

Chronic stressor in cities in Africa – Nigeria

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The growth of Africa's population is high while the rates of economic growth are low and the role of government is more pervasive than in other countries of the world (Obudho 1996). Obudho notes that African urban population grows at a rate of 4.5 percent per year during 1985-95, is the highest rate of growth in the world. By 2020-25, the urban population is expected to grow at 3.4 per cent per year, about six times the equivalent rate for the MDCs. Urban growth rates are high for every country of Africa where they exceeded 5.5 percent per year in 1985-90 (Obudho 1996). By the year 2025, 54.0 percent of the African population will reside in urban areas (UNCHS 1991). The average percentage figure for the African continent which is 54.0 percent is even lower than that for the Nigeria which is 61.6 percent (UNCHS 1991). Consequently, there has been rapid expansion of cities' areal extent which is now sometimes ten fold their initial point of growth (Egunjobi 1999; Ogunsanya 2002; Oyesiku 2002). A crucial aspect of this is that city growth and expansion in most African countries has been largely uncontrolled resulting in crowding and inadequate intra-connectivity. Cities have been growing in all directions without direction. Consequently, the scaring and unsatisfactory situations in the cities have been increasing at an alarming rate. Urban centres in Nigeria are thus under severe strains imposed among others by household

crowding and deplorable urban transport situation. This current trend in the Nigerian cities has been very frustrating.

Studies bearing on the effects of household crowding have produced mixed results. This is partly due to the fact that the level of household crowding varies from country to country, particularly, in the developed countries household crowding is quite low in comparison to developing countries. Also, and as others have suggested, the effects of crowding may well vary from one culture to another (Booth 1976; Gove and Hughes 1983; Booth et al 1980; Gove et al 1979; Taylor 1988; etc). In North America for instance, Baldassaire (1979) study found no relationship between household crowding and psychological well being. Booth (1976) study in Toronto found a significant positive relationship between subjective crowding but not objective crowding while Gove and Hughes (1983) in their study in Chicago conclude that crowding has a substantial negative effect on a variety of aspects of mental health and that the subjective experience of crowding has a stronger relationship on mental health than does objective crowding. In their study in Bangkok, Thailand, Fuller et al (1996) found objective household crowding to be detrimental to psychological well-being, controlling for a number of background characteristics. They found the effect of objective crowding to be mediated by subjective crowding which has strong, consistent and detrimental effects on well-being. There have been a number of studies of the effects of household crowding in some developing countries including Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong, India and Thailand (Hassan 1977; 1978; Jain 1989; Marsella et al 1970; Mitchell 1971; Fuller et al 1996 etc). However, such studies are rare in Africa and in Nigeria in particular.

The present study focuses on household crowding and intra-urban travel as a chronic stressor in Nigeria, using Ibadan as a case study. Transport system represents a major interface between the location of activities and the general movement of people in an urban system (Ayeni, 1998). Hitherto, urban transport problems are becoming more and more acute in the cities in Nigeria. World Health Organization (2000) recently articulated that health concerns related to traffic and transportation have become a worldwide phenomenon and will likely become more of an issue in the future.

In this century investigation of household crowding and intra-urban travel as a chronic stressor is particularly timely. This is because the pace of urbanization in developing countries since the Second World War has accelerated markedly and is expected to continue to do so in most developing countries for some time to come. Urbanization has been a major historical trend. City life is becoming the norm for an ever growing proportion of the world's population and urban environment influences every aspect of health and well-being of the urban residents (Galea, Freudenberg and Vlahov, 2005).

The null hypotheses tested in the paper are that: (i) there is no relationship between household crowding/ intra-urban travel and psychological well being; (ii) there is no intra-urban variation in the experience of household crowding and intra-urban travel; and (iii) there is no relationship between socio-economic variables and household crowding/intra-urban travel. Variables used in the analysis includes: household crowding variables both objective and subjective components; weekly trips for various purposes; socio- economic variables and psychological well-being variables. The data used is from a larger household survey carried out in Ibadan, Nigeria.

The findings in the paper show that there is a significant effect of household crowding/intra-urban travel on the psychological well being of Ibadan city residents, and there is significant intra-urban variation in the effect of household crowding/intra-urban travel on the psychological well being. Significant differences is found in the effect of household crowding/intra-urban travel on the psychological well being of the residents in high, medium and low density residential areas in Ibadan. Significant negative association is found between household crowding/intra-urban travel stress experience and the household income, education level, occupation level or quality, ownership of cars in the household, housing type, housing value, and distance of the location of the house to the CBD. Significant positive association is found between household crowding/intra-urban travel stress experience and household size. The findings suggest that household crowding and intra-urban travel constitutes a major threat to psychological well being. Policy implications towards healthy urban centres in Africa are highlighted in the paper.