
Road safety in African informal transport: A systematic review of Structural and Behavioural Risk Factors (2020-2026)

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Background

Across African cities and rural areas, the transport mode of informal minibuses and motorcycle taxis are the primary mobility option, however they operate mostly outside formal safety oversight. Current road safety policies fail because they are designed for formal transport, creating a disconnect between regulation and actual travel behaviour. Evidence on risks is growing, while the literature increasingly indicates that issues of safety differ vastly between modes, and are driven by precarious labour conditions rather than simple driver indiscipline. Ranging from physical crash risks in motorcycle taxis to personal security and gender-based violence in minibuses.

Aim

This study aims to systematically review and synthesize scientific literature from 2020 to 2026 regarding road safety risks in African informal transport. Unlike previous reviews restricted to single modes, this study specifically contrasts risk profiles and interventions between motorized two-wheelers and minibuses to identify structural determinants and evidence-based measures for each sector.

Method

A systematic literature search was conducted, combining terms for specific informal transport modes (e.g., “Matatu”, “Boda boda”, “Danfo”) with road safety indicators within African contexts. The search was restricted to the period from 2020 to 2026 to capture current infrastructural and regulatory trends, yielding 49 publications. Screening and selection followed PRISMA guidelines. The final output was coded using a standardized extraction framework covering transport mode, risk factors, safety outcomes, and reported interventions. Findings were analysed using thematic synthesis and descriptive comparison across modes and regions.

Results

The review identifies three dominant themes:

1. A rising injury burden among commercial motorcyclists contrasting with the structural risks of aging minibus fleets.

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2. Risky driving behaviours are increasingly identified as rational economic responses to precarious ownership models rather than simple indiscipline.
3. For minibus users, safety concerns extend beyond crashes to include gender-based violence.

Despite these emerging themes, the overall evidence base remains fragmented, with strong geographic concentration and limited longitudinal data to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of interventions.

Conclusions

Current safety interventions focusing solely on enforcement often fail because they ignore the political-economic drivers of risk, such as precarious labour conditions, and the specific vulnerabilities of different user groups. Future policy frameworks must address these structural root causes and differentiate between the distinct risk profiles of motorcycle and minibus operators. This review provides the necessary evidence base to move from fragmented local case studies to a comprehensive, multi-modal safety strategy for the region.