CRIME IN PUBLIC TRANSIT: A STUDY OF ABUJA MUNICIPAL AREA COUNCIL (AMAC), NIGERIA

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Abstract

Safety occupies a central theme in public transport. It affects consideration for the travel pattern and level of patronage in public transport. Globally, crime has become a social problem across towns and cities particularly along major bus-stops, transport routes, and other public places along public transit. This study examined crime in public transit in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Four hundred questionnaires (that cover twelve wards of AMAC) were administered to collect information from passengers, drivers and other operators of the public transit. Descriptive statistical technique was used to analyze the data. The results show that crimes such as theft, assault and battery, armed robbery, kidnapping, and rape/assault exist in AMAC. Most crime hot spots are located at the peri-urban area, along transport corridor, on-transit, bus stops and road intersections. There is the need for the intensification of proactive policies and programmes which include public education and installation of CCTV for surveillance along some strategic flash points of criminal activities.

Keywords: Public transport; Crime; Public safety; Transport security and safety; Hot spot; Abuja, Nigeria

Introduction

Transport security and safety have attracted global attention in recent times. Safety occupies a central theme and consideration for the travel pattern and level of patronage. In relation to road transport system, enhancing the safety of passengers and the right of citizens to life and health should be safeguarded (ECMT, 2003). Globally, crime has become a social problem across towns and cities along major bus-stops, transport routes, and other public places along public transit. There has been uncontrolled increase in incidence of crime in public transit in developing countries of Asia and Africa (World Bank, 2015). Studies have shown that uncontrolled increasing in frequency, dimension and advancement in crime in recent times is a global challenge across the world and Nigerian cities (Asiyanbola, 2003; Adebayo, 2013; Ewetan and Urhie, 2014; Asiyanbola, and Ayeolowo, 2019). According to India Delhi Report (2012) attention has been focused in understanding the interplay of critical infrastructure such as transport systems and facilities on incidence of major events such as terrorism, abuse and public assaults. Currently, in India, 92 percent of working women feel insecure especially at night, in all the major economic centers across the country and 85 percent of women in Bangalore complained about feeling unsafe while travelling (India, 2012). Sarkar and Partheeban (2011) revealed that women have been sexually abused in public transit in India.

As revealed by Gomez (2000) and World Bank (2002) South Africa has experienced personal violence in relation to sexual harassment in public transit. Past studies have shown that passenger fears, and concerns about safety influence their travel decisions. According to Sideris and Fink (2008), UK Department Survey for Transport showed an extra 10.5% of journeys would be generated if public felt more secure while travelling and waiting at the

stations. In the same vein, (Sham et al., 2013) found out that security in bus stops along mass transit enhance the chance of higher patronage of mass transit, especially among women.

Safety is one of the significant factors in influencing the utilization and patronage of mass transit. The incidence of crime and fear pose significant threats in decreasing the utilization of mass transit and in the long run have ripple effects on sustainable transport and urban development (Iveson, 2018). As posited by Ceccato and Paz (2017) crime in relation to mass transit refers to the physical safety of passengers and staff, as well as financial losses, physical and emotional well-being of commuters especially those using mass transit. The study further argued that globally, women have higher chance to be sexually victimized in public transit than men (Ceccato and Paz, 2017). In addressing the gender-sensitivity in mass transit, (Gekoski *et al.*, (2015) posited that numerous developed countries such as the UK, Japan, and countries of the European Union have put in place robust public transport safety measures for providing security to their citizenry. In contrast, Nigeria has witnessed poor safety measures in mass transit and passengers; women adopted their own strategies, such as changing their dressing code and taking precautionary measures to avoid sexual crime victimization while using public transit.

In Nigeria, public transport system has continuously become a major hotspot of numerous crimes. In recent times, passengers have persistently experienced unprecedented upsurge in incidence of harassments, kidnapping, murder, robbery, assaults, injuries, loss of life and property. Studies have revealed that the high incidence of crime along public transit, especially in developing countries was due to socio-economic deprivations (Burrell, 2007; Clifton, 2009; Odufuwa, 2011). The studies further associated high level of security to more spatial interaction and level of patronage.

Ajayi and Ajayi (2014) found out that cities in Nigeria have been faced with the challenges of the risk of lives and properties due to incidence of crime along transport routes and bus-stops. The study further revealed that passengers are being mugged, assaulted, robbed, and raped in Nigeria at major bus stops/bus stations and other mass transit facilities in their course of journey to home and other socio-economic activities. Olojede (2019) in an attempt to understand nature of crime in mass transit,

categorized crime in Nigerian transport environment to pick-pocketing, stealing, robbery, assaults, grievous bodily harm and wounding, breach of public peace, drug dealings and hooliganism. The study found out that passengers of mass transit have experienced criminal activities at different time of the day and week along bus stations, waiting at bus stations and travelling on bus.

As revealed by Wojuade and Badiora (2017), crime in Nigeria has changed from normal crime along transport corridors and routes to the recent incidence of kidnapping and terrorism. On the March 28th, 2022 terrorist attacked Abuja-Kaduna bound train killing at least 9 people, wounded several and with more than 65 people kidnapped. On April 4th, 2014, an early morning explosion that frayed through the Nyanya transit park in the outskirts of the Nigerian capital, Abuja, killed at least 71 people and injured 124 as hundreds of commuters travelled to work. The explosion destroyed 16 high-capacity buses and 24 minibuses, many of which were loaded with passengers. On August 22nd, 2015, a suicide bomber killed 5 and wounded 41 people in an attack at the crowded entrance to a bus station in Damaturu; capital city of Yobe State in Northeast Nigeria. On June 6th, 2017, 3 passengers were abducted from Lagos-Benin commercial bus at Benin City by-pass near Oluku station in Benin City. Furthermore, on 7th of August 2017, gunmen abducted 15 passengers in Rivers State when they hijacked a Lagos-bound commercial bus. The incident occurred around Elibrada community bus terminal along the east-west road in Emohua Local Council Area. These and many more are cases of heinous crime that may affect the quality and perception of public transportation system in Nigeria (Wojuade and Badiora, 2017; Alemika and Chukwuma, 2005; Fadare and Oduwaye, 2009).

Numerous studies have been conducted to understand factors influencing the quality of public transport, travel pattern and safety in public transit. Dragu et al., (2013) argued that crime and fear of crime influence the quality of public transport. Delbosc and Currie (2011) and Crime Concern (2004) posited that the level of security in public transit influence the patronage levels when traveling and waiting at transits stop bus stations. Some other (Ekblom 2011; Weisburd et al., 2012; Armitage and Joyce 2017) argued that surveillance in relation to ability to observe what is happening through the use

of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) and security guards influence crime and the perceptions of safety. Clifton (2009) and Odufuwa (2011) revealed that socio-economic deprivations contribute to the criminal activities on public transport system in developing countries. The studies further revealed that the more secure the public transport system, the more spatial interactions or patronage experienced.

Cozens (2014) found out that there is an interplay of the prevailing land-use and its effects on crime in public transit. The study identified that there are some prevailing land-use that increase vulnerability to crime in mass transit in relation to hotels, retail shops, seedy inns, vacant lots/buildings, and cash converters/pawn shops. It has been observed that public routes in relation to footpaths, parking facilities, and unsupervised transit areas; recreational settings in relation to bars and parks; public transport such as bus-stops, transport corridors and other adjoining locations; retail stores, health care centres and clusters of industries among others are potential location of crime generators, crime attractors (Brantingham and Brantingham, 2008), crime detractors (Kinney *et al.,* 2008), crime facilitators (Clarke and Eck, 2005), and crime precipitators (Wortley, 2008). According to Otu (2017), the uncontrolled activities of touts known as "Agberos" at the major bus-stops in Nigerian transport system has brought about physical assaults and harassment of customers in their bid to compete for passengers. Ceccato and Paz (2017) found out that the interplay of high densities of passengers in relation to overcrowding in public transit creates fertile ground for sexual harassment and other forms of abuse.

It is against this backdrop that this study examine crime in public transit in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include; to identify the category of crime in public transit in the study area; to identify the perceived hot spots of crime in public transit in the study area; and, to examine the temporal dimension of crime in public transit in the study area.

Method of Study

Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Four hundred questionnaires (that covers twelve wards of AMAC) were administered. Three hundred and eighty were returned. The target respondents were passengers, drivers and other operators of public transits in Garki, Gui, Gwagwa, Gwarinpa, Karu, Karshi, Kabusa, Nyanya, Orozo, Jiwa, Wuse and City centre wards. The number administered in each of the wards is proportional to the number of registered drivers and vehicles at the motor park in each ward. Purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants; drivers, operators, and passengers. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

Findings and Discussion

Categories of Crime Experienced and Perceived Hot Spots of Crime in Public Transit by the Respondents

Respondents were asked various questions relating to their perceived safety at the garage/bus stop, fear of being victims of crime in public transit, category of crime experienced in public transit, report of crime in public transit, knowledge of police emergency number, and perceived hot spots of crime in public transit. Table 1 shows the response of the respondents. In response to perceived safety at garage/bus stop, 43% often felt safe at bus stop, while 25% sometimes felt safe at the bus stop. When asked about their fear of being victims of crime in public transit, most of the respondents sometimes have fear of being victims of crime in public transport. Results on category of crime experienced in public transit shows that theft is the most common crime experienced by the respondents in public transit, followed by assault and battery, armed robbery, kidnapping, and rape/assault. Only few (35%) respondents had reported crime in public transit. This indicates that majority of the respondents had not reported cases of criminal activities in public transit in the study area. Also, only few (25%) respondents knew the police emergency number. This indicates majority of the respondents were not aware of emergency number to call during incidence of criminal activities. Inability to know emergency number to call during incidences of crime may influence slow response to distress call by law enforcement agencies in the study area. This is in the long run may bring about inability to effectively control criminal activities in public transit. Most perceived crime hot spots are located at the peri-urban area, along transport corridor, on-transit, bus stops and road intersections.

Table 1: Categories and Perceived Hot Spots of Crime in Public Transit in AMAC

S/N	Variables		Percentage (N = 380)
1	Perceived safety at Garage/Bus Stop	Often felt safe at Bus Stop	43.0
		Sometimes felt safe at the Bus Stop	25.0
		Rarely felt safe at the Bus Stop	11.0
		Never felt safe at the Bus Stop	3.0
2	Fear of being victims of crime in public transit	Always	18.0
		Often	12.0
		Sometimes	42.0
		Rarely	19.0
		Never	9.0
3	Category of crime experienced in public transit	Theft	27.0
		Armed Robbery	19.0
		Assault and Battery	22.0
		Rape/Assault	15.0
		Kidnapping	17.0
4	Report of crime in public transit	Respondents' who had reported Crime in Public Transit	35.0
5	Knowledge of police emergency number	Respondents' who knew Police Emergency Number	25.0
6	Perceived hotspots of crime in public transit	Peri-urban area	48.0
		On-transit	14.0
		Along transport corridor	22.0
		Bus Stop	10.0
		Road intersection	6.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 2: Temporal Dimension of Crime in Public Transit

S/N	Variables		Percentage (N = 380)
1	Time of occurrence of crime in public transit	5:00am-11:00am	6.0
		12:00noon-3:00pm	3.0
		4:00pm-6:00pm	9.0
		7:00pm-12:00am	56.0
		1:00am-4:00am	26.0
2	Period of the year of crime prevalence in public transit	Week Days	12.0
		Weekends	11.0
		Festive period	56.0
		Dry season	14.0
		Rainy season	4.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Temporal Dimension of Crime in Public Transit

Respondents were asked questions relating to the temporal dimension of crime in public transit at AMAC which include time of occurrence of crime in public transit, and period of the year of crime prevalence in public transit. Table 2 shows the response of the respondents. The result shows that most (56%) of the crime occurs between 7pm and 12am (mid-night), and most (56%) of the crime occurs during festive periods.

Recommendation and Conclusion

The paper examined crime in public transport in AMAC. Findings from the study reveals that most of the respondents sometimes have fear of being victims of crime in public transport. Theft is the most common crime experienced by the respondents in public transit, followed by assault and battery, armed robbery, kidnapping, and rape/assault. Only few respondents had reported crime in public transit and, only few respondents knew the police emergency number. Most perceived crime hot spots are located

at the peri-urban area, along transport corridor, on-transit, bus stops and road intersections. Most of the crime occurs between 7pm and 12am (mid-night), and most of the crime occurs during festive periods.

These findings suggest different steps that transit operators, passengers, drivers, community planners, and other policymakers can take proactively to reduce the severity of the problem. These include education of the public about safety tips on crimes associated to transit and travel pattern. Transit operators, drivers, passengers, police, and other responsible public agencies can instigate widespread educational campaign about crime in public transit. Such campaign, through adverts and posters on transit vehicles and in transit settings, can raise awareness about the problem and encourage victims and bystanders to report crime incidents. Also, there should be prompt deployment of law enforcement agencies along peri-urban areas, public places, bus stops and other crime hotspots. This would reduce

the incidence of crime in public transit. This should be match with locations of security checkpoints in some strategic locations and operate every hour for effective crime prevention. Furthermore, there is need to reduce overcrowding, especially mass transit buses. This would reduce the vulnerabilities of commuters, passengers and drivers to criminal attacks. Also, there should be installation of CCTV for surveillance along some strategic flash points of criminal activities. This would enhance the need to have real-time information on incidences of crime and enhance prompt deployment of security agencies for effective crime prevention and management. There is also the need for massive awareness across bus stops, public transits, commercial centres, religious centres and other public places on the toll-free number to call in case of emergency. This would enhance prompt response and deployment of law enforcement agencies for crime prevention and management.

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