

# Women as Public Transport Providers: A Qualitative Study of the Perception of Female Tricycle Riders in Nigeria

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Submitted: 13 December 2022. Accepted: 25 May 2023. Published: 5 August 2023

Volume 31, 2023. pp. 832-848. <http://doi.org/10.25133/JPSSv312023.046>

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## Abstract

The public transport sector in Nigeria has often been stereotyped as male-dominated. Over the years, the upsurge in the unemployment rate and the necessity of economic empowerment have pushed women to adopt commercial tricycle riding as a livelihood. This article explores the perception of women as tricycle riders by passengers and commuters in Ikeja, Lagos State, southwestern Nigeria. The study is anchored on the social role theory, which argues that gender stereotype is a product of the gendered division of labor that assigns social roles to men and women based on culturally approved norms and standards. Data for the study were sourced through qualitative ethnographic approaches involving focus groups and semi-structured interviews with thirty participants ( $N = 30$ ) who were purposively sampled. The authors argue that even though women are rising to the moment regarding competence and performance standards as tricycle riders, gender stereotypes constrain their acceptance and patronage in the business. We further demonstrate that unfavorable career evaluations promote bias against female tricycle riders. In this way, gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in the public transport sector in Nigeria. The study advocates for a more inclusive career culture and practices where men and women can feel valued and earn a living without discrimination and marginalization.

## Keywords

Nigeria; stereotype; social role theory; tricycle business; women

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## Introduction

The commercial tricycle (popularly known as *Keke* NAPEP or *Keke* Marwa) was first introduced in Nigeria as a poverty alleviation intervention to empower the teeming unemployed Nigerian youths and also to provide an alternative means of transportation to alleviate the challenges of inadequate modes of transportation faced in the sector. The term *Keke* is a Yoruba word for 'bicycle,' while NAPEP is an abbreviation for the National Poverty Eradication Programme, an agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria saddled with the responsibility of lifting Nigerians out of poverty. Brigadier Buba Marwa, a former governor of Lagos State, was the first administrator to introduce *Keke* as a source of commercial transportation in the city and, more broadly, in Nigeria.

According to Mgbemena (2013), tricycles were introduced as means of commercial transportation to ensure gainful employment for the idle workforce, sustain wealth creation and provide affordable mass transit services. This public transportation system became popular in many Nigerian cities when the operations of motorbikes (popularly called *Okáda*) as some state governments banned commercial transport mediums. For instance, in Lagos state, the ban was informed by the unruly behavior of bike riders, which resulted in the death of a sound engineer during a disagreement between a rider and a passenger in the Lekki neighborhood of the state (Adelagun, 2022). In other cities, they were banned for criminal activities like banditry, terrorism, kidnapping, and bag snatching. The frequent involvement of motorbikes in accidents that caused harm, injuries, and loss of lives to many road users also triggered their proscription in many other cities in Nigeria.

The introduction of tricycles as means of public transit system saw the emergence of women as critical actors and partners in the sector after many years of monopoly by men. This attestation shows that women were historically underrepresented in the transport sector as managers, operators, or consumers of public transport services; hence, no gender diversity could facilitate increased performance and attract talented (men and) women. This gender gap was fueled mainly by stereotypes that see the sector as a male-dominated industry with a strong masculine identity (Schmucki, 2002). The work culture in Nigeria generally does not provide a favorable climate for women to be influential in economic sectors outside of family and home management, given overwhelming cultural and social expectations (Mensah, 2023). Women are mostly confined to childcare and domestic commitments, mainly where the traditional division of labor held sway. The work environment does not include empowering women and offering equal opportunity in the workplace to guarantee transparency and accountability and eliminate discrimination and abuse. The emergence of women as tricycle riders in Nigeria holds great promise for their empowerment, exercise of agency, and gender relations in the economy's informal sector more broadly.

This study examines the perception of women as tricycle riders in the public transport business environment to understand the extent to which they are socially included or excluded as service providers in the industry's workforce. Drawing on the social role theory, we argue that managing gender issues is crucial in transport and mobility services. We discuss our findings based on the broader context of participants' nuanced narratives and experiences and proffer strategies that will eliminate workforce gender segregation in public transport management and operations in Nigeria. The study aims to yield substantial labor impact for women as significant stakeholders as public transport users and operators and develop a

richer understanding of the role of gender relations in the urban transit setting to downplay sex role discrimination and promote gender equity in the sector.

## Literature review

Extant literature on the relationship between women and public transport infrastructure mainly examines the issue from the perspective of women as public transport users or consumers. Greed (2008) focused on the challenges of integrating a gender perspective into the urban spatial environment to demystify the belief that the transport industry is a male-dominated space. They called for the involvement of women in planning, design, and policy priorities in the transport sector. Many other concerns have focused on insecurity, sexual violence, harassment, and women's perception of safety on road transport. Smith (2008) addressed the security needs of women passengers in public transport. They recounted how women have been victimized, put at risk of being the victim of crime, and subjected to fear of crime and disorder. They also recommended some crime prevention measures that transport providers can offer to ensure adequate protection for women.

Many studies (Gekoski et al., 2016; Hoor-UI-Ain, 2020; Neupane & Ghesney-Lind, 2013) have highlighted the role of violence, sexual harassment, and assault against women in the transport industry. These authors have described how women and girls experience sexual offenses and harassment in the public transport environment. Gekoski et al. (2016) mainly argued that the trend is most noticeable in emerging economies with higher rates of harassment and assault and may be related to differing cultural and gender norms, where public space is regarded as the male domain. Neupane and Ghesney-Lind (2013) maintained that these forms of harassment of women do not attract social and legal consequences in some contexts, as men enjoy both proximity and anonymity. Hoor-UI-Ain (2020) explored the emotional implication of sexual assault and harassment. They affirmed that such practices damage the victims' mental, social, and personal well-being. In order not to make women "transit captive" and socially exclusive (Gekoski et al., 2016, p. 3), a legal framework needs to be put in place by transport authorities, and the police must enforce it to safeguard women on public transport.

A related concern is the question of safety, framed in women and public transport discourses from a wide range of perspectives. Ouali et al. (2020) identified safety as one of the top priorities for public transport providers. Safety concerns determine the transport industry's transit service quality and operational profitability. However, acts of violence, emptier vehicles, and larger carriages decrease women's feeling of safety. This evidence reveals that the perception of safety is relatively based on subjective evaluations of anxiety and discomfort. This finding is why some transport companies create 'women only' carriages to bridge the mismatch in women's safety concerns (Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink, 2009). Studies have also explored the influence of commuting on public transport on expectant mothers' health and well-being and how it can impact their physical and mental health (O'Toole & Christie, 2022). The study suggests how such mothers can be supported given the challenge of their health condition, recounts the limited support to pregnant women, and advocates measures to improve their health and well-being while commuting.

Previous studies on integrating women into the public transport system have examined the issue from the perspective of women as service operators, where women have to navigate gender relations and stereotypes in a male-dominated territory to develop a career. In this

context, Beigi et al. (2020) investigated the normative and structural forces that constrained female internet taxi drivers in Tehran, Iran. They argued that a driving career provides flexibility and independence to women who combine their traditional family roles with financially supporting themselves and their families; thus, taxi driving enables women to chart a roadmap for planning their careers. However, Westmarland and Anderson (2001) recounted the physical attack, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment faced by female taxi drivers in northeast England. The study examined the implication of violence on the security of female drivers. It suggested measures such as installing two-way radios, partition screens, security cameras, gas spray, weapons, and verbal skills to checkmate abuse and harassment. This evidence points to the vulnerability of female taxi drivers in the course of discharging their duties. The challenge of speeding offenses by female taxi drivers in Taiwan was the focus of a study by Yeh et al. (2015), where they used a logistic regression model to explore the factors of female drivers speeding offenses. The investigation related speeding violations by female taxi drivers to age, education, and experience. The study's implications were considered for female cab drivers' traffic safety.

Berrones-Sanz and Araiza-Diaz (2019) undertook a comparative study of the working and health conditions of female and male taxi drivers in Mexico City. They concluded that female drivers who were mainly single mothers, widows, or divorcees attracted less income and had a higher proportion of illness than males. These factors constrained women from performing efficiently due to developing anxiety and discomfort associated with mobility. Berry (1998) also examined gender identity and work culture by female taxi drivers in Halifax, Canada, given the perception that masculine and feminine occupational domains are mutually exclusive. Male taxi drivers embody a popular image of masculinity, and female drivers navigate the contested terrain of their masculine work culture. They need to act like men and be seen to align with masculine traits to be considered taxi drivers. Similarly, Khosa (1997) revealed the unequal power relations between male and female taxi drivers in South Africa. The study highlighted discriminatory practices in hiring women drivers and the experience of sexual harassment. The study, therefore, elaborated on the strategies women taxi drivers have adopted to counteract inequality and discrimination.

Despite the marginalization of women in the sector, Naysmith and Rubincam (2012) provided a counter-sociological narrative from female truck drivers in South Africa who were increasingly targeted for employment due to the perception that they were safer, more conscientious, less likely to endanger public safety and company property, and less likely to engage in risky forms of behavior. They were also believed to have more positive experiences with colleagues and supervisors. The study concluded that female drivers were rated superior to their male colleagues despite the challenges of gaining entry and acceptance in the industry. This account revealed that despite the claim of male dominance in the transport industry, women could equally excel as quality transit service providers.

There has been no known study on the role of women in non-traditional occupations like commercial tricycle riding in the Nigerian context (or beyond) to understand the nuanced experiences and perceptions people have about them. This is the conceptual gap in the literature the present study aims to fill.

## Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the social role theory proposed by Eagly (1987) as a social psychology framework that claims that gender stereotypes in societies are informed by gender socialization and gender-based behavior. Men and women enact gender stereotypes because their different roles in the community confer other social demands on them (Vogel et al., 2003). This essentialist claim is deliberately created to delineate boundaries that make sexually-linked behavior be judged differently depending on the gender of the sexual actors (Milhausen & Herold, 2002). These differences also make sexual norms and beliefs between men and women to vary. Heterosexual identity is central to the production of stereotypes. This theory argues that the pre-scripted social roles ascribed to men and women reinforce stereotypes. These are the traditional conventions on sex and gender where specific codes of behavior are assigned to each gender which are tied to culturally defined roles. Men often use this set of beliefs to demonstrate their perceived roles as independent, dominant, self-reliant, and strong (Flandorfer et al., 2010).

On the other hand, women are presumed to have strong emotional attachments, auxiliary leadership roles, and engagement in domestic chores and commitments. An implication of this gender segregation and adverse social norms is that poverty widens the gender gap, and in the process, men are more financially dependent and stable than women. While men are believed to be active, independent, and sexually influential, women are passive, dependent, and sexually docile (Inyabri et al., 2022). Historical divisions of labor that assign men roles outside the family and situate women's roles within the family is also strong pointer to stereotype. Men control economic power and privileges and enjoy productive resources, and women have limited financial options and lack agency and autonomy (Mensah et al., 2022).

Regressive cultural norms, therefore, deprive women of agency in their interaction with the social world (Lee & Logan, 2019). They become victims of structural and social forces constraining their economic freedom (Swader et al., 2013). The implication is that the traditional division of labor gives men and women differentiated skills, and these differences are attributed to cultural standards and expectations (Eagly, 1987). The unequal power relations provide the context for women's limited livelihood opportunities. The notion of 'doing' gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) also reinforces social roles. According to this thinking, gender is continually socially constructed in light of a normative conception of men and women (Deutsch, 2007). People act and behave based on the compartmentalization of roles to conform to culturally approved standards of gender segregation. People do gender when they conform to social roles predicted by their essential sexual natures and undo gender when they "engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136). The notion of doing gender, therefore, entails conformity or resistance to established stereotyped standards.

Conformity often privileges men and marginalizes women, and resistance foregrounds agency and autonomy in negotiating gender and sexuality under the patriarchal structure. There are many social consequences for individuals who reverse or resist socially prescribed gender roles. Women are often socially isolated, labeled, and harassed when they violate social stereotypes (Heilman et al., 2004). Women who are assertive and demonstrate agentic capacities are said to be not appealing. When they show leadership traits, competence, and independence, they are believed to defy societal expectancy and are often seen as cold.

On the other hand, men who are emotionally sensitive and manifest communal behavior are regarded as weak or effeminate. The social role theory argues that gender drives how the contemporary world is organized, but stereotypes limit the space for equality and social inclusion. The social role theory will offer new insights on the “impact of space in forming gender identities and shaping gender relations” (Schmucki, 2002, p. 69) as it explains perceptions and ideologies in understanding behavioral differences exhibited by female riders of tricycles in urban public transport space in Nigeria.

## Methodology

Data for this study were sourced through qualitative ethnographic fieldwork exercise spanning nine months at Ikeja, Lagos State, southwestern Nigeria. Thirty Participants were selected from male and female tricycle riders, passengers, and commuters. They were recruited based on their knowledge of the transportation sector in the city, coupled with their willingness to participate in the research. The social demographic characteristics of participants, such as gender, age, occupation, education, and religious identity, were documented. It was noted that some of these variables play dominant roles in influencing the perception of tricycle riders more broadly. The age range of participants varied from 18–66 years. Fifteen (50%) participants were males, and another 15 (50%) were females. There were 14 (47%) tricycle riders, 12 (40%) passengers, and four (13%) commuters as participants. Apart from the tricycle riders, other participants’ occupations were evaluated concerning their posture in the transport industry.

Regarding educational attainment, six (20%) participants were graduates from higher institutions such as universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Twenty (67%) participants schooled up to secondary school, and seven (23%) participants claimed to have stopped schooling at the primary level or acquired informal education. Twenty-five (83%) participants were Christians, and the remaining 5 (17%) did not identify with any organized religion. Participants gave informed consent for all interviews and recordings. For those who could not read or write, the consent statements were read and interpreted for them to sign.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Calabar before the commencement of the fieldwork (Certificate No. UC/DRD/FA/23/272).

Two ethnographic approaches were employed concerning data collection and analysis: focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Three focus groups of five participants in each group comprised female tricycle riders, male tricycle riders, and passengers (or commuters). Participants were guided through focus group discussions and interviews, where we obtained diverse perspectives on the perceptions of female Keke riders. This approach also provided more detailed insights into factors that influenced women to adopt riding tricycles as a primary source of livelihood. Participants shared ideas and opinions on how they navigated their identities to cope with a male-dominated profession and how they confronted issues of gender stereotyping. Semi-structured interviews allowed interactions with participants at a more personal level.

We asked questions about the individual history of Keke riding, the number of years they have been in the business, and the challenges they face as women. We elicited information on their turnovers, the boundaries they set for themselves, and what they were doing differently. An audio recorder was used to document all interviews and discussions, and field notes

helped record transcripts of interviews. Data were coded, transcribed, translated, and checked for accuracy. The descriptive method was employed in data analysis and discussion. This approach highlights the main features of data and offers an in-depth analysis based on the accounts and perspectives of participants in their own words.

Thematic analysis was then used to sort the data into relevant categories or themes to allow for flexibility in the interpretation of the data. It helped identify commonalities in patterns of meaning to draw understanding from the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This approach enabled the researchers to flesh out relevant layers of signification across data sets, engage collective experiences, identify common denominators, and make sense of these commonalities. Clarke and Braun (2013) maintained that thematic analysis focuses explicitly on analyzing meaning across the entire data set and can facilitate an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon. Generally, thematic analysis deals with meaning in context based on the specific patterns found in the data. The researchers aim to abstract salient features for the analysis (Dey, 1993).

## Results and discussion

In the following analysis, we examine the factors that motivate female riders to join the public transport business and their perceptions as service providers based on some thematic threads or social metrics. The analysis gains sufficient insights from riders' experiences and nuanced perspectives of commuters and passengers.

### Justifying women's role as public transport providers

Based on our interview transcripts, participants enumerated and justified some factors that pushed them to consider riding a tricycle as a primary means of livelihood. The common denominator here was the high unemployment rate, which has compelled women (and men) to devise adaptive mechanisms in Nigeria's complicated and precarious socio-economic context (Ademuson et al., 2022). Participants reported that the alarming economic scourge, without any appreciable attempt to cushion its effects, was directly responsible for their voyage to the public transport business environment.

One participant recounted joblessness six years after graduating from a polytechnic. As a single mother of two children, she needed a legitimate livelihood to support her young family; thus, when a friend opened the opportunity to ride a tricycle, she welcomed the idea, which paid off. Another participant narrated that the lack of a better job compelled her to ride Keke for a living. She informed the researchers that she earned forty thousand Naira (US\$87) monthly as a graduate nursery school teacher, which was too insignificant to sustain her and her siblings. She resigned from the job and gathered her merger earnings to acquire a tricycle on the hired purchase when she learned about the high economic return on the business. She reiterated that she makes over ninety thousand Naira (US\$195) monthly. According to this participant, the business has guaranteed better pay and greater freedom.

Other participants see their incursion into this business line as having arisen from a feeling of independence and freedom. They maintained that they were tired of home life and over-reliance on their husbands' little incomes. They needed to change their family dynamic structures, contribute financially to stabilize them, and also be in control of their lives. The

last set of participants reported that they chose this business path due to their passion for driving to earn a living from something they love doing. One participant summarized this position thus:

*I have a passion for driving and saw tricycle riding as a career option to fulfill this burning passion and earn a decent living. The risk is high, but I try to make my marks in my little way. It has also helped me to raise the standard, challenge gender norms, and be as glamorous as possible.*

(Akon, Female 34)

This participant also recounted how she manages her time and exercises flexibility in meeting the demands of her clients' and motherhood's needs, negotiating gender identity, and coping with stereotypes. In justifying their attraction for riding tricycles, we see the interplay of gender, agency, and women empowerment. These women have bargaining power and self-sufficiency due to their engagement in this enterprise. Venturing into this business has also helped them to address the pattern of gender inequality that hitherto limited their economic options.

## Perception of safety

Safety is critical in maintaining passengers' credibility and patronage in any transport business. Road traffic safety involves measures to prevent and control the potential risks in road traffic operations (Ma et al., 2022). Such safety methods minimize road crashes based on the level of protection offered to road users. Road safety situational assessment was based on the perceived risk of speeding, distraction, fatigue, and the condition of the tricycle. Participants believed that ensuring passengers' safety is a primary requirement for the road transportation business. Female tricycle riders were evaluated positively for improved traffic behavior and low-risk attitudes compared to their male counterparts.

One participant confirmed that he was more comfortable with the female riders who were not desperate to navigate congestion on the road at the risk of their passengers' lives like the male riders. This set of riders recognizes potential hazards and maintains high safety standards on the road.

One female rider informed the researchers that she does routine checks on her tricycle before she heads out each day to avoid malfunction, which is also a safety concern. She checks the brakes, the tightness of the handlebars, reflectors, and light and ensures the tires are properly inflated. She observed that safety is a crucial societal issue in her transit business, and carrying out daily routine checks helps to reduce high-level noise and air pollution. One participant who claimed to prefer female riders to males ranked female riders high on controlling distraction and fatigue. He reiterated that they are more focused and not reckless when they carry fare-paying passengers and display more profound road safety knowledge than their male colleagues. In his own words, he reiterated as follows:



*They (female riders) are very accident-conscious and moderate their speed to navigate congested roads. They do not pose any risk to the physical health of their passengers. Unlike their male counterparts, you will never see them making or answering calls on the road. This is why I am saying they seem to have better safety attitudes and perceptions and are better riders.*

(Ekpe, Male 43)

This account, though based on a subjective evaluation, details that this participant feels more comfortable with female riders than male riders due to their improved traffic behavior and perceived level of service rendered, which offers a unique riding experience.

One participant noted that female riders carry a warning (caution) triangle in their vehicle, unlike male riders who do not, thus making passengers embarrassed when their tricycles break down on the road. It was generally admitted that female riders have a greater hierarchy of control and understand road signs and methods of preventing clashes. These skills were attributed to their improved behavior and consciousness toward safety on the road.

## **Perception of security**

Physical security is an overriding issue and presents significant challenges to transport operators irrespective of the transport mode or operator's gender. In Ikeja, Lagos State, where the present study is situated, Keke terminals are sites for illegal activities such as theft, consumption of alcohol, and hard drugs. It is also a place where criminals and touts converge to reduce civil liberties and create fear in unsuspecting passengers and members of the public through their activities in the terminal. Participants believed that female riders were more conscious of the security of their passengers and their baggage or goods than their male counterparts.

One participant stated that female riders are not engaged in drug abuse and alcohol consumption in the terminal or stealing items that passengers forget inside their tricycles. He cited an incident where his mobile phone fell out of his trousers pocket inside a tricycle when descending, and he returned to the terminal where the phone was kept safely for him by the female rider. He also maintained that female riders initiate preventive measures to minimize the risk of theft and improve security in the terminal. In this way, female riders increase public transport security and convenience. Another participant argued that it is more secure to transit with a female rider on Keke than their male counterparts because of the following reasons:

*Security concerns in this park (terminal) do not know the gender, but I think the female riders are more amendable to security threats. For instance, during the pandemic, the authorities warned tricycle riders to carry only two passengers instead of the regular four. It was only the female riders who were obeying this regulation. They demonstrated concern for safety and security.*

(Demola, Male 40)

This participant also stated that female riders are not violent or overly aggressive; they will not fight with their passengers or fellow riders or jump queues to take turns loading

passengers. Therefore, he portrayed them positively and wished they could be given opportunities to impact the job.

There is another dimension of security issues that affects the female operators themselves in the road transport industry. These include verbal abuse, sexual harassment, threats, and other forms of violence they experience at work, affecting their social participation in the business. These are often perpetrated by male passengers or fellow riders who may see them as competitors. Participants reported that attacks and harassment are part of the rigors of their job daily. According to one participant,

*Some men believe you are trespassing in a space where you ought not to belong, and you have come to make the money they should have made. Because of our resilience, they will abuse, harass and intimidate you to acknowledge that they control the space.*

(Risikatu, Female 35)

Although male riders reported being harassed by touts at various tricycle terminals, the proof by the participant above shows that women are more vulnerable and are more likely to suffer gender-dominated forms of victimization. Unfortunately, participants reported that there was no concerted effort in place to end or minimize this problem.

## **Driving experience and exposure to risk**

During the focus group interactions, female tricycle riders were asked to self-assess their driving ability and years of experience as riders of Keke. They ranged their experiences from six months to seven years. Four participants had 5–7 years of experience, three had been riding for 2–4 years, and three had six months–2 years of experience. The number of driving distances also varied among participants. Only four out of 10 female riders had covered up to 20 kilometers on their tricycles. This implies that they were the only ones exposed to travel distance and spent time traveling with their tricycles. They claimed to be knowledgeable and comfortable with their Keke.

In terms of exposure to risky conditions, that is, “being in a situation which has some risk of involvement in a road accident” (Wolfe, 1992, p. 337), they also argued that they can detect hazards and react to them instantly. However, they admitted that riding Keke under risky conditions such as bad weather, poor visibility, or distractions such as eating, drinking, or making calls can cause dangerous driving hazards. They also maintained that individual driving style, personal lifestyle, and safety behavior can affect driving performance positively or negatively. For instance, if one is emotionally aggressive while driving, it could be a source of distraction and increase exposure to driving hazards. However, other participants believed that male riders are more experienced regarding the number of years, traveling distance, and general performance on the road.

One participant informed the researchers that male riders know how to maneuver congested paths and adapt to changing road conditions than female riders. He reiterated that male riders could respond more to unforeseen contingencies like fixing deflated tires than female riders, who could not respond to these emergencies independently. Significantly, they also know how to steer rugged terrains and high-traffic areas easily. However, concerning exposure to the risk of accidents, participants generally agreed that female riders have safe driving habits than their male counterparts, especially relating to speeding aggressively, respect for traffic

lights or regulations, making calls while at the wheel, and lack of safety equipment while on the road which can increase exposure to hazard and decrease performance. Tricycle riding has its fair share of dangers. Still, the general opinion was that female riders are less exposed to accident risk in identifying road signs, maintaining proper speed, keeping safe following distance, and being courteous to other road users.

## **Attitude to alcohol and drugs**

Alcohol and drugs have been identified as significant contributors to road accidents, and many studies have identified a causal relationship between alcohol consumption and fatal road traffic accidents (Brismar & Bergman, 1998; Glucksman, 1994; Raffle, 1989). Participants generally spoke in favor of female riders regarding alcohol-related causes of accidents. No participant had witnessed a female Keke rider driving under the influence (DUI) which implies that female riders improve the safety of traffic and do not expose their lives and those of their passengers to danger. This position was contrasted with several accounts of male riders who indulge in alcohol consumption. This behavior has been identified as a source of injury, disability, or death. A participant averred that:

*Female tricycle riders are not as impaired by alcohol as their male counterparts. They show greater concentration. They are also better coordinated and make sound judgments in eventualities or risky situations. So, they are cool-headed and know how to identify risks on the road. In fact, they are better riders.*

(Brown, Male 46)

The account by this participant details the preponderance of opinions by other participants on a drunk driving metric. This evidence further reveals that women may, after all, be less skilled riders of tricycles. Still, they are safer riders regarding crash rates and driving offenses induced by alcohol and drugs. Participants generally agreed that men were riskier behind the wheel and women typically had firm control over the steering when it came to the hazard of drinking and driving. Safe driving has enabled female drivers to improve their driving performance and save lives. Participants believed that the alcohol lifestyle of some male riders has lent to more chances of getting their tricycles damaged.

A female participant who was also a tricycle rider remarked that driving under the influence of alcohol is dangerous and has posed untold hardship on many families and individuals. The minutest quantity of alcohol in the bloodstream, according to her, can impact driving negatively, and this is a severe public health concern. She admitted that some of her male colleagues in the public transport business are addicted to alcohol and drugs (such as stimulants and antianxiety agents). They believe that alcohol and drugs enhance their performance on the road, which is not the case. She further reiterated that alcohol does not help any driver or rider to make wise decisions in a risky situation and calls on all service providers in the transport sector, irrespective of their gender, to desist from drunk driving. This account shows that alcohol and drug intake can impair driving skills and ability and increase crash risk. The preponderance of opinion favored female riders concerning alcohol and drug consumption.

## Aggression and violence

Another significant standard of comparing female tricycle skills and road performance with those of their male counterparts we adopted in this analysis was aggressive driving behavior. There are various ramifications of aggressive behavior in the context of commercial tricycle riding.

Participants identified this behavior as verbal abuse, tailgating, abrupt lane changes, running hazard lights, and swerving. Considering these factors, participants observed that in terms of verbal abuse, female riders are often constrained in displaying anger against their passengers, unlike their male colleagues. A participant noted that verbal abuse of passengers by Keke riders is an insidious behavior pervasive in most of the Keke parks in the study area. He argued that this abuse comes mainly in the form of labels, indicators of various dimensions of impoliteness. Another participant asserted that this behavioral pattern is often associated with the male riders and attempted to explain the motivation for this practice as follows:

*They (male riders) abuse and label their passengers at the slightest provocation, usually arising from a minor misunderstanding. They try to project the passenger in a negative light, stigmatize and lower their evaluation, self-worth, and dignity. Most times, they deliberately diminish the personality of the passenger, so the solution is just to ignore them.*

(Adamu, Male 54)

Another participant remarked that this behavior has persisted among this category of service providers despite efforts by the park authorities and their various unions to end transgressive and face-threatening acts in the park. Other participants believed that using uncouth language with their passengers has become a systemic way of life for male transporters who do not treat their passengers respectfully. Participants unanimously agreed that female riders do not harass, intimidate or verbally abuse their passengers; instead, they treat them as human beings with respect and dignity.

Participants also discussed the issue of tailgating or what the riders refer to as 'back-to-back' in their social space. This refers to the style of driving too close to the vehicle in front of the rider. This behavior was classified as an act of aggression and was mainly associated with male riders. Participants maintained that this habit is dangerous and can lead to a fatal clash that may endanger the lives of innocent passengers and pedestrians. Similarly, other acts of aggressive riding like hard brake, lane blocking, quick lane changes, swerving, and honking were all linked to male riders, which they use to vent traffic frustrations and perpetuate road violence and rage. What these narratives reveal is that female tricycle riders are more safety conscious. They know road hazards and alertness to danger, abide by traffic laws and make safety a cherished value. However, despite these advantages over the male rider, the stereotype still plays a significant role in the perception of both genders in the road transport business.

## Overall satisfaction and patronage

Participants generally demonstrated during the focus group interactions that female tricycle riders were safer because they believed safety is paramount on the road. They were more highly rated than their male counterparts in terms of overall satisfaction but under-patronized

because of gender stereotypes. Participants have ambivalent and contrasting perceptions of female Keke riders concerning patronage. Few participants were not interested in the gender of the rider. All they cared about was a good rider. Others were more consistent with female preferences, and the majority opted for male riders if allowed to choose. This is a significant challenge faced by female riders in the industry.

Some of the female riders who are participants in this study were engaged in understanding their coping strategies and adaptive mechanisms in confronting the issue of gender stereotypes in a dominant masculine profession. One participant explained the difficulties women face as service providers in the business as follows:

*My brother (researcher), some jobs in the non-formal sector (blue-collar jobs) in Nigeria, like this Keke business, are highly segregated gender-wise, and it's difficult for women to break into it. You have to beg some passengers before they would patronize you virtually. But I believe that in time, we shall get there.*

(Agi, Female 33)

This account details that even with female tricycle riders' safety and performance records, there is still a structural bias against them because of their gender. They are less desirable and least patronized. This pessimistic idea still thrives despite women being considered safer riders and more friendly in passenger relations. Misconceptions continue to drive the perception of women despite their anticipated awareness of lifestyle change. Another participant described how she negotiates her gender identity during her male-linked job. She said she uses paid male loaders to call passengers into her tricycle because the response was meager when loading herself. This caused her to spend more time in the process than her male counterparts, resulting in low returns from the investment.

## Discussion and conclusion

Our initial concern was to provide the motivations some women have chosen commercial riding of tricycles as a means of livelihood, and several factors ranging from the high unemployment rate, desire to contribute to family income, the transformation from home life to work life, and passion has accounted for their engagement. The study found that female tricycle riders in Nigeria adopted an egalitarian posture towards gender to neutralize power inequality in the transport sector of the economy (Miller, 2006). The emergence of these women in the industry also represents a shift towards a new way of expressing or experiencing gender, particularly in a male-dominated space (Marsman, 2017). This decision has provided space for autonomy and empowered these women to move away from rigid gender roles. It has also demystified the dominant construction of masculinity and traditional assumptions about the social meaning of gender.

In all the metrics we used in evaluating the perception of female tricycle riders in comparative terms with their male colleagues, they have not been found wanting in any respect. Still, their everyday activities, social behavior, and conduct have tended to assign roles outside the expectations of their gender category, which has resulted in their segregation and, ultimately, their low patronage. In this way, female riders become victims of structural and cultural forces that promote male domination and constrain them economically (Swader et al., 2013). This evidence details that the perception of gender is more affected by culture. According to Eagly

and Wood (2016), the social role theory acknowledges the existence of sex differences and similarities in social behavior. It posits that disagreements arise because of the distribution of men and women into scripted social roles. Tricycle riding encompasses a line of professions that is not desirable and acceptable for the female gender according to prevailing patriarchal scripts of their society; hence women are not only underrepresented in this traditionally male-dominated space but also face structural bias and discrimination.

Despite the claims by participants that female tricycle riders edge their male counterparts in safety and performance records, most of them still prefer to patronize male riders. This is because women are believed to belong to the private domesticated sphere as caregivers and home managers who should be modest, tender, and more concerned about their families' quality of life (Offiong & Mensah, 2012). Conversely, men belong to the public sphere and are focused on work-life to advance their professional development as providers. In this concern, the role performance of men and women reflects the sexual division of labor and gendered hierarchy in society (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

Occupation is one of the ranges of human endeavor which is influenced by gender roles and which is often represented in terms of being masculine or feminine (Housman & Odum, 2019). The discrimination of female riders is not based on incompetence or inexperience but rather on gender-segregated judgments. These female riders are not seen as doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), acting out the roles outside the limit of their essential sexual natures, which some participants considered unnatural and abnormal. In this regard, these female riders have situated themselves in the postmodern era to reinvent their identities. To these women, this is the age where the certainties of the past crumble and notions of masculinities and femininities become multiple and more flexible (Holland, 2009). Some perceive their new challenge as a source of emotional strength to externalize their innermost desires and passion to break standard rules and patriarchal affordances. Weeks (2007) described this kind of resistance as a "social shift and ideological transformation" (p. 142).

In conclusion, the study investigated the perception of female tricycle riders in Lagos, Nigeria, based on some identified metrics and found that though female riders were generally evaluated to be better than their male counterparts in terms of safety and performance records, many passengers still entertain reservations in patronizing them because of the prevailing sexist attitudes towards women in this profession. The study discovered that specific careers, mainly in the informal sector of the Nigerian economy, become tied to gender roles and are culturally defined as normative. This justifies the claim by Cameron and Kulick (2003) that "gender is always necessarily sexualized" (p.143), which implies that gender and sexuality are inextricably interwoven. In the new social landscape of the tricycle business, where male-privileging ideals are constructed and reconstructed, repressive gender norms constrain female riders' agency and limit them from reaching their full potential. This evidence showcases how gender intersects with socio-economic and cultural forces and how this is perceived within the broader network of meaning. We, therefore, advocate for a more inclusive career culture and practices where men and women can feel valued (irrespective of their gender identity) as they earn a living in the transport sector of the Nigerian economy.

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all the participants who were involved in this study. The study benefitted immensely from their deep knowledge and perspectives on the perceptions of women tricycle

riders in Nigeria. We are grateful to McQueen Phillip, Eme Inem, and Jennifer Isaac, our research assistants in the field. We also thank the anonymous reviewers of this work for the additional insights they have provided. The remaining errors are ours.

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