

Case Study

Road Warriors: The Challenges of Indigenous Habal-Habal Drivers in Oriental Mindoro, Philippines

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

In the rural areas of the country like Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines, habal-habal drivers give indispensable assistance with transportation. The resistant environment of the local habal-habal drivers in Panaytayan, Mansalay, and Oriental Mindoro is discussed here. The “road warriors” are people who ply rough and dangerous areas making important communications between such people and essential services. Nevertheless, habal-habal driving is a difficult task and drivers encounter various hindrances in bringing people to the research area. The study identified various problems that affect the habal-habal drivers of Panaytayan. Recommendations were put forth for the improvement of conditions of habal-habal service providers and the population in entirety. The data collection method adopted a quantitative approach; involving the administration of questionnaires to the indigenous habal-habal drivers made at the site. Various remedies were suggested for the problems experienced by habal-habal drivers as well as accessibility matters about their destination. These drivers place passenger lives and their own at risk. Regulatory measures are required together will enhance safety and support for them for the benefit of passengers and the communities within this area. Adoption of these recommendations by the local government, as well as other stakeholders, could go a long way in improving the conditions of life for this group of people and ensuring the availability of dependable means of transport in the community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the hard terrain and remote areas of Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines the habal-habal drivers are considered as “Road Warriors”. The word ‘habal’ is from the Cebuano language, and means ‘mating’, as in animal copulation. Doubling up the word to Habal-Habal means ‘looks like mating’, which refers to the number of people piled onto the hapless small motorcycle (Mangahas & Quimba, 2021). The drivers who are also called “road warriors” travel through rough and remote areas connecting secluded communities with critical services like health care, schooling, and jobs. They became the saviors of the rural population living in the beautiful but cut-off corners in this area by providing transportation services. The motorcycles ride over the muddy tracks across the road to Panaytayan, connecting the rural poor with necessities like health care, schooling, and work that they can survive on. Habal-habal drivers are usually important players who provide transport services in most parts of Panaytayan, Mansalay, and other areas in the Philippines.

Nevertheless, habal-habal drivers encounter several difficulties in ensuring communication to far-flung places. Some of the above-mentioned problems are bad roads, expensive motorcycle maintenance and repair, unhealthy competition for motorcycles about other means of transport and cheap fares, long operational hours, and security issues (Alonto & Paje, 2020)

The problems that habitual drivers face are crucial to their health, as well as to the health of the communities served. Frequently, the drivers of habal-habal face economic difficulties, health issues, and mental pressure (Santos & Santos, 2018). In addition, there are transport challenges resulting in people finding it difficult to reach places of work, schools, and health care centers. To develop tailored solutions aimed at improving the performance and sustainability of habal-habal services provided by Philippine drivers, it is crucial to understand this literature. The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) surveyed habal-habal riders operating in Metro Manila in 2019 and identified several problems these riders faced. These included crumbling roads, high costs of motorcycle parts replacement or repair, and unfair competition from other modes of transport such as trains, the research showed that habal-habal drivers are usually abused by their transport owners, and they always have a high probability of accidents occurrence (ITDP, 2019). In a study conducted by the World Bank, it was discovered that habit-riding drivers in the country’s rural areas were also facing similar setbacks as their counterparts in Metro Manila (World Bank, 2020). It revealed that many of the habal-habal drivers in rural areas put in long hours of work but are paid miserably for it. Such conditions may affect the lives of driver’s families, thereby creating financial difficulties and diseases among them.

However, much of the literature focuses on broader issues about habal-habal services which may not reflect the problems unique to Panaytayan. Notwithstanding the significant role they play, there is minimal research done that highlights the problems that face the habal-habal drivers in Panaytayan. While most studies have been centered on economic advantages associated with habal-habal driving, this study will touch upon some of the research gaps that are of great concern in Panaytayan in

terms of habal-habal drivers whose contributions to the supply of basic needs cannot be underestimated.

The purpose of this study is to address this research gap. Therefore, this survey assessed all the problems encountered by these drivers and discussed the possible implications for community access across the area. Finally, based on the research results, a set of recommendations that shall help mitigate the issues will be developed. Therefore, this research adds to the little existing literature about habal-habal drivers in the Philippines.



Figure 1. Habal-habal drivers as they deliver transportation services.



Figure 2. Road going to Panaytayan

It is fair enough to share the challenges of the community especially the habal-habal drivers in their means of transporting both goods and people, but as time goes these challenges become bearable to them as this shows how adaptable they are.



1.1. Objectives of the Study

The research focused on habal-habal drivers in Panaytayan, aiming to understand their demographics, challenges, and the impact of these challenges on their livelihoods and well-being. It thoroughly analyzed demographic data and identified various challenges, including internal and external. Additionally, it delved into the specific impact these challenges had on the drivers. Finally, it formulated strategic recommendations aimed at improving the drivers' conditions and accessibility to Panaytayan, fostering a more sustainable and beneficial environment for both drivers and the community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Road Warriors in Philippine transport

The Philippines is unique in Southeast Asia for its diverse public transportation system. Beyond the standard buses and taxis, the country's roads are filled with a variety of motorized vehicles used for public transport, including jeepneys, multicabs, megataxis, tricycles, and motorcycle taxis known as "habal-habal". According to Guillen and Ishida (2004), the history of habal-habal can be traced back to the evolution of "trisikads" or "pedicabs." These initially began as bicycles with sidecars and later transformed into motorized tricycles in the late 1950s (Guillen and Ishida, 2004). Subsequently, in the late 1990s, motorcycle taxis emerged as a new form of transportation, particularly in areas lacking alternative transport services. Republic Act No. 4136 or the Land Transportation and Traffic Code of the Philippines categorizes motorcycles as personal vehicles and prohibits their use for commercial purposes. Drivers of habal-habal have no official driver's license or permission to operate. However, habal-habal is sometimes the only means of transport for far-flung communities, especially in Panaytayan, and their role adds to the overall accessibility of the area.

3.2. Challenges of Habal-habal Drivers

The realities of being a habal-habal driver are outlined in various literature and sometimes it is not as promising. According to the study by Agaton (2022), poor road and transportation conditions in the area have negatively impacted children's education. They specifically mentioned that female students have been disproportionately affected. Furthermore, road accidents were more common among teenagers than adults. Both young boys and girls were involved in these incidents. These accidents were likely caused by road conditions and the types of vehicles and activities on the roads. People expressed concerns about road safety, citing speeding, overcrowding of passengers, and excessive cargo as major hazards (Agaton, 2022). Other literature finds the lack of regulation as one of the challenges in habal-habal operation. Most drivers are over-speeding and not wearing helmets and probably not licensed. RA 4136 emphasizes that motorcycles can't be used for commercial purposes, however, despite this provision in law, motorcycles are widely used as public transportation, particularly in areas with limited transportation options like in Panaytayan.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this research was collected using quantitative

methods. Quantitative method was used to know the age, number of years of habal drivers; and the driver's license status. Frequency was measured using a validated questionnaire. Twenty indigenous habal-habal drivers were asked to participate and to delve deeper into their challenge and its impacts in providing transport access in the remote areas of Oriental Mindoro, specifically in Panaytayan, Mansalay, and Oriental Mindoro. Four-point Likert scale was utilized to assess the impact of challenges with the following verbal description; 1-very easy, 2 easy, 3 challenging; 4- very challenging. Percentage was used in determining the demographic profile of habal-habal drivers while mean and ranking were utilized to present the level of internal, external, and impact of the challenges faced by the haba-habal drivers

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the results of statistical analysis and interpretation, the study arrives at the following findings:

4.1. Demographic Profile of Habal-Habal Drivers

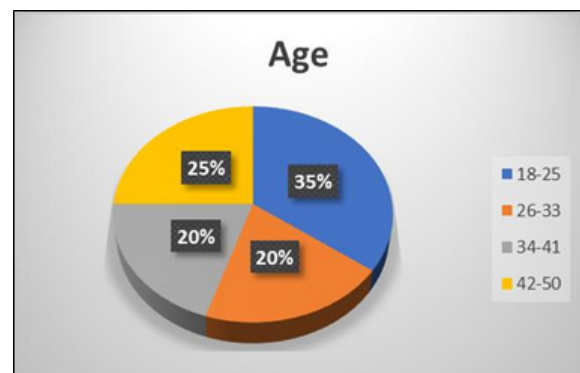


Figure 3. Demographic Profile of Habal-habal drivers in terms of age

Figure 3 shows that 35% of the respondents are 18-25 years old with a frequency of 7, followed by 42-50 with a frequency of 5; the lowest group with 4 frequencies each are 34-41 and 26-33 respectively. This means that the majority of the habal drivers belong to young adults who can do strenuous activities

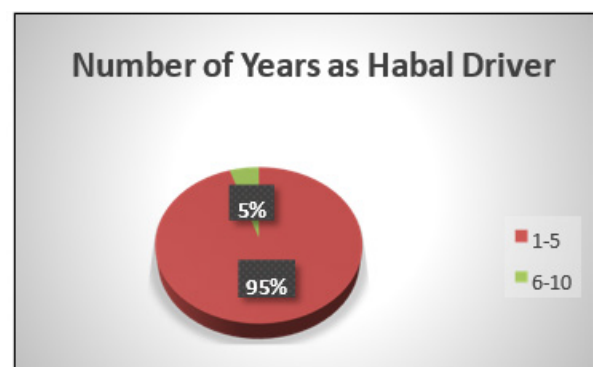


Figure 4. Demographic Profile of Habal-habal drivers in terms of the number of years in the service

The data in Figure 4 shows that 95% of the habal drivers spent 6-10 years as habal drivers with a frequency of 19 while the remaining 5% with a frequency of 1 got 1-5 years' experience. This connotes that due to their long experience as habal drivers, this group of respondents can delineate the challenges that they



encounter firsthand from the wide array of their involvement in this activity.

are still considered unregulated, and can imply that getting a license is also a challenge for them.

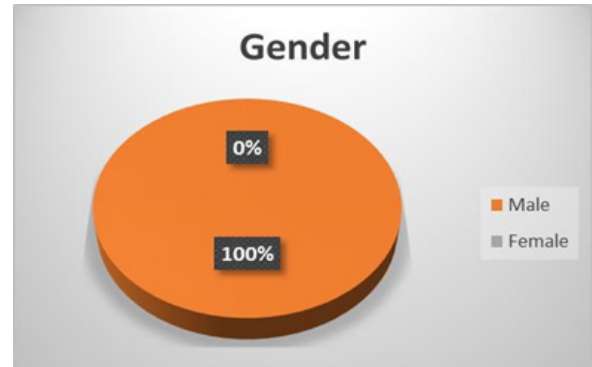
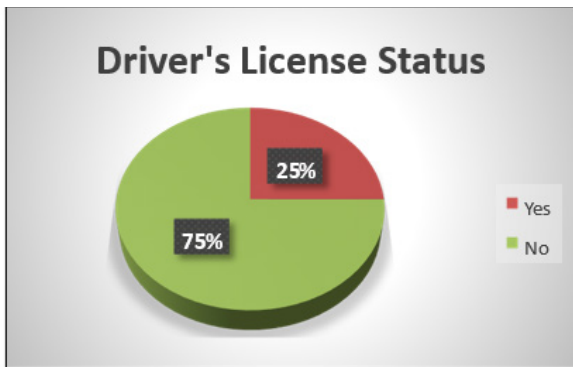


Figure 5. Demographic Profile of Habal-habal drivers in terms of Driver’s License Status

Figure 6. Demographic Profile of Habal-habal drivers in terms of Gender

The data shows in Figure 5 shows that 75% of the habal drivers do not possess their driver’s license with a frequency of 15 while those who don’t have one comprised the remaining 25% with a frequency of 5. This signifies that even though they have a long experience driving for tourists and community members, they

For the gender distribution of the habal-habal drivers as shown in Figure 6, all of them are male. Due to the physical capability of males, it dominates the number of individuals who engage in this kind of activity.

4.2. Challenges of Habal-habal drivers

Table 1. Level of Internal Challenges faced by the Habal-habal Drivers

| Challenges | Mean | Rank | Description |
|---|-------------|------|-------------------------|
| 1. Poor road infrastructure (<i>Mahirap na imprastruktura ng kalsada</i>) | 3.95 | 3 | Very Challenging |
| 2. Lack of access to affordable motorcycle maintenance and repairs(<i>Kawalanng access sa abot-kayang pagmimintina at pagkakumpuni ng motorsiklo</i>) | 3.95 | 3 | Very Challenging |
| 3. Irregular working hours (<i>Irregular na oras ng trabaho</i>) | 3.95 | 3 | Very Challenging |
| 4. Lack of protective gears and safety equipment (<i>Kawalan/ kakulangan sa kasuotang at kagamitang pangkaligtasan</i>) | 4 | 1.5 | Very Challenging |
| 5. Lack of safety signages in the area (<i>Kawalan ng mga senyales o tanda ng kaligtasan sa lugar</i>) | 4 | 1.5 | Very Challenging |
| Overall Mean | 3.97 | | Very Challenging |

The top two challenges are all considered to be very challenging: Lack of protective gear and safety equipment and lack of safety signage in the area. These challenges can all have a significant impact on the safety and well-being of habal-habal drivers, as

well as their ability to earn a living. These challenges can have a significant impact on their safety and well-being, as well as their ability to earn a living. In some cases, these challenges can even lead to being killed or injured (Mendoza, 2019).

Table 2. Level of External Challenges faced by the Habal-habal Drivers

| Challenges | Mean | Rank | Description |
|--|-------------|------|-------------------------|
| 1. Low earnings (<i>Mababang kita</i>) | 4 | 1 | Very Challenging |
| 2. Unfair competition from other forms of transportation (<i>Di makatarungan na kompetisyon mula sa iba’t ibang uri ng transportasyon</i>) | 3.75 | 5 | Very Challenging |
| 3. Lack of knowledge and skills in proper driving (<i>Kawalan ng kaalaman at kasanayan sa wastong pagmamaneho</i>) | 3.9 | 3 | Very Challenging |
| 4. Insufficient safety training (<i>Kakulangan sa pagsasanay sa kaligtasan</i>) | 3.95 | 2 | Very Challenging |
| 5. Personal and family problems (<i>Personal at pamilyang mga problema</i>) | 3.85 | 4 | Very Challenging |
| Overall Mean | 3.89 | | Very Challenging |

4.3. Level of External Challenges faced by the Habal-habal Drivers

Table 2 exhibits the level of external challenges faced by the habal-habal driver. Low earnings rank the highest as a major

challenge to them. This could lead to financial instability making it more challenging for habal-habal drivers to provide for their family and necessary vehicle maintenance that could compromise safety and reliability.

4.4. Level of Impact of Challenges faced by Habal-habal drivers

4.4.1. Level of Social Impact of Challenges faced by the Habal-Habal Drivers

Table 3. Level of Social Impact of Challenges faced by the Habal-Habal Drivers

| Challenges | Mean | Rank | Description |
|--|---------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Safety concerns may erode trust in habal-habal services (<i>Ang mga alalahanin sa kaligtasan ay maaaring magpabawas ng tiwala sa mga serbisyong habal-habal</i>) | 3.85 | 3.5 | Very Challenging |
| 2. Legal challenges and lack of regulation can contribute to the social stigma attached to habal-habal services (<i>Ang mga hamong legal at kakulangan sa regulasyon ay maaaring makatulong sa pagdikit ng sosyal na stigma sa mga serbisyong habal-habal</i>) | 3.85 | 3.5 | Very Challenging |
| 3. The lack of job security and benefits for habal-habal drivers contributes to social inequality (<i>Ang kakulangan ng seguridad sa trabaho at mga benepisyo para sa mga driver ng habal-habal ay naglalaan ng kaibahan sa lipunan</i>) | 3.85 | 3.5 | Very Challenging |
| 4. Income instability, can affect the social dynamics within habal-habal drivers' families (<i>Ang kawalan ng kasiguraduhan sa kita ay maaaring makaapekto sa dinamika ng lipunan sa loob ng pamilya ng mga driver ng habalhabal</i>) | 3.95 | 1 | Very Challenging |
| 5. The stress and anxiety for habal-habal drivers, affecting their mental and emotional well-being (<i>Ang stress at pag-aalala para sa mga driver ng habal-habal ay maaaring makaapekto sa kanilang kaisipan at emosyonal na kalagayan</i>) | 3.85 | 3.5 | Very Challenging |
| | Overall Mean | 3.87 | Very Challenging |

The table conveys that Income stability can affect social dynamics within habal-habal drivers' families. Income uncertainties significantly influence social dynamics and other psychological distress. This could heighten their stress and strained relationships which emphasizes the study stating this contributes to insecurities and low morale and directly

influences how they interact and collaborate socially (Ryu & Lu, 2022).

4.4.2. Level of Personal Impact of Challenges faced by the Habal- Habal Drivers

Table 4. Level of Personal Impact of Challenges faced by the Habal- Habal Drivers

| Challenges | Mean | Rank | Description |
|--|---------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. The poor road infrastructure may lead to accident-caused injuries (<i>Ang mababang kalidad ng imprastruktura ng kalsada ay maaaring magdulot ng mga aksidente na nagreresulta sa mga pinsala sa katawan</i>) | 3.9 | 2 | Very Challenging |
| 2. The randomness and length of driving schedules, and weather conditions may cause over-fatigue and illnesses to drivers (<i>Ang pa iba ibang iskediyul at haba ng oras ng pagmamaneho, pati na rin ang kondisyon ng panahon, ay maaaring magdulot ng sobrang pagod at mga sakit sa mga driver</i>) | 3.9 | 2 | Very Challenging |
| 3. The challenges may caused stress and depression to habal drivers (<i>Ang mga hamon ay maaaring magdulot ng stress at depresyon sa mga driver ng habal-haba</i>) | 3.85 | 4.5 | Very Challenging |
| 4. High engagement in habal driving because limited job opportunities (<i>Ang mataas na pagtangkilik sa pagmamaneho ng habal ay dahil sa limitadong mga oportunidad sa trabaho</i>) | 3.9 | 2 | Very Challenging |
| 5. Fear and hesitation to drive due to past experiences (<i>Takot at pagaalinlangan sa pagmamaneho dahil sa mga nakaraang karanasan</i>) | 3.85 | 4.5 | Very Challenging |
| | Overall Mean | 3.88 | Very Challenging |

The randomness and length of driving schedules, and weather conditions may cause over-fatigue and illnesses to drivers, the poor road infrastructure may lead to accident-caused injuries and high engagement in habal driving because limited job opportunities reveal the top three (3) challenges on the level of the personal impact of challenges faced by the habal-habal drivers. This implies that they experience collective personal impact from the challenges faced while driving can affect their

quality of life from safety, physical, and economic factors. Addressing the personal impact on them needed holistic interventions for a more fulfilling life in this profession (Tanglai, 2022)

4.4.3. Economic Impact of Challenges faced by the Habal-Habal Drivers



Table 5. Level of Economic Impact of Challenges faced by the Habal-Habal Drivers

| Challenges | Mean | Rank | Description |
|---|---------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Limited job opportunities (Limitadong mga oportunidad sa trabaho) | 3.9 | 4.5 | Very Challenging |
| 2. The instability of income from habal driving (Ang hindi pagkakasiguro ng kita mula sa pagmamaneho ng habal) | 3.9 | 4.5 | Very Challenging |
| 3. Additional expenses for vehicle maintenance and repair (Karagdagang gastusin para sa pagmamantini at pagkukumpuni ng sasakyan) | 4 | 1 | Very Challenging |
| 4. High price of gasoline and proximity (Mahal na presyo ng gasolina at kinaroroonan) | 3.95 | 2.5 | Very Challenging |
| 5. Unregulated service fee and fares (Walang regulasyon sa bayad ng serbisyo at pasahe) | 3.95 | 2.5 | Very Challenging |
| | Overall Mean | 3.94 | Very Challenging |

The results illustrated in Table 5 show that the additional expenses for vehicle maintenance and repair got the highest rank on the level of the economic impact of challenges faced by the habal-habal drivers which are described as very challenging for them. This was supported by the study that additional expense adds up to the financial burden that was faced by habal drivers as it reduces the income earned but is equally important to protect them from incidents and protect their motorcycles to ensure continuous earning (Ojstersek & Topolsek, 2019).

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the challenges faced by habal-habal drivers in Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines encompass both internal and external factors. The external challenges, such as poor road infrastructure, limited access to affordable maintenance, and irregular working hours, significantly impact the safety and well-being of drivers, potentially leading to injuries or fatalities. On the other hand, internal challenges like low earnings and additional expenses for vehicle maintenance contribute to financial instability, affecting the drivers' ability to provide for their families and maintain their vehicles, thereby compromising safety and reliability. Moreover, these challenges extend beyond economic implications, influencing social dynamics, psychological distress, and overall quality of life for habal drivers. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive interventions to improve their safety, financial stability, and overall well-being in this profession. To address the challenges faced by Habal-Habal drivers and improve the overall safety and accountability of their services, it is recommended to adapt the extension proposal of BS Tourism Management entitled; Habal – Habal Extension Program for Panaytayan, Mansalay (HEPP). It aims to address the challenges faced by the indigenous habal-habal drivers in providing sustainable and reliable transportation services to the remote areas of Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro.

RECOMMENDATION

the findings recommend that the regulatory authorities and local government agencies consider implementing the following measures:

- **Licensing Caravans:** Establish a formal licensing system through caravans that is accessible and affordable for Habal-Habal drivers. This system should include clear criteria for obtaining a license, training requirements, and regular

assessments of drivers' competence.

- **Safety Training Programs:** Develop and implement safety training programs specifically tailored to the unique challenges faced by Habal-Habal drivers operating in remote and rugged terrains. These programs should cover defensive driving, first aid, and passenger safety.

- **Regular Inspections and Monitoring:** Institute regular vehicle inspections and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that Habal-Habal drivers and their motorcycles comply with safety standards. This can be achieved through spot-checks and scheduled inspections.

- **Community Engagement:** Involve local communities in the oversight of Habal-Habal services. Encourage the reporting of unsafe practices and gather feedback from passengers to improve service quality and safety.

- **Insurance Requirements:** Consider requiring Habal-Habal drivers to have appropriate insurance coverage to ensure that passengers are financially protected in case of accidents.

- **Support for Licensing:** Offer financial support or subsidies to assist Habal-Habal drivers in obtaining licenses and meeting safety requirements. This can help alleviate the financial burden on drivers.

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate both drivers and passengers about the importance of licensed and safe operations. These campaigns can emphasize the benefits of safe travel.

These recommendations aim to enhance the regulatory framework governing Habal-Habal services and to improve the safety and accountability of these vital community transport providers. By implementing these measures, Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, can foster a safer and more reliable transportation system for its residents and visitors.

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