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Criminality and crime control measures in selected train stations in Lagos, Nigeria

Usman Ojedokun* and Grace Adeoti†

ABSTRACT

Crime is among the major problems negatively impacting the effective operation of the rail transportation system in Nigeria. Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to criminality in public transit stations, there is a paucity of empirical data on the occurrence of the problem within train station facilities. Thus, using routine activity theory as a guide, this study investigated criminality and crime control measures in selected train stations in Lagos, Nigeria. In-depth interview and key informant interview methods were primarily deployed to gather data from 20 train station officials and eight locomotive drivers selected using purposive sampling technique. Results showed that vandalism, pilfering of train station equipment, rooftop riding and ticket evasion were the most commonly recorded forms of crime in train stations in Lagos. Multiple situational and environmental factors, including the presence of abandoned equipment, lax security systems, the construction of train stations in residential neighbourhoods, and poorly illuminated environments were making train stations vulnerable to criminality. It is imperative for the Nigeria Railway Corporation to strengthen existing security architecture at train stations to effectively deter motivated offenders from viewing the public transportation hub as suitable sites for crime perpetration.

Key Words Motivated offenders; rail transportation system; public transit stations; Nigeria Railway Corporation.

INTRODUCTION

Transit stations are globally recognized to be among the major sites prone to criminality (Paes-Machado & Viodres-Inoue, 2017; Tay et al., 2014; Uittenbogaard, 2014). In Nigeria, crime is one of the key problems negatively impacting the effective operation of rail transportation. Passengers and train station officials are often exposed to different forms of criminal victimizations, while trains and railway facilities are routinely targeted for attack and vandalism (Aderibigbe, 2016; Badiora et al., 2020). For instance, in a bomb attack launched by terrorists against a train along the Abuja-Kaduna route in March 2022, seven passengers were killed and over 100 others kidnapped (Opejobi, 2022). Similarly, the Nigeria Railway Corporation (NRC) recently declared that theft of railway equipment is on the increase (Aliyu & Ugwuezuoha, 2022). Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to transit crime in Nigeria (Ajayi & Ajayi, 2014; Badiora et al., 2015; Olojede, 2019), there is a paucity of data on the forms of criminality occurring within train stations.

Crime targeting train stations is a major cause for concern because of its multiple negative socioeconomic implications. Apart from its deleterious impact on human safety and security (Irvin-Erickson & La Vigne, 2015), it can also lead to low patronage of rail transportation as commuters may be unwilling to make use of train services out of fear and anxiety (Gallison, 2016). Moreover, criminal attacks targeting trains and railway facilities not only create a huge financial burden on the NRC, they are also capable of rendering ineffective the Federal Government's efforts to revamp railway transportation (Aliyu & Ugwuezuoha, 2022).

Train stations' vulnerability to criminality is a global problem. Badiora et al. (2020) mention that safety issues are among the major concerns of stakeholders in the railway sector. Loukaitou-Sideris et al. (2002) opine that train stations are frequently perceived as nodes of criminal activity because they typically bring together numerous individuals with varying motives. Kennedy (2008) laments that the Melbourne metropolitan train network often experiences different incidents of crime across its stations. A study conducted by Uittenbogaard and Ceccato (2013) at Stockholm's underground train stations found evidence of different acts of vandalism. Similarly, Ceccato and Paz's (2017) research in São Paulo metro stations revealed that touching, groping, ejaculation, genitalia exposure, and rape were the major categories of crimes commonly reported by train passengers.

Correspondence to: Usman Ojedokun, Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 200132, Nigeria. **E-mail:** uaojedokun@gmail.com

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Furthermore, Madzivhandila's (2019) research indicated that assaults on ticket collectors and vandalism were common forms of crime in South African train stations.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) observe that crimes occurring at railway stations are mainly motivated by the physical appearance of a neglected or susceptible environment. Diec et al. (2010) assert that the combination of a poorly designed railway environment, the presence of uncivil people, the lack of apparent security measures, and negative media exposure often trigger anxiety among train passengers. Moreover, Gallison and Andresen (2017) state that the complex network of stations, trains, and platforms usually provides both targets and opportunities for motivated offenders. Kennedy (2008) identifies situations making passengers feel unsafe in a railway environment as including waiting at stations, walking to and from a station, and using available toilets and waiting rooms. Walsh (1999) submits that train travel represents one of the most fear-inducing activities because passengers often feel that they are confined within the system and are restricted in their ability to cope with a dangerous situation. Generally, the connection between public transportation and crime demonstrates the importance of the interaction between the decision-making behaviour on the part of the motivated offender to commit crime, and the environment (Gallison, 2016). Against this background, this study investigated the common types of crime occurring in train stations in Lagos, the factors promoting crime in train stations, the victimization experiences of train station officials in the line of duty, and the types of crime-control measures in Lagos train stations.

Theoretical Framework

Routine activity theory (RAT) was employed as a guide. It essentially posits that criminal activity is typically organized around routine activities of a population in which crime is likely to occur as a result of the interplay of three principal elements: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The theory assumes that when a motivated offender and a suitable target come together in the absence of a capable guardian, criminal opportunity occurs. Target suitability connotes certain attracting qualities such as the value of a person or property, access to them, and resistance capability, while capable guardians refer to third parties that may be formal or informal and who have the capacity for intervention. Motivated offender refers to an individual who has the inclination towards perpetrating crime. This element is considered a constant, meaning that a motivated offender will always be available to take advantage of opportunities that arise to perpetrate crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Furthermore, RAT states that, although there will always be a substantial number of motivated offenders, suitable targets (either vulnerable people or unattended valuables) and capable guardians (watchful friends and neighbours, the police, security personnel) will vary in terms of place and time. Consequently, the risk of exposure to criminal victimization varies dramatically among the circumstances and locations in which people place themselves and their property (Schmalleger & Volk, 2018).

Study Area and Study Population

Lagos city in south-west Nigeria was the study area. The choice of the city was primarily informed by the fact that it pioneered the train transportation system in Nigeria and also operates Lagos Mass Transit Trains (LMTT). Specifically, the stations covered in this research were those situated at Ebutte-Meta Junction, Iddo, Ikeja, and Oshodi. The study population constituted locomotive drivers and train station officials.

METHODOLOGY

This research study was exploratory and cross-sectional in design. Data were principally elicited through a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews (IDIs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) because these provide opportunity for a detailed exploration of sensitive topics in context (Neuman, 1994). Specifically, information was elicited from 20 train station officials through IDIs, while KIIs were used to gather data from eight locomotive drivers. All respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The non-probabilistic sampling technique was considered apt for a qualitative study involving respondents who have professional knowledge and an informed opinion on the subject matter. For data analysis, all categories of elicited responses were processed using manual content analysis. The small sample size of this study may make it difficult to generalize its findings, as they may not be representative of the situations in other train stations in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted strictly in accordance with the international ethical standards guiding social research. Informed consent was sought and obtained by respondents before their participation. Also, the study objectives were clearly explained to them, and they were duly informed about their right to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table I presents the socio-demographic profile of respondents. Male respondents constituted 85.7% of the population. Also, a single largest share had spent between 6 and 10 years in the railway service. The majority (59.4%) of the respondents were serving at the Ebutte-Meta Junction train station, followed by

TABLE I Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=28)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequencies	%
Sex	Female	4	14.3
	Male	24	85.7
Years of service	1–5	8	28.5
	6–10	10	35.7
	11–15	4	14.3
	16–20	4	14.3
	21–25	1	3.6
	26–30	1	3.6
Train station	Ebutte-Meta Junction	17	59.4
	Iddo	5	15.6
	Oshodi	3	12.5
	Ikeja	3	12.5
Designation	Train station official	20	71.4
	Locomotive driver	8	28.8

those serving at the Iddo station (15.6%). Most (71.4%) were train station officials.

The Common Types of Crime Occurring in Train Stations in Lagos

To gauge the nature and extent of criminality in train stations, respondents were asked about the common types of crime occurring in the public transportation hub. All the interviewees submitted that train stations in Lagos were susceptible to different forms of crime. One respondent stated that:

> The most common types of crime in this railway station are rooftop riding, ticket evasion, violence targeting train station officials, theft of passengers' belongings, and vandalism which usually involves the removal of clips and iron from train tracks and train station as well physical assaults involving passengers. (IDI/Male/Principal Commuter Inspector)

A senior traffic officer interviewed also said, "Acts of vandalism which mainly deal with removal of clips and iron are very common. It usually happens when human scavengers come around to pick unused metals. They usually engage in loosening of bolts and nuts from train tracks" (IDI/Male/Senior Traffic Officer).

Another interviewee submitted thus:

> Ticket evasion by passengers is common. Ticketless passengers usually gain entry into this train station through the back gate. Thereafter, they will mix up with other passengers in the station and then go ahead to get inside a train without buying boarding tickets. (IDI/Male/Traffic Commercial Officer)

The above narratives demonstrate the pervasiveness of crime in train stations in Lagos city. Vandalism, pilfering of train station equipment, rooftop riding, and ticket evasion were identified by nearly all the respondents as the most commonly recorded forms of crime in interviewees' train stations. Other forms of crime mentioned as occurring in the transit hub included theft of passengers' belongings, pickpocketing, physical assaults involving passengers, and violent attacks on train station officials. The implication of this finding is that train stations in Lagos city are hotspots that are not only attractive to motivated offenders interested in engaging in acts constituting crime against property and crime against persons but are also generating anti-social behaviours amounting to crime against public order. This result supports the submission of Irvin-Erickson and La Vigne (2015) that transit stations are crime generators and crime attractors by bringing together large numbers of people while also providing well-known opportunities for criminals. It also validates a key assumption of RAT, namely, that criminal activity is typically organized around routine activities of a population in which crime is likely to occur as a result of the interplay involving a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian.

Factors Promoting Crime in Train Stations in Lagos

Investigation was also conducted into the factors leading to the occurrence of crime in train stations. Multiple factors were identified as contributing to the problem. In the opinion of one respondent:

> The unnecessary exposure of unused equipment scattered around the train station is the major motivation for some human scavengers. Everything is exposed, and even valuable items are not usually kept in an enclosed store. There [is much] unused equipment everywhere (IDI/Male/Principal Commuter Inspector).

Another respondent explained, "This railway station environment is porous. Criminals can easily gain entry as intending passengers. Moreover, railway stations in Lagos are situated in residential neighbourhoods and business districts. Thus, it is often very difficult to apprehend criminals" (IDI/Male/Traffic Inspection Officer).

Another respondent also stated:

> It is very easy for criminals to commit crimes within this train station at night because the environment is generally not well illuminated. Most of our faulty electricity-generating appliances have not been repaired. Hence, it is always dark here at night. (IDI/Male/District Safety Officer)

It can be deduced from these statements that crime occurrence in train stations in Lagos city is being driven by different factors. The major factors identified were the presence of abandoned equipment in train stations, lax security systems, the location of train stations in residential neighbourhoods, and poorly illuminated train station environments. This result indicates that the presence of certain conditions is encouraging motivated offenders to target train stations as sites for perpetrating different forms of crime. Ceccato and Uittenbogaard (2014) and Newton et al. (2014) have also submitted that train stations can become criminogenic as a result of their structural characteristics and the constant rhythms of human activity within them. This outcome also supports the core element of RAT stated above, which posits that although there will always be a substantial number of motivated offenders, suitable targets and capable guardians will vary in terms of place and time.

Victimization Experiences of Train Station Officials in the Line of Duty

Since most of the respondents mentioned that they normally experienced physical attacks in the line of duty, it was considered imperative to investigate the social context underlying the occurrence of such behaviour. One of the interviewees narrated his victimization experience this way:

> Yes, I have been assaulted before in the line of duty. There was a time a passenger fought me because her luggage was missing in the station. It was really a very serious matter. Her luggage must have been carried away by another passenger. It was not my fault. (IDI/Male/Traffic Inspector)

Another respondent explained thus:

> See, this, my broken teeth were as a result of an attack in the line of duty. One day, my train developed a technical

> fault, so we needed to fix it. As I was trying to sort out the problem, someone threw a stone at me. It broke one of the train glasses and also hit my mouth. (KII/Male/Locomotive Driver/male)

In the words of another respondent:

> I have almost been attacked in the line of duty by a train passenger. I was trying to tell him to conduct himself properly and he got it all wrong. He was drunk at the time. So, he started hitting his head on the body of the train. Of course, I had to look for an opportunity to excuse myself from the scene before he could fatally attack me. (IDI/Male/Train Station Official)

It can be inferred from the above narratives that officials of NRC are sometimes physically assaulted by train passengers as a result of travel time delays, missing luggage, and alcohol intoxication. The implication of this finding is that train stations in Lagos are generators of both instrumental crime and expressive crime. Consequently, the fear of exposure to violent assault may negatively impact train station officials' level of job commitment. This finding is similar to the outcome of Madzivhandila's (2019) study in South Africa, which found that railway station staffers are frequently subjected to assault by train passengers. It also demonstrates the relevance of a submission of RAT that the risk of exposure to criminal victimization varies dramatically according to the circumstances and locations in which people place themselves and their property.

Types of Crime-Control Measures Available in Train Stations in Lagos

To determine the level of preparedness of the NRC in addressing the occurrence of criminality in its stations, respondents were asked about the types of crime-control measures that are available in their train stations. All the respondents gave similar responses. One interviewee explained thus:

> In this train station, we mainly rely on the presence of officials of the Nigeria Police Force and personnel of other law enforcement agencies, like the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). In fact, police and other security agencies usually have their stations located very close to every wayside train station. (IDI/Male/Train Station Official)

However, another respondent submitted thus: "The measure put in place by NRC to control crime occurrence in train stations is not really effective. The number of security personnel on the ground is very small compared to the population of train passengers" (IDI/Male/Train Station Official).

A further respondent confirms this:

> The available crime-control measure, which essentially centres on the presence of security personnel, is not really effective. It is just better than making no effort. Compared to the population size that is always present within train station premises and the different types of crime that are being recorded, the existing crime control arrangement is weak. (KII/Male/Locomotive Driver)

It is clear from the above responses that train stations in Lagos relied exclusively on the presence of law enforcement agents for the control of crime and security provision. The implication of NRC's exclusive reliance on the traditional policing style for crime prevention and law maintenance at train stations points to the fact that the organization is not yet well positioned to tackle security and safety issues. Indeed, the efficiency of traditional policing style to deter criminals at train stations is increasingly being called into question by different forms of criminal behaviours that are being recorded in the public transport hub. Uittenbogaard and Ceccato (2013) have similarly submitted that train stations with environments that provide poor conditions for formal and informal social control will tend to attract a greater incidence of crime and disorder. It also buttresses the position of RAT which states that the absence of capable guardians with the capacity for intervention will encourage a motivated offender to engage in crime.

CONCLUSION

Crime targeting train stations has multiple negative socio-economic implications for Nigeria. Thus, the following recommendations are put forward as practical means of addressing the problem. Firstly, it is imperative for the Federal Government to formulate practical policies that would be geared towards strengthening the existing security architecture at train stations and train routes so as to effectively deter motivated offenders (thieves, terrorists, and vandals) from viewing the transportation hub as suitable sites (targets) for crime perpetration. This step can be achieved by introducing capable guardian(s) with capacity for intervention, such as increasing the presence of law enforcement officials, increasing surveillance through access control, installing CCTV cameras, improving the quality of illumination within train station environments, and making use of drones.

Secondly, train station management personnel should become more capable guardians by ensuring that unused work equipment (suitable targets) is properly kept in secured spaces. This step can make train stations less attractive targets to motivated offenders (thieves and vandals) seeking suitable locations for engaging in vandalism and pilfering.

Also, it is important for NRC to fully embrace the adoption of ticket vending machines and ticket scanners to effectively overcome the crime of ticket evasion while also designing suitable measures to overcome operational challenges of delayed train departures, travel time delays, and missing luggage, which can expose train station officials to physical assault and violent attacks.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

*Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; †Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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