

Socio-Economic Determinants of Criminal Involvement Among Commercial Motorcyclists In Malaba Town, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Commercial motorcycle transport has become a central source of livelihood for young people in Kenya, particularly in regions with limited formal employment opportunities. Although the sector has created income for many households, it has increasingly been associated with rising insecurity and participation in illegal activities, especially in border environments. This study examined socio economic determinants of criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town, located along the Kenya Uganda frontier. A descriptive cross sectional research design was employed, targeting 322 riders selected through systematic random sampling, alongside key informant interviews with security officers and sector leaders. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and chi square statistics, while qualitative responses were interpreted through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that income instability, unemployment, limited education, and financial pressure significantly shape vulnerability to criminal involvement. A majority of riders reported struggling to meet daily needs, with 68% indicating that financial difficulties increase temptation to engage in unlawful activities and 73% noting that stable income would reduce crime involvement. Similarly, 69% agreed that educated riders are less likely to participate in crime, and 72% believed that access to loans or financial support would mitigate criminal behaviour. These results suggest that economic stress and limited livelihood options are central drivers of crime rather than inherent deviance. The study concludes that addressing criminal activity within the boda boda sector requires integrated interventions that combine economic empowerment, vocational training, access to credit, and strengthened cross border enforcement.

Keywords: Boda boda sector, Socio economic vulnerability, Border related crime, Youth livelihoods.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Commercial motorcycle transport, widely known in East Africa as the boda boda sector, has become one of the most important informal economic activities in Kenya. Over the last decade, this sector has offered a primary source of income for thousands of unemployed and underemployed young people who face limited access to formal work opportunities. The National Transport and Safety Authority (2023) reports that the industry now supports more than one point five million riders and facilitates daily transport for millions of commuters. Studies show that motorcycle transport has improved household livelihoods, enhanced rural and urban mobility, and increased access to economic opportunities, particularly for socially and economically vulnerable groups (Mutuku and Kharono, 2022; Omondi, 2023). For many young men, motorcycle riding has also become a pathway to dignity, identity, and consistent daily earnings in a context marked by job scarcity and income uncertainty (Nteere and Muthoka, 2022).

However, this sector has increasingly been associated with criminal activity and insecurity concerns in Kenya. Law enforcement reports and academic studies have linked some riders to offences such as robbery, drug transportation, violent assaults, and mobile money fraud

(National Police Service, 2023; Onyango and Were, 2022). Although most riders serve their communities responsibly, the speed, flexibility, and anonymity offered by motorcycles can enable rapid escapes and concealment, making them attractive tools for crime where socio economic stress meets weak enforcement. Research from Nairobi, Kisumu, and Eldoret indicates that riders experiencing unstable earnings and limited economic alternatives are more susceptible to risky behaviour, especially in areas with high crime rates and limited regulation (Wanjiru and Muriuki, 2024).

This vulnerability becomes more pronounced in border towns such as Malaba, which serves as a major commercial gateway between Kenya and Uganda. Border spaces often present a blend of formal trade, informal business networks, and illicit economic exchanges. Existing research on cross border crime shows that informal transport actors operating near border points are frequently exposed to smuggling routes, counterfeit goods, drug markets, and other clandestine activities (Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024; Warsame, 2023). Riders in Malaba navigate busy customs zones, freight yards, clearing and forwarding corridors, forex markets, and high turnover trading centres. This places them in an environment where opportunities for illegal economic activity exist alongside legitimate livelihoods. As Munyinyi and Nyadera (2024) observe, the informal transport economy in East African border towns often acts as a bridge between formal supply chains and shadow markets.

Socio economic realities further shape the choices and behaviours of commercial motorcyclists. Many riders experience unstable daily income, rising fuel costs, pressure to repay motorcycle loans, and responsibility to support their families. These financial pressures may influence decision making, particularly when legal income sources appear insufficient to meet basic needs (Macharia and Mwangi, 2023). Rational Choice Theory suggests that individuals may evaluate risks and benefits when engaging in criminal behaviour, especially when economic rewards appear immediate and enforcement is inconsistent (Cornish and Clarke, 2017). Similarly, Routine Activity Theory proposes that crime is more likely when motivated actors encounter suitable opportunities without adequate guardianship (Cohen and Felson, 1979). The boda boda sector in border environments presents these conditions: high mobility, minimal surveillance, and easy access to markets where both legal and illegal goods circulate.

Despite public interest and rising policy attention on boda boda related crime, empirical research on the socio-economic drivers of criminal involvement among riders in Kenyan border settings remains limited. Existing studies have largely examined regulatory gaps, safety concerns, and sector governance, while deeper criminological inquiry into the lived economic pressures facing riders is scarce (Ndolo and Okello, 2021; Ouma and Limo, 2023). This gap limits the development of evidence-based strategies that address structural economic drivers, not just enforcement and control.

Understanding the socio-economic factors that push some riders toward criminal involvement is necessary for designing preventive interventions. If criminal behaviour stems from economic exclusion, unemployment, and financial strain, then livelihood support, business skills development, youth employment programs, and accessible credit facilities may complement policing and licensing reforms. This study therefore examined how income instability, unemployment, limited education, and financial pressure shape criminal tendencies among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town. Through field data and criminological interpretation, the study provides insight into the conditions that influence crime involvement in one of Kenya's most economically significant yet socially complex informal labour systems.

1.1 Problem Statement

The boda boda sector has created essential employment opportunities and supported livelihoods among young people in Kenya. However, it has increasingly been associated with rising crime incidents, especially in high pressure informal economies and strategic border zones. In towns such as Malaba, commercial motorcyclists operate in an environment characterised by intense cross border trade, fluctuating income streams, and exposure to informal and illicit markets. National security reports and empirical studies have documented the involvement of some riders in activities such as human trafficking, illicit goods transportation, violent robbery, and drug distribution (National Police Service, 2023; Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024). These concerns have intensified public debates, prompted police crackdowns, and shaped policy responses in transport and security sectors.

Despite these dynamics, there is limited empirical evidence that explains why some riders become vulnerable to criminal involvement while others remain law abiding. Existing research has focused more on regulation, safety compliance, and sector management, rather than socio economic drivers of criminal behaviour in border contexts (Ouma and Limo, 2023). Without grounded insight into economic pressures, unemployment realities, and livelihood insecurity shaping decisions, policy responses risk treating boda boda crime as solely a policing issue rather than a social and economic challenge. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by examining the socio-economic determinants of criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the influence of income instability and unemployment on criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town.
- ii. To analyze the effect of education level and skill limitations on criminal decision-making among commercial motorcyclists.
- iii. To assess how financial pressures, economic vulnerability, and livelihood insecurity shape participation in illegal activities within the boda boda sector.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by Routine Activity Theory and Rational Choice Theory, both of which provide important insight into the socio-economic conditions and decision-making processes that shape criminal behaviour among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town. Routine Activity Theory was developed by Cohen and Felson in 1979. The theory argues that crime occurs when three conditions converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. In the context of the boda boda sector, daily operations involve high mobility, unpredictable income flows, and frequent interaction with diverse individuals across formal and informal trade settings. Riders transport goods, interact with strangers, and operate in areas where law enforcement visibility may be limited, especially during late hours. Border towns such as Malaba present additional opportunities for crime due to cross border trade, informal currency exchange points, and active smuggling corridors. As a result, routine exposure to criminal opportunities and weak surveillance structures can create conditions that make some riders vulnerable to criminal engagement.

Rational Choice Theory, introduced by Cornish and Clarke in 1986, explains crime as a product of conscious decision making. According to the theory, individuals weigh the potential benefits of a criminal act against the perceived risks and consequences. In an environment marked by limited formal employment opportunities, unstable earnings, and rising cost of living, some boda boda riders

may view illegal activities such as smuggling or drug delivery as financially attractive alternatives. Empirical studies in East Africa have shown that youth in informal transport settings often consider crime a rational economic response when legal income sources are insufficient or unpredictable (Macharia and Mwangi, 2023; Warsame, 2023). In Malaba, riders facing financial strain, motorcycle loan pressure, and family responsibilities may rationalize criminal behaviour as a survival strategy, especially where enforcement appears inconsistent. Together, these theories help explain both the structural environment that facilitates crime and the individual decision-making processes behind crime involvement among commercial motorcyclists in border regions.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Socio economic vulnerability, income instability, and criminal involvement

Empirical evidence increasingly links economic marginalization to rising involvement in crime among informal transport workers in Africa. Studies demonstrate that when daily earnings are volatile and insufficient to meet basic household needs, some youth in the motorcycle sector turn to illegal activities as alternative income sources (Nteere and Muthoka, 2022; Mutuku and Kharono, 2022). In Uganda and Tanzania, boda boda riders experiencing unstable earnings were more likely to smuggle small goods, engage in cash theft, or collaborate with organized criminal networks, especially in border settings (Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024). Kenyan research similarly indicates that riders operating in low-income towns face heightened financial pressure that increases the temptation to participate in crime or to provide logistical support to criminal actors for quick financial gain (Wanjiru and Muriuki, 2024). Border studies show that cross border motorcycle transporters often face unpredictable income streams due to seasonal trade, fuel price fluctuations, and police enforcement activities, conditions that make illicit compensation appear attractive during periods of financial strain (Munyinyi and Nyadera, 2024). Overall, existing evidence demonstrates that income vulnerability plays a major role in shaping criminal involvement within informal transport economies, particularly where poverty and limited social safety nets prevail.

2.2.2 Education level, skills limitations, and criminal decision making

Research across sub-Saharan Africa has shown that individuals with limited formal education and technical skills may face greater barriers to formal employment, increasing the likelihood of participation in informal and sometimes illegal economic activities (Omondi, 2023; Ouma and Limo, 2023). In Kenya, a large proportion of boda boda riders enter the sector after secondary school or without completing formal education, which constrains their ability to pursue formal employment pathways or business opportunities (Ndolo and Okello, 2021). Studies in Nakuru, Kisumu, and Eldoret reveal that youth who lack vocational and entrepreneurial skills often view motorcycle transport as a fallback livelihood, while those with higher education or technical training are less likely to be drawn into crime due to stronger employment prospects and social mobility pathways (Onyango and Were, 2022). In Uganda, riders with limited education reported greater susceptibility to peer influence, cross border smuggling, and opportunistic crimes due to fewer alternatives and limited awareness of legal consequences (Warsame, 2023). These studies support the argument that education and skills gaps restrict opportunity structures, increasing the vulnerability of motorcycle operators to criminal recruitment and decision making driven by survival needs.

2.2.3 Financial pressures, livelihood insecurity, and participation in illegal activities

Empirical studies also highlight the role of sustained economic stress in shaping criminal participation among youth in the informal sector. Research in Nairobi and Mombasa found that escalating living costs, lack of savings, and debt pressures significantly increased the likelihood that motorcycle riders would engage in illegal courier services, fuel siphoning, or stolen goods movement to sustain livelihoods (Macharia and Mwangi, 2023). Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke (2024) established that riders in East African border zones face

heightened exposure to loan sharks, daily rental obligations for motorcycles, and family responsibilities, conditions that increase the risk of criminal behaviour when legitimate income sources are unstable. Studies also show that riders who operate without access to affordable credit or social protection schemes often rely on informal networks that may double as criminal channels, especially in border trading corridors (Mutuku and Kharono, 2022; Warsame, 2023). In Malaba and Busia, county community safety reports have noted cases of motorcycle riders transporting contraband and narcotics due to financial stressors and lack of alternative income (County Government of Busia, 2022). Collectively, these findings underscore how persistent financial pressure and livelihood insecurity push some riders into illegal activities as a coping mechanism within fragile informal economies.

2.3 Research Gaps

Existing scholarship has highlighted important insights into the boda boda sector, particularly regarding safety, regulation, and its role in youth employment in Kenya. However, there remains limited empirical focus on the socio economic pathways that influence criminal involvement among riders in border towns. Most studies concentrate on road safety, sector governance, and transport policy, leaving a gap in understanding how financial instability, lack of alternative employment, and livelihood stress shape crime decisions within informal transport settings (Ndolo and Okello, 2021; Ouma and Limo, 2023). Further, while several studies acknowledge the presence of criminal networks in the boda boda industry, few examine these dynamics in cross border contexts where exposure to smuggling channels and informal trade structures may heighten risk (Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024). This study addresses these gaps by examining the socio-economic determinants of criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town, with a focus on income vulnerability, skills limitations, and financial stress.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Study Design

This study adopted a descriptive cross sectional research design. This design is suitable for studies that seek to describe characteristics of a population and explore relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Cross sectional designs are also efficient for criminological and social behaviour research where the aim is to capture attitudes, experiences, and behavioural tendencies at a specific point in time (Bryman, 2016). A mixed analytical approach enabled the study to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative insights, which strengthens interpretation of human behaviour in social contexts (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019).

3.2 Study Location

The study was conducted in Malaba Town along the Kenya Uganda border. Malaba represents a high mobility informal economic environment where cross border trade and transport activity intersect with informal livelihood strategies (Munyinyi and Nyadera, 2024). Border settings are widely recognised as crime vulnerability zones due to fluid trade routes, informal networks, and low regulatory visibility (Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024).

3.3 Population

The target population comprised registered commercial motorcycle riders operating in Malaba. Informal transport workers are considered critical actors in local economic systems but are also vulnerable to criminal influence where legitimate opportunities are limited (Nteere and Muthoka, 2022).

3.4 Sampling Techniques

A sample of 322 respondents was selected using Yamane's formula for finite population sampling (Yamane, 1967). Systematic random sampling ensured representation across boda boda stages in Malaba, which improves generalisability in transport sector studies (Kothari, 2004). In addition, five key informant interviews were conducted with security officers, boda boda leaders, and community policing representatives to enhance contextual insight through stakeholder triangulation (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire complemented by a semi structured interview guide. Questionnaires are effective for capturing socio economic patterns and behavioural tendencies among large populations (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2009). Semi structured interviews allowed deeper understanding of perceptions and lived realities related to economic strain, risk exposure, and crime decision making (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell, 2013).

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential statistics are recommended for criminology and social behaviour studies examining associations between predictors and behavioural outcomes (Pallant, 2020). Chi square tests assessed associations between socio economic variables and criminal involvement, while qualitative responses were analysed thematically in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Influence of Income Instability and Unemployment on Criminal Involvement

The study examined how income instability and unemployment shape criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town. Results indicate a strong association between financial hardship and risk of criminal engagement. The results are presented in figure 4.1.

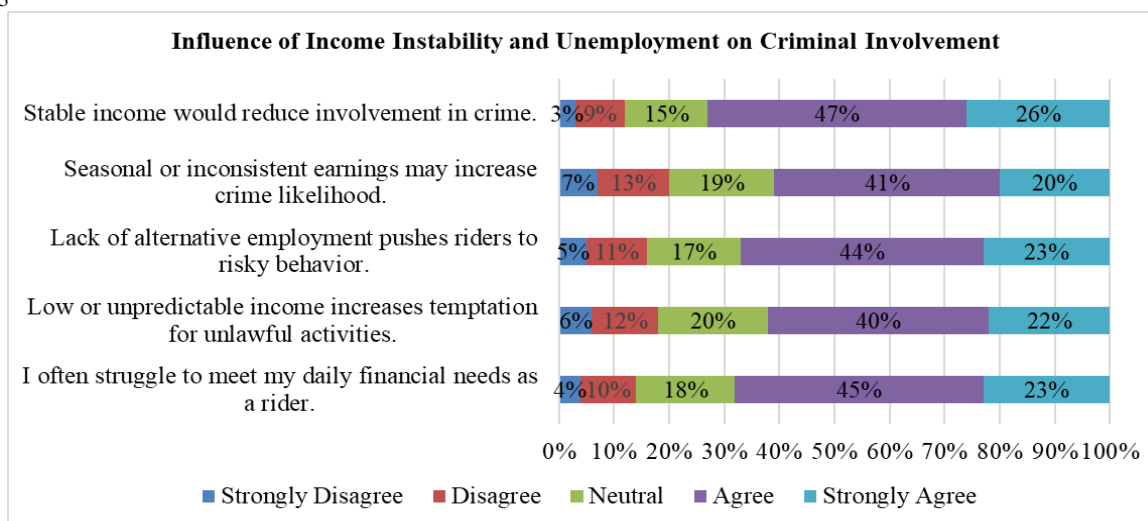


Figure 4. 1: Influence of Income Instability and Unemployment on Criminal Involvement

Findings show that 68% of riders agreed that they often struggle to meet daily financial needs, while 14% disagreed. This suggests that financial stress is a common experience among riders. In addition, 62% agreed that low or unpredictable income increases the temptation to engage in unlawful activities, while 18% were neutral. The data implies that income instability is a critical driver of risky economic behaviour in the sector. Similarly, 67% agreed that a lack of alternative employment options pushes riders toward risky conduct, whereas only 16% disagreed, highlighting the role of unemployment in shaping criminal vulnerability.

Seasonal fluctuations in earnings also emerged as a contributing factor. A combined 61% of respondents agreed that seasonal or inconsistent income increases the likelihood of criminal involvement, while 19% remained undecided. This suggests that riders facing unstable income streams may be tempted to pursue informal or illegal opportunities during periods of low business. Furthermore, 73% agreed that stable income would reduce involvement in crime, signalling that economic security acts as a protective factor.

These results align with research showing that financial strain increases susceptibility to crime among informal sector workers (Nteere and Muthoka, 2022; Wanjiru and Muriuki, 2024). In border towns, where informal trade flourishes alongside illicit markets, riders may view illegal couriering or smuggling as a temporary income solution (Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024). This situation reflects the realities of Malaba, where riders navigate unpredictable earnings, loan repayment obligations, and cross border economic activity.

Qualitative responses reinforced these patterns. One rider noted,

“When a day is bad and you have not earned enough for fuel or food, you are tempted when someone offers quick money to deliver something.” R012

Such narratives demonstrate how economic survival pressures shape behaviour in informal transport environments.

The findings are consistent with Rational Choice Theory, which suggests individuals evaluate risks and rewards before engaging in criminal behaviour (Cornish and Clarke, 2017). Riders facing immediate financial pressure may perceive short term illegal earnings as outweighing enforcement risks, particularly when formal income options are limited. The results also support Routine Activity Theory, which argues that crime occurs when motivated individuals encounter opportunities in the absence of effective guardianship (Cohen and Felson, 1979). The high mobility nature of boda boda activity, limited surveillance on back routes, and presence of informal exchange networks in Malaba create conditions where criminal opportunities are accessible.

4.2 Effect of Education and Skill Limitations on Criminal Decision Making

The study examined how education level and skill limitations influence criminal decision making among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town. The results demonstrate a strong link between limited education, lack of vocational skills, and increased vulnerability to criminal behavior. The results are presented in figure 4.2.

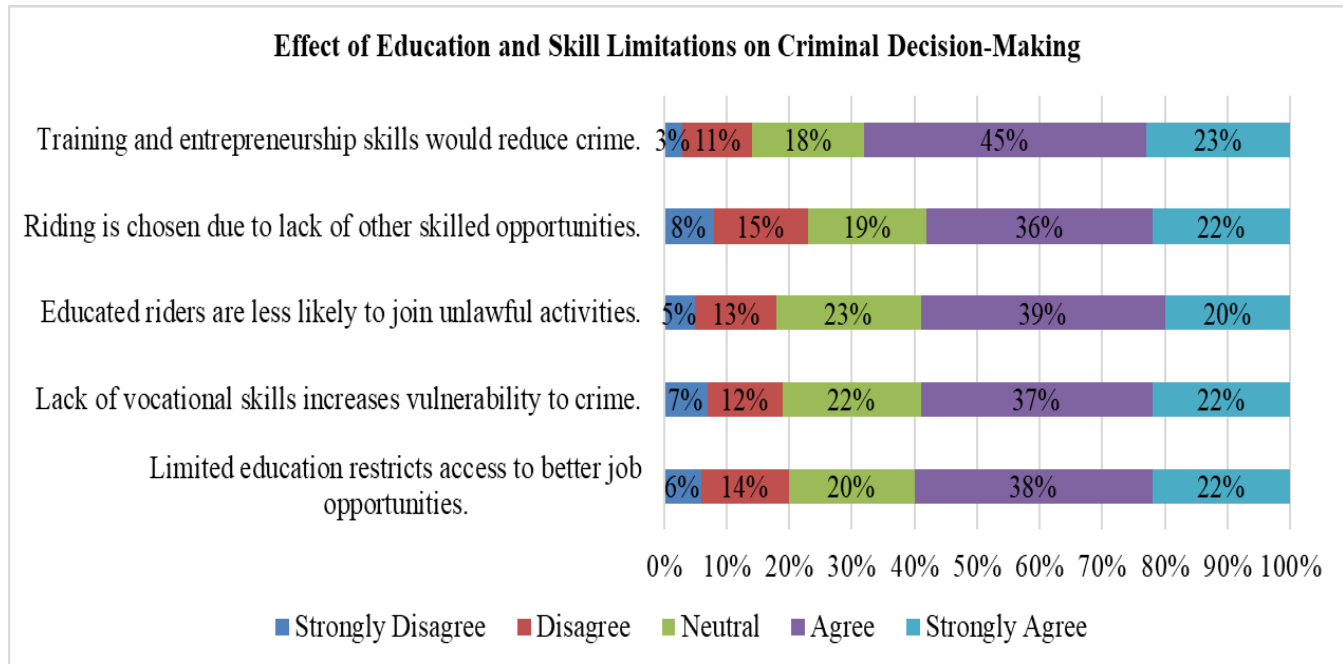


Figure 4. 2: Effect of Education and Skill Limitations on Criminal Decision Making

Findings show that 62% of respondents agreed that limited education restricts access to better job opportunities, while only 20% remained neutral and 20% disagreed. This indicates that many riders perceive education as a key determinant in accessing formal and better paying employment opportunities. In addition, 59% agreed that lack of vocational skills increases vulnerability to crime, compared to 19% who disagreed. This suggests that riders without professional or technical skills face constrained livelihood pathways and may consider illegal activities when legitimate options are limited.

Results also revealed that 69% of respondents agreed that educated riders are less likely to join unlawful activities. Only 18% disagreed with this statement. This reinforces the view that education provides not only employment prospects but also awareness of legal consequences and avenues for upward mobility. Moreover, 58% agreed that riding is often chosen due to the absence of skilled employment options, while 23% disagreed. These findings indicate that the boda boda sector serves as a fallback occupation for individuals with limited academic or technical qualifications.

Notably, 68% of participants agreed that access to training and entrepreneurship skills would reduce crime involvement among riders. This signals a strong belief in skill development as a preventive mechanism and reflects a broader aspiration among youth to transition into more stable economic roles if provided with support.

These results are consistent with literature showing that individuals with limited education and employable skills often turn to informal and sometimes high-risk economic activities (Omondi, 2023; Ndolo and Okello, 2021). In Uganda and Tanzania, similar studies found that youth in motorcycle transport are more susceptible to criminal recruitment where skill deficits limit access to formal labor markets

(Warsame, 2023; Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024). In Kenya, education has been identified as a buffer against crime by enhancing social mobility opportunities and fostering rational decision making (Onyango and Were, 2022).

Qualitative narratives supported the quantitative patterns. One respondent explained,

“I finished primary school only. Without skills it is hard to get a good job, so we end up here and sometimes you just do what comes to survive.” R08

This highlights how education limitations shape entry into the informal sector and increase exposure to crime opportunities.

The findings align with Rational Choice Theory, which implies that individuals evaluate alternatives before choosing behavior. Riders who lack education and technical skills may perceive legal earning options as insufficient and may rationally consider illegal means when faced with financial pressure and limited alternatives (Cornish and Clarke, 2017). The results also resonate with Routine Activity Theory, as riders with limited skills spend more time in informal street and border environments where potential criminal opportunities exist and guardianship is weak (Cohen and Felson, 1979).

4.3 Impact of Financial Pressure and Economic Vulnerability on Illegal Activities

The study examined how financial pressure and economic vulnerability influence involvement in illegal activities among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town. Findings show a clear relationship between persistent economic struggle and increased likelihood of engaging in unlawful behaviour. The results are presented in figure 4.3.

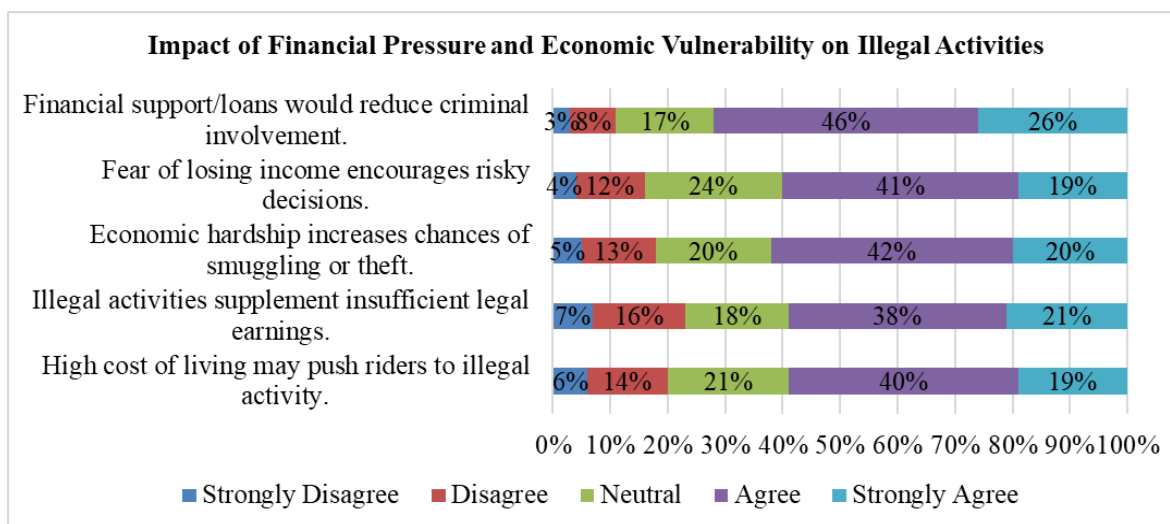


Figure 4. 3: Impact of Law Enforcement on Business Security

Results indicate that 59% of respondents agreed that high cost of living may push riders to illegal activity, while 20% disagreed. This suggests that inflation and rising living expenses have a significant impact on financial coping strategies among riders. Similarly, 54% agreed that illegal activities supplement insufficient legal earnings, while 23% disagreed. This illustrates that some riders may resort to informal or illegal means to meet daily needs when legitimate earnings fall short.

Economic hardship was also identified as a major driver of criminal vulnerability. A combined 62% of participants agreed that economic hardship increases the chances of smuggling or theft, while 20% disagreed. This indicates a strong perception that financial distress heightens the temptation to engage in illegal cross border trade or other offences. In addition, 60% of respondents agreed that fear of losing income encourages risky decisions, reflecting the insecurity inherent in informal employment.

Financial support mechanisms emerged as a potential protective factor. The results show that 72% of riders agreed that access to financial support or loans would reduce criminal involvement, with only 11% disagreeing. This suggests that access to credit and structured financial assistance may reduce desperation driven criminal decisions by stabilising income and enabling savings or investment in alternative livelihoods.

These findings are consistent with studies showing that persistent financial strain increases the likelihood of crime participation in informal transport economies (Macharia and Mwangi, 2023; Mutuku and Kharono, 2022). Border studies further demonstrate that individuals facing liquidity challenges in cross border trade corridors are more susceptible to smuggling offers and criminal recruitment (Ajeigbe and Kibukamusoke, 2024). The vulnerability is heightened in regions such as Malaba where informal markets operate alongside illicit trade networks and enforcement gaps.

Qualitative perspectives reinforced the quantitative findings. One rider explained,

“There are days you just cannot make enough. When someone offers money to move something, you think of your children and you do it. You do not want problems, but hunger forces you.” R04

This highlights how livelihood stress and survival needs can override legal considerations.

The results reflect Rational Choice Theory, where individuals facing acute financial pressure evaluate risks and rewards and may opt for illegal alternatives when legitimate avenues are insufficient (Cornish and Clarke, 2017). When riders confront sudden financial needs, for example fuel purchases or family emergencies, illegal couriering or smuggling small consignments may appear as rational and necessary choices. The findings also support Routine Activity Theory, which suggests that crime is more likely when motivated individuals operate in environments with available criminal opportunities and weak guardianship (Cohen and Felson, 1979). The high mobility nature of boda boda work and access to hidden border routes create such opportunities.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

The study set out to examine the socio-economic factors influencing criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba Town. Findings demonstrated a strong association between economic vulnerability, limited skills, financial pressure, and engagement in illegal activities. Regarding income instability, 68% of riders reported struggling to meet daily financial needs, while 62% agreed that low or unpredictable income increases temptation to engage in unlawful activities. Similarly, 67% indicated that lack of alternative employment pushes riders into risky behaviour, and 73% believed that stable income would reduce involvement in crime. These results confirm that unemployment and income instability are major drivers of criminal vulnerability in the boda boda sector.

The findings further revealed that education and skills play a crucial protective role. A combined 62% of respondents agreed that limited education restricts access to better employment opportunities, and 59% stated that lack of vocational skills increases vulnerability to crime. In addition, 69% agreed that educated riders are less likely to engage in unlawful activities, and 68% believed that training and entrepreneurship skills would reduce criminal behaviour. These patterns suggest that riders view education and skills development as meaningful pathways away from crime involvement. Financial pressure also emerged as a significant determinant. 59% of riders agreed

that high cost of living may push them to illegal activity, while 54% indicated that illegal activities sometimes supplement insufficient legal earnings.

Furthermore, 62% agreed that economic hardship increases the likelihood of smuggling or theft, and 60% acknowledged that fear of losing income encourages risky decisions. Notably, 72% agreed that financial support or loans would reduce criminal involvement, demonstrating strong belief in the role of economic empowerment programs. Overall, the results illustrate that criminal involvement among boda boda riders in Malaba is largely shaped by financial hardship, limited employment alternatives, inadequate skills, and high economic pressure. These socio economic stressors interact to create an environment where illegal opportunities may be viewed as rational survival strategies.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings indicate that criminal involvement among commercial motorcyclists in Malaba is largely driven by structural economic challenges rather than inherent criminal tendencies. Riders who operate in environments characterised by fluctuating income, limited job alternatives, and persistent financial pressure are more likely to consider illegal opportunities when confronted with survival needs. Education and vocational skills emerged as important protective factors, suggesting that improving human capital is central to reducing crime in informal transport. The results also highlight that economic desperation increases the likelihood of rational crime decision making in contexts where illegal opportunities are accessible and law enforcement monitoring is limited. Strengthening formal employment pathways, improving access to credit, and enhancing enforcement along border transport corridors are therefore essential to reducing crime within the boda boda industry. Addressing these socio-economic realities provides a more sustainable approach to crime prevention than enforcement alone.

5.3 Recommendations

- i. Enhance youth employment and skills development programs: Government and county authorities should expand vocational training, technical skills programs, and entrepreneurship support tailored to youth in informal transport. Such initiatives can improve employability and reduce reliance on high risk informal activities.
- ii. Strengthen economic empowerment schemes for boda boda operators: Provision of affordable credit, cooperative saving schemes, and financial literacy programs would help riders build economic resilience and reduce vulnerability to illegal activities linked to financial desperation.
- iii. Improve border surveillance and law enforcement coordination: Security agencies should collaborate with community policing units and boda boda associations to monitor high risk transport corridors and discourage exploitation by criminal networks. Strategies should balance enforcement with respect for riders' livelihood rights.
- iv. Formalise and regulate boda boda associations: Strengthening the governance capacity of rider associations can foster accountability, improve membership management, and facilitate structured support for ethical conduct and financial stability.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should explore gender dynamics within the bodaboda sector, since most literature has focused on male riders while female participation remains understudied. Additional qualitative studies could investigate personal narratives and coping strategies among riders involved in crime to provide deeper insight into decision making pathways. Comparative studies between border towns

and interior urban centres would also help determine whether these patterns are unique to frontier settings or reflect broader national trends. Finally, longitudinal research would contribute useful evidence on how long term economic empowerment and training interventions influence behaviour and reduce crime vulnerability over time.

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