

Psychoactive Substance Use Among Commercial Motorcyclists: Patterns, Sources, and Influencing Factors in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study investigated the patterns, sources, and factors influencing the consumption of psychoactive substances among commercial motorcyclists in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, the study sampled 600 registered motorcyclists selected through a multistage sampling procedure across eight Local Government Areas in Ekiti State. Data were collected with a validated and reliable researcher-designed instrument, the Psychoactive Substances Questionnaire (PSQ), and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that Indian hemp/Marijuana (Igbo) was the most frequently consumed psychoactive substance, followed by alcohol, energy drinks, and cigarettes, while substances such as tramadol and Rohypnol were least consumed. Friends emerged as the major source of psychoactive substances, with drinking joints, hawkers, and okada parks serving as additional access points. Peer influence was identified as the strongest factor driving substance use, alongside motivations such as boosting energy, relaxation, and appetite enhancement. Other factors, including affordability, availability, and attempts to improve cycling performance, were less influential. The study concludes that psychoactive substance use among commercial motorcyclists is shaped more by social and functional motivations than by accessibility alone. It recommends targeted health education, strengthened peer-support interventions, regular health screenings, and stricter regulation of substance sales around motorcycle parks.*

Keywords: psychoactive substances, commercial motorcyclists, substance use factors, sources of substances

INTRODUCTION

Psychoactive substance abuse has become a major public health and social concern globally, with far-reaching consequences on individuals, families, and society. These substances, which include chemical compounds capable of altering perception, mood, cognition, behavior, and motor functioning, have been part of human experience for centuries. Historically, humans have used psychoactive substances to achieve relaxation, pleasure, or altered states of mind, with records suggesting that such practices date back to the Stone Age (Adegboyega & Awosusi, 2012). While psychoactive substances have contributed to human development in various ways, inappropriate or excessive use poses serious physical, psychological, and social risks. Psychoactive substance abuse is therefore defined as the use of these substances in a manner that causes harm to the individual or others, often manifesting through injury, illness, addiction, or engagement in risky behaviors.

A wide range of psychoactive substances is commonly consumed, including alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, cocaine, benzodiazepines, and locally brewed alcoholic mixtures such as paraga, ogogoro, and other herbal concoctions. Others include tramadol, heroin, codeine, and pentazocine, with newer synthetic substances increasingly entering the market (Adegboyega & Awosusi, 2012). These substances are consumed through various methods, including ingestion, smoking, sniffing, and injection, with patterns of use influenced by accessibility, affordability, and social acceptability. The abuse of these substances can result in a wide spectrum of health consequences, ranging from chronic physical conditions such as liver cirrhosis, cardiovascular disease, and malnutrition to psychological disorders including depression, anxiety, memory loss, and psychosis (Hales, 2014; Umar et al., 2017). Socially, substance abuse may contribute to criminal behavior, community unrest, and increased risk of road traffic accidents (EKSUTH, 2023).

In Nigeria, psychoactive substance use is prevalent across diverse populations, with high-risk groups including youths, commercial sex workers, commercial divers, and motor park attendants (Ishaku et al., 2020). Among these groups, commercial motorcyclists, commonly known as 'okada' riders, represent a vulnerable population due to the nature of their occupation. Commercial motorcycling has grown into a significant mode of transportation in Nigeria, covering nearly a quarter of all public transport services, particularly in urban centers (Alti-Muazu & Aliyu, 2008). The occupation appeals primarily to young adults seeking employment, offering income opportunities to those with limited formal employment options. In Ekiti State, as in other urban areas, motorcycles are increasingly used for transportation due to their convenience, ability to navigate congested or poor roads, and affordability for both operators and commuters. However, the demands of the occupation, including long hours, fatigue, and pressure to maximize earnings, may predispose riders to the use of psychoactive substances as a coping mechanism or to enhance performance (Mundenga et al., 2019). The consumption patterns among commercial motorcyclists are varied and have evolved with the availability of new psychoactive substances, including inhalants, over-the-counter medications, and combinations of chemicals that induce euphoria or suppress fatigue (UNODC, 2021). Substances are often acquired through social networks, such as friends, hawkers, and okada parks, highlighting the role of peer influence in driving consumption. Many motorcyclists report using substances to boost energy, relax, increase mental alertness, enhance performance, or cope with occupational stress, while the availability and affordability of these substances further encourage habitual use. Unfortunately, these practices have severe consequences, including increased susceptibility to road traffic crashes,

physical ailments, and mental health challenges (Awosusi & Adegboyega 2013; Caldwell, 2014; Asogun et al., 2016). Road accidents, injuries, and fatalities among commercial motorcyclists are frequently linked to psychoactive substance use, underscoring the public health implications of such practices (Obadeji, 2020; EKSUTH, 2023).

Despite the evident risks, there is limited awareness among commercial motorcyclists regarding the health effects of psychoactive substance consumption. Factors such as age, educational background, and religious affiliation appear to influence both substance use and awareness of its consequences. Younger riders may be more prone to experimentation and peer influence, while limited education may restrict understanding of the health risks associated with substance abuse (Ogunjobi et al., 2023; Olofin-Samuel et al., 2025). Similarly, adherence to religious teachings may act as a protective factor against substance use (Awosusi, 2012). However, studies focusing on commercial motorcyclists in Ekiti State are scarce, with most research concentrated on students, truck drivers, or other occupational groups. This gap highlights the need for empirical investigation into the patterns, sources, and influencing factors of psychoactive substance consumption among commercial motorcyclists in Ekiti State, as well as their awareness of the associated health risks.

In view of the foregoing, this study seeks to fill the knowledge gap by examining the types of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists, identifying the sources through which these substances are obtained, and exploring the factors that influence their use. By providing insights into the patterns and determinants of substance use within this high-risk occupational group, the study aims to inform interventions, policies, and awareness programs that can mitigate the adverse physical, psychological, and social effects of psychoactive substance consumption among commercial motorcyclists in Ekiti State.

The aim of this study was to examine the patterns, sources, and factors influencing the consumption of psychoactive substances among commercial motorcyclists in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to identify the types of psychoactive substances commonly used by commercial motorcyclists, determine the primary sources through which these substances are obtained, and explore the social, physiological, and functional factors that influence their consumption. By addressing these objectives, the study aimed to provide insights into the prevalence and drivers of substance use within this occupational group, thereby informing targeted interventions to promote health, safety, and well-being among commercial motorcyclists.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the types of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists?
2. What are the sources of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists?
3. What are the factors influencing the consumption of psychoactive substances by commercial motorcyclists?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was considered appropriate because it allows for the examination of a small sample drawn from a large population, thereby enabling conclusions to be generalized to the defined population. The population comprised all registered commercial motorcyclists operating across sixteen Local Government Areas of Ekiti State. A sample

of 600 commercial motorcyclists was selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, two senatorial districts were randomly selected from the three in the state. The second stage involved randomly selecting four Local Government Areas from each chosen senatorial district, yielding a total of eight Local Government Areas. In the final stage, seventy-five commercial motorcyclists were randomly selected from major motorcyclist parks within these areas, focusing on locations with high numbers of okada operators. Data were collected using a self-developed instrument titled “Psychoactive Substances Questionnaire (PSQ),” which comprised six sections. Section A collected respondents’ socio-demographic information, Section B addressed psychoactive substance consumption, Section C explored sources of substances, and Section D examined factors influencing consumption. Likert-type scales and frequency ratings were used to quantify responses, with a criterion mean score of 2.5 guiding acceptance or rejection of statements.

The validity of the PSQ was ensured through face and content evaluation by experts in Health Education, Sociology, Community Medicine, and Test and Measurement, who assessed clarity and relevance of items, accepting them if at least three out of four experts agreed. Reliability was determined using the test-retest method on thirty motorcyclists outside the sampled area, with a Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient of 0.81, indicating high reliability. For administration, consent was obtained from motorcyclist union leaders, and the purpose of the study was explained to participants. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, to answer the research questions and provide insights into the types, sources, and factors influencing psychoactive substance use among commercial motorcyclists in Ekiti State.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	N	(%)
Age		
under 18 years	49	8.2
19 – 23 years	154	25.7
24-28 years	179	29.8
29-33 years	91	15.2
33 years and above	127	21.2
Marital status		
Married	120	20.0
Single	312	52.0
Divorced	91	15.2
widow/ widower	77	12.8
Religion		
Christianity	219	36.5
Islam	192	32.0
Traditional	147	24.5
Others	42	7.0
Level of education		
No formal Education	147	24.5

Socio-demographic characteristics	N	(%)
Primary School	105	17.5
Secondary School	192	32.0
Post-secondary Education	156	26.0
Years of experience		
Under 1 year	105	17.5
1-3 years	154	25.7
3-5 years	215	35.8
Above 5years	126	21.0
Motorcycle ownership		
Self-owned	222	37.0
Hired Purchase	210	35.0
Rented	168	28.0

The socio-demographic profile of respondents shows that the majority of commercial motorcyclists fall within the age range of 24–28 years (29.8%), followed by 19–23 years (25.7%), indicating that this occupation is predominantly undertaken by young adults. Most respondents were single (52.0%), with married individuals constituting 20.0%, suggesting a workforce largely composed of unmarried men. In terms of religion, Christianity (36.5%) and Islam (32.0%) were the most represented, while traditional beliefs accounted for 24.5%. Educationally, the largest proportion had attained secondary school education (32.0%), followed by post-secondary education (26.0%), with a notable segment lacking formal education (24.5%), highlighting diverse educational backgrounds. Regarding work experience, a majority had 3–5 years of riding experience (35.8%), reflecting moderate occupational exposure, while smaller proportions had under one year (17.5%) or more than five years (21.0%). Motorcycle ownership patterns revealed that most respondents owned their motorcycles (37.0%), with others on hire purchase (35.0%) or rented (28.0%), suggesting varying degrees of investment and economic commitment in the profession. Overall, the data indicates that commercial motorcycling is largely a young, predominantly single occupation with mixed educational levels, moderate experience, and diverse ownership arrangements.

Question 1: What are the types of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists?

Table 2: Types of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists

S/N	Types of Psychoactive Substances I do Take	Frequently used	Used occasionally	Used but discontinued	Never used	Mean	Rank
1.	Indian hemp/ Marijuana (Igbo)	182 (30.3)	147 (24.5)	56 (9.3)	215 (35.8)	2.50	1 st
2.	Lysergic acid Diethylamide (LSD)	84 (14.0)	119 (19.8)	98 (16.3)	299 (49.8)	1.98	8 th
3.	Cocaine	119 (19.8)	98 (16.3)	126 (21.0)	257 (42.8)	2.13	5 th
4.	Amphetamine,	98 (16.3)	105 (17.5)	84 (14.0)	313 (52.2)	1.98	8 th
5.	Caffeine/ Energy drinks (Power Horse/ Smirnoff)	87 (14.5)	168 (28.0)	112 (18.7)	233 (38.8)	2.18	3 rd
6.	Cigarette/Tobacco	115 (19.2)	119 (19.8)	112 (18.7)	254 (42.3)	2.16	4 th

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7.	Alcohol	119 (19.8)	164 (27.3)	105 (17.5)	212 (35.3)	2.32	2 nd
8.	Inhalants (glue, vanish, petrol paint)	63 (10.5)	168 (28.0)	112 (18.7)	257 (42.8)	2.06	7 th
9.	Locally brewed gin (ogogoro/gegemu/opae yin)	112 (18.7)	108 (18.0)	126 (21.0)	254 (42.3)	2.13	5 th
10	Tramadol / Rohypnol	42 (7.0)	66 (11.0)	175 (29.2)	317 (52.8)	1.72	10 th

Table 2 presents the types of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists. The result indicates that, using a criterion mean score of 2.50, all the items had mean scores below the cut-off point except Indian hemp/ Marijuana (Igbo). This implies that Indian hemp/ Marijuana (Igbo) is the type of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists. Ranking the types of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists reveals that Indian hemp/Marijuana (Igbo) (mean=2.50) is the predominant psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists, closely followed by alcohol (mean=2.32), Caffeine/ Energy drinks (Power Horse/ Smirnoff) (mean=2.18) and Cigarette/Tobacco (mean=2.16) while Tramadol/Rohypnol (mean=1.72) is the least in the ranking order.

Question 2: What are the sources of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists?

Table 3: Sources of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists

S/N	SOURCE	YES		NO		MEAN	RANK
		N	%	N	%		
1.	Friends	323	53.8	277	46.2	1.54	1 st
2.	Okada Parks	242	40.3	358	59.7	1.40	4 th
3.	Patients medicine dealer/ chemist	211	35.2	389	64.8	1.35	6 th
4.	Market Place	184	30.3	418	69.7	1.30	7 th
5.	Hawkers	238	39.7	362	60.3	1.40	3 rd
6.	Drinking Joints	291	48.5	309	51.5	1.48	2 nd
7.	Other places not listed	225	37.5	375	62.5	1.38	5 th

Mean benchmark cut-off= 1.50

Table 3 presents the sources of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists. The result indicates that, using a criterion mean score of 1.50, all the items had mean scores below the cut-off point except item 1. This implies that friend constitutes the major source of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists. Ranking the sources of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists reveals that friends (mean=1.54) dominate the source of psychoactive substances consumed by commercial motorcyclists, closely followed by drinking joints (mean=1.48), hawkers (mean=1.40), okada Parks (mean=1.40) and other places not listed (mean=1.38) while market place (mean=1.30).

Question 3: What are the factors influencing the consumption of psychoactive substances by commercial motorcyclists?

Table 4: Factors influencing the consumption of psychoactive substances by commercial motorcyclists

S/N	Reasons for using psychoactive substance	SA	A	D	SD	MEA N	RAN K
1	To boost energy	196 (32.7)	154 (25.7)	173 (28.8)	77 (12.8)	2.78	2 nd
2	Peer group/friends influence	204 (34.0)	213 (35.5)	85 (14.2)	98 (16.3)	2.87	1 st
3	For relaxation	140 (23.3)	164 (27.3)	169 (28.2)	127 (21.2)	2.53	3 rd
4	To forget about problems	141 (23.5)	143 (23.8)	161 (26.8)	155 (25.8)	2.45	5 th
5	To increase masculinity	84 (14.0)	147 (24.5)	126 (21.0)	243 (40.5)	2.12	11 th
6	To improve cycling performance	91 (15.2)	154 (25.7)	157 (26.2)	198 (33.0)	2.23	9 th
7	For social interaction	150 (25.0)	126 (21.0)	133 (22.2)	191 (31.8)	2.39	6 th
8	To increase mental alertness	122 (20.3)	133 (22.2)	190 (31.7)	155 (25.8)	2.37	7 th
9	It is easily affordable	98 (16.3)	126 (21.0)	169 (28.2)	207 (34.5)	2.19	10 th
10	To increase appetite	147 (24.5)	161 (26.8)	147 (24.5)	145 (24.2)	2.52	4 th
11	To reduce stress	112 (18.7)	178 (29.7)	120 (20.0)	190 (31.7)	2.35	8 th
12	It is readily available	64 (10.7)	143 (23.8)	183 (30.5)	210 (35.0)	2.10	12 th

Mean benchmark cut-off= 2.50

The data in Table 4 indicates that peer group or friends' influence is the most significant factor motivating commercial motorcyclists to consume psychoactive substances, with a mean score of 2.87, ranking first above the benchmark of 2.50. Closely following is the desire to boost energy (mean = 2.78) and using substances for relaxation (mean = 2.53), both exceeding the cut-off and highlighting the role of both social and functional motivations. Increasing appetite (mean = 2.52) also meets the benchmark, suggesting physiological needs contribute to substance use. Other factors, including coping with problems, enhancing masculinity, improving cycling performance, social interaction, mental alertness, affordability, stress reduction, and availability, all fall below the benchmark, indicating they are less influential. Overall, the results suggest that psychoactive substance consumption among commercial motorcyclists is predominantly driven by social influences and the perceived benefits of increased energy and relaxation, while practical availability and affordability are comparatively minor determinants.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the most consumed psychoactive substance among commercial motorcyclists was Indian hemp/Marijuana (Igbo), which emerged as the predominant substance used across the population studied. This high prevalence underscores the widespread availability and cultural normalization of cannabis use within this occupational group. Following marijuana, alcohol ranked as the next most frequently consumed substance, reflecting its legal status, social acceptability, and ease of access. Caffeine-based energy drinks such as Power Horse and Smirnoff were also commonly used, highlighting a pattern in which motorcyclists rely on stimulants to maintain alertness and stamina during long working hours. Cigarette/Tobacco consumption was similarly prevalent, likely influenced by both addiction and the perception that smoking enhances concentration. In contrast, the consumption of Tramadol/Rohypnol appeared least in the ranking, although their presence remains concerning due to their potent psychoactive and addictive properties. These findings align with the earlier work of Oshikoya and Alli (2016), who reported marijuana as the most used substance among similar populations, followed by tobacco. Furthermore, Onyecho et al. (2018) noted that tramadol, cannabis, and cigarettes were particularly problematic for participants having trouble with cessation, reinforcing the risks associated with these substances.

The study also showed that friends constituted the major source through which commercial motorcyclists obtained psychoactive substances. This highlights the strong role of interpersonal networks in perpetuating substance use within this group. Friends were identified as the dominant means of accessing these substances, followed by drinking joints, hawkers, and motorcycle (okada) parks. The marketplace ranked lowest in this order, possibly because it is less discreet or accessible compared to informal peer channels. This pattern of access is consistent with Giwa et al. (2015), who similarly reported that commercial motorcyclists obtained psychoactive substances primarily from friends. Such findings emphasize the significance of social circles and peer influence in sustaining substance-use behaviors, especially in occupational groups where camaraderie and shared routines form strong bonds.

The study further identified several factors influencing the consumption of psychoactive substances among commercial motorcyclists. These included the need to boost energy, peer group/friend influence, relaxation, and appetite enhancement. Among these, peer group/friends influence emerged as the most dominant factor, indicating that social pressure and the desire for group acceptance play a crucial role in substance use. This was closely followed by the need “to boost energy,” which reflects the physically demanding nature of commercial motorcycling and the perception that psychoactive substances enhance performance. Relaxation and appetite stimulation were also notable motivators. The least influential factor was the ready availability of substances, suggesting that access alone does not drive use as strongly as psychosocial determinants do.

These findings support earlier literature. Adegboyega and Awosusi (2012) noted that the use of psychoactive substances for relaxation, attaining pleasurable states of mind, and altering physiological or psychological functioning dates back to the Stone Age, indicating that such motivations are deeply rooted in human behavior. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2010) similarly identified reduction of pain, anxiety, and tension, misinformation, parental background, peer influence, and loneliness as reasons for substance abuse. Studies by Manbe (2015), and Hababu (2010) further revealed motivations such as

proving masculinity, achieving feelings of adequacy and competence, peer pressure, experimental curiosity, and the absence of parental supervision. Collectively, the present findings reinforce the idea that substance use among commercial motorcyclists is strongly shaped by social, psychological, and occupational factors, all of which interact to sustain patterns of psychoactive substance consumption.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed that Indian hemp/Marijuana is the predominant psychoactive substance consumed by commercial motorcyclists, with alcohol, energy drinks, and tobacco also commonly used, while other substances such as Tramadol and Rohypnol are less prevalent. Friends were identified as the primary source of these substances, highlighting the strong role of social networks in facilitating access, with drinking joints, hawkers, and okada parks serving as secondary sources. The factors influencing consumption were largely social and functional, with peer influence emerging as the most significant motivator, followed by the desire to boost energy, achieve relaxation, and increase appetite. Other factors such as availability, affordability, stress reduction, and enhancing masculinity were less influential, indicating that psychoactive substance use among commercial motorcyclists is predominantly driven by social pressures and perceived performance or coping benefits rather than mere accessibility.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. The Ministry of Health and local government agencies should implement targeted awareness programs to educate commercial motorcyclists on the health risks associated with psychoactive substance use and promote safer coping strategies.
2. Transport unions and commercial motorcycle associations should establish peer mentoring and support groups to reduce the influence of friends in promoting substance use and encourage positive behavioral change.
3. Healthcare providers and community health centers should offer regular health screenings, counseling, and rehabilitation services to commercial motorcyclists to identify and address substance use early.
4. Law enforcement agencies and market regulators should monitor and regulate the sale of alcohol, energy drinks, and other substances around motorcycle parks and commuter hubs to limit easy access and reduce misuse

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