette and unsafe sexual behaviors.<sup>[7, 8]</sup>

HIV/AIDS is a major global public health concern especially in sub-Saharan Africa where the highest morbidity and mortality is found.<sup>[9-11]</sup> According to UNAIDS, over 70% of the people who have contacted HIV live in sub-Saharan African.<sup>[9-11]</sup> Nigeria has entered a stage where the epidemic could increase at an exponential rate unless adequate national and regional responses are mounted to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS.<sup>[10]</sup> Educating the youth, particularly those who are sexually active is important in eradicating HIV. According to Kaiser Family Foundation, teens and young adults are at the center of the epidemic because young people aged 15-24 account for approximately half of new adult HIV/AIDS infections and 23% of the global total adults living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>[9]</sup> The United Nations Population Fund also confirmed that young people are at the center of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in terms of rates of infection, vulnerability and of the 1.5 billion young people worldwide, 11.8 million are estimated to be living with HIV.<sup>[12]</sup> It is also reported that every day, between 5,000-6,0000 young people (ages 15-24) contract HIV and that many of them still lack comprehensive and correct knowledge about to prevent the infection.<sup>[12]</sup> In Nigeria, commercial motorcyclists are typically youth.

Knowledge and attitude towards HIV/AIDS and the practice or otherwise of safe sex contribute significantly to the promotion or reduction of the spread of the disease. Other important influences are age, religion and level of education.<sup>[13,14]</sup> The practice of safer sex with the use of condoms can prevent HIV transmission especially among those with multiple sexual partners, a practice that is quite common among commercial motorcyclists. A study by Adeoye in Benin, Nigeria suggested that the interaction between the motorcyclists and a wide range of

people in the society predisposed them to having multiple sexual partners. It was found that about two-thirds (66%) of the respondents admitted to having multiple sexual partners.<sup>[15]</sup> This study assessed the awareness of HIV/AIDS and related sexual behavior among commercial motorcyclists.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Sagamu, the headquarters of Sagamu Local Government Area, Ogun state, South West, Nigeria. Sagamu is a semi-urban community with an estimated population of about 195,000 people who are mainly Yoruba. Sagamu is home to a tertiary health institution (Olabisi Onabanjo University Teaching Hospital), many primary health care centers, health clinics and private hospitals. There are over 6,124 registered commercial cyclists and a sizeable number of others who are not registered operating in 2 branches with 22 motorcycle parks across the town.

The study designed was cross sectional descriptive. The sample size was calculated using the formulae for estimating prevalence in a descriptive study where study population is less than 10,000<sup>[16,17]</sup> based on a prevalence of 23% which is the proportion of adults living with HIV/AIDS who are young<sup>[12]</sup> and a worst expected frequency of  $\pm 5\%$  at a confidence level of 95%. The minimum required sample size was 273. The sample size was increased to 300 to adjust for 10% non-response rate. Commercial motorcyclists were selected by a multi-stage random sampling technique with proportional allocation. Proportionate sample sizes were allocated to each of the 22 motorcyclist units. The participants were then drawn from each of the units by systematic random sampling. A sampling frame was obtained for each of the units and the sampling interval was determined. The first participant was picked by simple random sampling via balloting.

Three hundred motorcyclists were selected using multistage probability sampling techniques.

The study instrument was a standardized interviewer administered questionnaire containing closed ended questions that

assessed the demographic characteristics, awareness of and HIV/AIDS related behaviour commercial motorcyclists.

### Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science- SPSS 17.0.<sup>[18-20]</sup> Proportions were determined and statistics presented in tables.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the age distribution shows that most of the 'okada' riders are young active males between the ages of 21 and 30 years (54.7%). The average age is 27.3± 6.7 years. The majority (47%) of the respondents completed primary school education while a sizeable proportion (40.7%) completed secondary school. The primary school completion rate is 91.7%. The majority of the

respondents (62.6%) are married while 35.3% of them are single. Polygamy is very common among the married commercial motorcyclists with 44.7% of them having more than one wife. The majority

of the riders (53.7%) had experience ranging from

one to four years riding motorcycles commercially. Most of the riders were found to have other occupations in which they received basic trainings like panel beating, motor mechanic, and battery charging.

Table 2 shows that the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among the okada riders is 94.0%. Two hundred and forty three (81%) of the respondents have multiple sexual partners but only 57% of the respondents use condoms consistently. Eight (8.0%) percent of the respondents have ever done voluntary counseling and testing for HIV (VCT).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of commercial motorcyclists in Sagamu

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage %
Age		
11 to 20	23	7.7
21 to 30	164	54.7
31 to 40	85	28.3
41 to 50	14	4.7
>50	14	4.7
Sex		
Male	300	100.0
Female	0	0.0
Religion		
Christianity	196	65.3
Islam	101	33.0
Traditional	3	1.0
Ethnicity		
Yoruba	192	64.0
Igbo	52	17.3
Hausa	23	7.7
Others	33	11.0
Educational status		
No formal education	25	8.3
Primary	141	47.0
Secondary	122	40.7
Tertiary	12	4.0
Marital status		
Single	106	35.3
Married	188	62.7
Divorced	2	0.7
Widower	3	1.0
Separated	1	0.3
Type of marriage		
Monogamy	104	55.3
Polygamy	84	44.7

Table 2: Risk behaviors for HIV/AIDS among commercial motorcyclists in Sagamu.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage %
Awareness of HIV/AIDS		
Yes	282	94.0
No	18	6.0
Multiple sexual partners		
Yes	243	81.0
No	57	19.0
Regular and consistent codon use		
Yes	171	57.0
No	129	43.0
VCT uptake		
Yes	25	8.3
No	275	91.7

## DISCUSSION

The age distribution shows that most of the 'okada' riders are young active males between the ages of 21 and 30 years. The average age is  $27.3 \pm 6.7$  years. This is similar to the findings of other studies which show that okada riders are generally males whose average ages are less than 30 years though a study in Benin, Nigeria showed a mean age of 36 years.<sup>[3,21-23]</sup> They are predominantly Yoruba, who mostly (65.3%) practice Christianity. The majority (47%) of the respondents completed primary school education while a sizeable proportion (40.6%) completed secondary school. The primary school completion rate is 91.7%. This is quite high considering that the national primary school completion rate for males in Nigeria is 78.8%.<sup>[24]</sup> However, the rates are thought to be as expected for places in South West, Nigeria where Sagamu is situated. South West, Nigeria generally better educational indices than other parts of Nigeria. The majority of the respondents (62.6%) are married while 35.3% of them are single. Other studies show a wide variation in the marital status of okada riders from place to place. In Lagos, 38% of them were married, while 45.2% and 60.4% respectively were married in a suburban town and Kwara state.<sup>[25-27]</sup> Polygamy is very common among the married commercial motorcyclists with 44.7% of those who are married having more than one wife. This is a reflection of the state of the general Nigerian population where polygamy is quite common.<sup>[28]</sup>

The level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among 'okada' riders is 94%. Six percent (6%) of the respondents were not aware. This is surprising in view of the high level of awareness campaign for HIV/AIDS in the country. Besides, other studies reveal that okada riders are universally aware of HIV/AIDS.<sup>[29]</sup> Although, a study in Benin revealed that 95% of the commercial motorcyclists were aware of HIV/AIDS.<sup>[15]</sup> However, it is known that commercial motorcyclists spend the most part of every day of the week on the road and have very limited exposure to health education campaigns that are being carried out through various media.

There is a high prevalence of risk behaviors for HIV/AIDS among commercial motorcyclists in Sagamu in spite of the relatively high level of awareness of the disease and the high rate of primary school completion. Eighty one (81%) percent of the respondents have multiple sexual partners. This quite high compared to 29.3% of okada riders in Lagos who confessed to having multiple sexual partners (24) but in Benin, 67% of the riders have multiple sexual partners.<sup>[15]</sup> The reason for this disparity is not immediately obvious. However, the practice of having multiple sex partners is also quite common among commercial bus drivers who work in similar settings as the okada rider. More than two thirds (74.3%) of commercial drivers and motor park attendants in Lagos had multiple sexual partners.<sup>[30]</sup> Araoye and others found in Ilorin, Nigeria that 91% of single sexually active drivers and 72% of the married ones had multiple sexual partners.<sup>[31]</sup> The practice is also quite common among workers in the

transport sector in Uganda.<sup>[32]</sup> The stress of staying away from home for long hours, social misdemeanor associated with the motor park and unlimited access to sex coupled with dwindling morality may be responsible for this.

Forty three percent of the respondents do not use condoms regularly during sexual intercourse. This is consistent with findings among okada riders in Benin where 55% do not use condoms regularly.<sup>[15]</sup> Commercial drivers and motor park attendants in Lagos showed worse results as only 11.6% were found to use condoms regularly and consistently.<sup>[30]</sup> Similar low consistent use of condoms has been demonstrated among truck drivers and patients in Uganda, India and Nepal.<sup>[32-34]</sup>

The respondents are not very receptive to voluntary counseling and testing for HIV as only 8.3% of them have gone for VCT and hence know their status. This is not an unusual finding. Similar results were obtained among okada riders in Abuja where only 8.7% of the motorcyclists had accessed VCT services.<sup>[35]</sup> Indeed a study in Benin found that none (0%) of the okada riders had done VCT. The motorcyclists tend to be too busy looking to earn their daily bread to subject themselves to VCT services which are not readily accessible to them. The fact that they are a predominantly male population may contribute to this because females are known to accept and take up VCT more than males.<sup>[36]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There is a high prevalence of risk behaviors for HIV/AIDS among commercial motorcyclists in Sagamu despite the relatively high level of awareness of the disease and the high rate of primary school completion. The motorcyclists do not use condoms consistently; they have multiple sexual partners and rarely have voluntary counseling and testing for HIV. There should be a very organized effort to step campaign to further create awareness, discourage practice of multiple sexual partnership, combat social misdemeanor, improve the acceptance and consistent use of condoms and improve acceptance and uptake of VCT among the commercial motorcyclists. These campaigns should be taken to their work places.

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