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Psychosocial factors influencing aggressive driving among commercial and private automobile drivers in Lagos metropolis

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ABSTRACT

Using 300 purposively selected private and commercial automobile drivers in Lagos, Nigeria as participants, and with a combination of FGD, interview and questionnaire, the study investigated the influence of psychosocial factors such as (locus of control, age, years of driving experience, marital status and educational status) on aggressive behavior among the drivers based on the frustration – aggression hypothesis. Given the chaotic traffic situation in Lagos, premise was that the aggressive instincts in human beings would be more pronounced among the drivers thereby negatively affecting their behavior. Result showed that commercial drivers were significantly higher on aggressive driving behavior. Younger drivers were more aggressive than older ones. Aggressiveness was attributed to other factors in the environment other than the drivers themselves. The need for training of drivers in proper and acceptable way of driving within their cultural context was emphasized.

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1. Introduction

The rapid urbanization around the world has been identified as resulting in more automobiles in cities and urban centers of the world (World Bank Group, 2000), the implication of this is that road traffic congestion has invariably increased too. Researchers like Oni (2002) and Nesbit, Conger, and Conger (2007), have reported that aggressive driving and road rage is not a new problem, and as a result of congestions in most cities of the world, there is usually heavy and slow moving traffic. As a result, more and more drivers are taking out their anger and frustrations in their vehicles. A behavior which has been said to have grievous impact on other road users and the entire populace. E.g., death and serious injuries (Nesbit et al., 2007).

For instance, in 1997, Vest, Cohen, and Tharp, reported that since 1990, aggressive driving had increased by 51%.

Pepper (1997) reported that aggressive driving continues to increase about 7% every year. The American Automobile Association Foundation for Traffic Safety, in 1997, reported that between 1990 and 1996, 218 deaths and 12,610 injuries occurred due to road rage. In a survey conducted on UK motorists, nearly 90% reported that they had been victims of what they perceived to be road rage. In addition, approximately 60% stated that they themselves had experienced anger while driving over the past year. Interestingly, drivers who identify themselves as having problems with anger drive the same amount (both distance and time) as low anger drivers. However, studies show that they are 2.5–3.0 times more likely to become angry while driving, 3.5–4.0 times more likely to be physically and/or verbally aggressive, and 1.5–2.0 times more likely to engage in risky behavior behind the wheel (Deffenbacher, Filetti, Lynch, Dahlen, & Oetting, 2002; Deffenbacher, Petrilli, Lynch, Oetting, & Swaim, 2003; Deffenbacher, Lynch, Filetti, Dahlen, & Oetting, 2003; Deffenbacher, Filetti, Richards, Lynch, & Oetting, 2003).

A look at the situation of traffic in Lagos state of Nigeria (the setting for this research work) will affirm that there

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is little or no difference from what obtains in some other parts of the world as stated above. Oni (2002) has observed that Nigeria is urbanizing at an unprecedented high rate. And according to the National Urban Transport Policy for Nigeria, urban population as percentage of the national population in 1970 was 20%, which rose to 38% in 1993 and the projected proportion is estimated at 60% in the year 2010. This is a clear indication that the rate of urban population growth far exceeds the national growth rate of 3% which may be largely responsible for the unmet demand in urban Transport Infrastructure. It is more interesting to know that the highest numbers of death and injuries from automobile accidents are recorded in the commercial capital of Lagos in Nigeria. Statistics from the Nigeria Police show that the number of people killed in road accidents had risen by more than 150% in 43 years. The figures, spanning 1955–1998, indicate that 489 people died in 1955 compared to 6,500 in 1998. Statistics for the injured are even more staggering in the 43 years, rising from 4,289 persons in 1955 to 17,117 persons in 1998 (Loy France, 2004).

Ugwuegbu (1977) and Balogun (1991) reported research findings that Lagos is characterized with perpetual traffic jams, daily loss of inestimable working hours, road accidents and ensuing scuffles among road users; all of which can be attributed to seemingly nonobservance of traffic rule and regulations, as well as aggressive behaviors of the automobile drivers. In Lagos city, it is worth mentioning that drivers of both commercial and private vehicles are known to have a uniquely aggressive driving culture (Oluwasanmi, 1993). More specifically, however, commercial vehicle drivers are known to be rough, reckless, always in haste, rudely disobedient to traffic rules and more prone to accidents. The reasons adduced for this distinguishably negative behavior of commercial drivers include their general low level of education, drug use and abuse and desire to make several trips within a given time in order to make more money. As a matter of fact, the chaotic nature of traffic and other activities in Lagos seem not to be a new phenomenon, because, as far back as 1977, Arnold and Weiss described the traffic situation of Lagos thus:

“Hardly anything in Lagos worked properly in the mid-1970s (and worse still now): the port was unbearably congested, the roads often presented a solid and permanent traffic jam. . . .”;

Since, transportation is the life wire of any urban society; it could make or mar the environment depending on the interactive measures and degree of responsiveness to transport planning and management in urban development (Oni, 2002). With this growth has come an increase in environmental and energy impacts – carbon emissions, petroleum consumption, air pollution, traffic congestion and other externalities. Whether we are in a private car, a public transport vehicle, riding motorcycle or walking, the time we spend transporting ourselves is longer, the costs are higher and the air we breathe gets dirtier. All of these experiences stimulate frustrating experiences in people and such experiences may most likely precipitate aggressive behavior in automobile drivers.

Aggressive driving is a form of automobile operation in which an operator will deliberately behave with contempt toward other drivers and drive in such a manner as to increase the risk of an automobile accident. Aggressive driving involves deliberate, unsafe driver actions (UDAs) such as driving over the speed limit, following too closely, and unsafe lane changing. Aggressive driving behavior may include: making frequent or unsafe lane changes, failing to signal or yield the right of way, tailgating and disregarding traffic controls. According to Baron and Byrne (1994), there are two types of aggression, instrumental and hostile. Instrumental aggression while driving includes acts such as speeding off, running a red light, as well as weaving in and out of traffic. Hostile aggression while driving may consist of insulting comments or gestures, horn honking, cutting someone off, etc. These acts are performed in order to hurt or get revenge on the person who is causing the frustration and/or anger.

Shinar (1998) has identified factors that influence the likelihood of aggressive driving as; frustration, traffic congestion, driver characteristics (such as age, gender and ethnicity) of both instigator and aggressor), personality characteristics, and social status (of both instigator and aggressor). He also reported his study carried out on Israeli drivers' reactions to a situation in which the driver ahead of them did not move when the traffic light turned green. Shinar found that when the light the participants were at only stayed green for a short amount of time, they were quicker to honk than when they were at a light which remained green for a longer period of time. He also found that drivers were quicker to honk during weekday rush hours than during the weekend and that males and younger drivers were more impatient.

However, another study that examined the effects of traffic congestion found different results (Lajunen, Parker, & Summala, 1999). Contrary to Shinar's study (1998) they found no significant correlations between rush hour driving and driver aggression. This study was carried out in Great Britain, Finland, and the Netherlands, and unlike Shinar's study (1998), was based on self-reported responses rather than observed behaviors. It was suggested that a possible explanation for this difference in results may be due to differences between cultures. Interestingly, in 2002, Parker, Lajunen, and Summala published another study of driver aggression in Great Britain, Finland, and the Netherlands. Contrary to their previous study, they suggested that traffic density may in fact provoke aggressive driving.

In a study by Dukes, Clayton, Jenkins, Miller, and Rodgers (2001), participants were presented with driving scenarios and asked how they would respond to them. The characteristics of the drivers revealed in the scenarios were age, gender, and cell phone use. The results revealed that situations in which a driver was reckless produced higher reported levels of road rage than when a driver held up traffic. However, there were no significant differences in reported aggression resulting from any of the driver's characteristics.

Yagil (2001) found that drivers who are anxious or competitive and highly irritable are more likely to become aggressive when they are frustrated. This study took place

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