

Costly fitness regime: Search for



Fitness enthusiasts in Lagos

Photo: PUNCH

While many citizens find the health benefits offered by jogging to be admirable, many people are stomped due to cases of joggers who have fallen victim to robberies or murder by louts and inebriated drivers, aided by a general lack of safety confronting many residents across communities, **VICTOR AYENI** writes

In an age of burgeoning awareness about the many benefits of physical activity and fitness regimens, more Nigerians are turning to one of the most efficient forms of exercise – jogging.

It is no longer farfetched to see both young and middle-aged individuals jogging singularly or in groups across various residential areas in major cities across the country.

Unfortunately, despite the promising prospects offered by jogging, many Nigerians are confronted by risks that range from muggings to accidents to being murdered while running towards wellness.

On December 25, 2022, as the arch of sunlight shone on the Idu-Karmo district of the Federal Capital Territory, shrill cries of mourning marked the emerging Christmas celebration when a father of four, **Usman Ahmad**, was found in a pool of blood in the area.

The deceased, who was an employee of the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission, had set out early in the morning to go on a jogging routine, but his lifeless body with stab wounds was found in the afternoon about half a kilometre from his Ochacho Estate residence in Abuja.

Saturday PUNCH gathered that Usman had just relocated to the estate three months before his death and after he bagged a master's degree in Energy Oil and Gas Economics from the University of Dundee, United Kingdom.

During Usman's burial in Barkin Ladi, Plateau State, his father, Hussaini Ahmad, said he received the tragic news of his death from his wife a day after it happened.

"The wife of the deceased called me on Sunday, telling me that Usman was nowhere to be found since he left for a morning walk. I was later told that his corpse had been found. His friends and other good Samaritans recovered the body and brought it to Barkin Ladi for burial," he told Daily Trust.

Also speaking, one of Usman's neighbours, Kasim Abdullahi, disclosed that the deceased normally went out for morning walks every weekend, the last of which was on Saturday when the incident happened.

He said, "On Sunday morning at around 6:38 am, Usman sent me a WhatsApp message asking what time we were going for the walk. Unfortunately, I had to drop my family at Jabi Motor Park as I was unable to make it the day before.

"Around 11 am, Usman's wife came to my house to ask my wife whether we went out together as he had not returned. I quickly got up from bed, came downstairs, and met Usman's wife together with another friend's wife

who I happened to know.

"I then went to our estate gate to inquire whether anyone had seen Usman passing in the morning to which they said they could not recall.

"I went back home, got into my car, and followed the route we used for our morning walk with Usman. I also put a call to Usman's childhood friend and he quickly came to our estate where we met.

"We then decide to report Usman as missing to the nearby police station.

At the station, we described Usman, his phone numbers, and what he was wearing that fateful day as well as the last time he was seen. We were then informed that it would take 24 hours before a signal could be raised but that we should continue the search and rescue effort."

Abdullahi added that he received news that his friend's body was found while he performed ablution for Zuhr (Muslim noon) prayer the next day.

"I saw Usman's lifeless body, with his joggers soaked in blood as a result of a stab on his right lap. His phone was nowhere to be found, which suggested that phone snatchers could be behind his untimely death," he added.

Abdullahi, however, believed that Usman might have put up a resistance to mobile phone snatchers who accosted him while jogging which infuriated them and made them stab him with a knife.

FCT police spokesperson, Adeh, confirmed the incident, adding that Usman was confirmed dead by experts.

"He was later discovered around 2 pm by a search party organised by the Karmo Divisional Police Headquarters upon the receipt of the information, with visible bodily injuries.

"He was confirmed dead by experts on the crime scene and the police investigation team was present to remove the corpse and take necessary preliminary investigative actions," she added.

Stabbed, robbed while jogging

In a similar ill-fated incident, a member of the National Youth Service Corps identified as Chalya Joel was brutally murdered by suspected armed robbers in Kaduna State.

Like Usman, the University of Jos graduate was killed while jogging on

the morning of Wednesday, October 18, 2023.

The Director of Press and Public Relations of the NYSC, Eddy Mega, in a statement issued on October 19, 2023, noted that after the deceased completed her morning devotion with other corps members at the Barnawa Government Residential Area in Kaduna, where she resided, she proceeded to jog.

Joel was believed to have been accosted by hoodlums who stabbed her and made away with her phone. The corps member's colleagues were reportedly alerted by a kind-hearted passerby and she was rushed by the management of the NYSC to Harmony Hospital Limited in Barnawa, for prompt medical attention.

Unfortunately, she passed on.

For several days after Joel's murder, friends of the deceased all came to mourn her on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter).

"No. What is really happening to Jossite and the special education department? We haven't finished mourning Kekefas Emmanuel and now it's Chalya, brutally killed in Kaduna during her morning jog while serving her fatherland.

"May your killers know no peace Chalya. This is too much to bear," one Comfort Elisha wrote on her Facebook page.

Giving details on the murder, the state Police Public Relations Officer, Mansir Hassan, said Chalya was killed by miscreants on motorcycles.

"It's a very tragic incident. She was performing her early morning jogging when some miscreants on motorcycles pounced on her. The victim's name is Grace Chalya Silas. She was a corps member serving in Kaduna South.

"When the case was reported to the police, operatives responded swiftly and moved to the scene of the crime where they saw the victim in the pool of her blood. She was rushed to the clinic, where she was later confirmed dead."

Killed by added drivers

In an interview with Saturday PUNCH last month, a retired professor of Physics at the University of Lagos, Oluyinka Olatunji, described how his first son's life ended tragically after he was knocked down by a vehicle while jogging.

The 90-year-old widower broke down in tears as he recounted how his son, who he said was the most intelligent of his children, got an appointment in a finance company in Lagos about the time when he decided to go jogging.

"I had four children one of whom is now late and incidentally the most brilliant of them. He attended the University of Lagos International School where he was taught all sorts of things and given good mental orientation. He got an appointment in one of these finance companies.

"He liked jogging, so he went jogging in Lagos and was knocked down by a vehicle. He was taken to a hospital where a doctor who examined him wrote an X-ray in the morning, while he was bleeding internally. Unfortunately, he passed on before daybreak.

"I wrote to the Chairman of the House Committee on Health in the House of Representatives protesting the action of the said doctor. That was how my first son died," he stated, wiping away his tears.

Similarly, on April 21, 2020, several commuters and residents of the Sangotedo area in Lagos were thrown into mourning when a driver drove against traffic rules and crushed two young men while they jogged early in the morning.

An Instagram user, @originaltomb, who shared a video of the incident on the social media app, said the siblings had just finished assisting their mother in displaying her tomatoes for sale when they decided to go jogging.

According to her, they had barely begun when they were run into by the vehicle. Three other people were also said to have sustained serious injuries during the crash and were treated at an undisclosed hospital.

In the graphic video that was shared on Instagram, the lifeless bodies

perfect body may lead to grave

were seen inside the drainage, with the unoccupied damaged vehicle surrounded by several sympathisers and passersby.

In the viral video, some of the passersby were heard saying, "The driver took 'one-way'," in the Yoruba language.

Worrying figures on road crashes

The death of the siblings re-echoed the dangers joggers face amid reckless driving by some motorists.

Last Friday, the latest data released by the National Institute of Statistics in Abuja, revealed that a total of 2,717 accidents occurred in the fourth quarter of 2023.

However, the figures indicated a decrease of 33.12 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, when 3,617 accidents were recorded.

The figures showed that 1,104 men (adults and children) lost their lives in accidents in the time under purview, accounting for 83.45 per cent of the 1,323 deaths recorded.

Women accounted for 16.55 per cent of deaths with a total of 219 people, adults and children combined.

On Tuesday, the Lagos Sector Command of the Federal Road Safety Corps said it recorded 342 road accidents that claimed 22 lives in Lagos State between January and February 2024.

The state Sector Commander of the FRSC, Babatunde Farinloye, disclosed this in an interview with **PUNCH** Metro.

Also, **The PUNCH** had reported that the FRSC Corps Marshal, Dauda Biu, had disclosed that a total of 5,081 people were killed in various road traffic crashes across the country in 2023.

Biu noted that 10,617 road traffic crashes were recorded and 31,874 were injured stressing that the figures represented a significant reduction in road crashes, fatalities, and injuries compared to the data recorded in 2022.

The World Health Organisation estimated over 1.3 million people die every year as a result of traffic accidents worldwide, and more than half of all road traffic deaths are among vulnerable road users including pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists.

However, findings by our correspondent from data provided by both the NBS and Statista indicated that drunk driving, brake failures, speed violations, light or sign violations, wrongful overtaking, dangerous driving, and unsafe lane changing were some of the most common causes of car crashes and deaths across the country.

Lagos jogger stabbed to death

On February 26, 2015, residents of the Morogbo area of Badagry, Lagos, made a grisly discovery: the body of an unidentified man who was stabbed to death.

According to the police report, the man's corpse was dumped in a bush near Iborosun village after he was stabbed in the stomach and jaw by the murderer(s). The incident was brought to the notice of the police by a resident of the area, Pastor Stephen Hensu, of the Celestial Church of Christ, Okiki Imole branch, Badagry.

Narrating how he saw the corpse, the 50-year-old pastor said, "On the day of the incident, February 26, 2015, around 9 am, I left my church for a meeting of the shepherds at Araromi.

"While I was there, I received a phone call from my wife informing me that some people coming from Iborosun village saw a corpse in a bush in our area."

After the police were notified of the body that was found, a source within the force said nobody had come forward to identify the deceased.

"Looking at the corpse shows that the man was a sportsman and he was out jogging that morning when he was attacked and killed. He was killed and his corpse was dumped in the bush.

"He had deep cuts in his jaw and stomach. Nobody knows his name and none of his family members has come forward to identify him, which will help us in investigations," the source said.

Veteran journalist killed by hit-and-run driver

In another tragic example of the risks joggers face, a veteran journalist, and associate publisher of the Entertainment Weekly newspaper, Dimgba Igwe, died hours after he was hit by a driver while jogging on September 6, 2014.

The late journalist had set out on a jogging exercise in the Okota area of his Lagos residence on the fateful Saturday morning when he was knocked down by a hit-and-run driver.

Although Igwe was found alive and was rushed to hospital after the accident, he was said to have been pronounced dead on arrival at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital in Ikeja.

A veteran journalist and author, Mike Awoyinka, who was a friend of the deceased, lamented that Igwe could have lived if the healthcare system had not failed him.

"Why must all my friends and heroes in journalism die so cruelly, landing on the front page? My editor, Dele Giwa, died the same way: killed dastardly through a letter bomb on October 19, 1986. And up till today, the riddle of



Scene of the accident in Sangotedo



•Omolokun-Ola

his death remains unsolved.

"It has become 'A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma,' to use a phrase by Winston Churchill. Like Giwa, Dimgba Igwe, in the throes of death was crying, 'I don't want to die.'

"For four hours, he was bleeding on the road to Golgotha. No ambulance. No oxygen mask. No Samaritan hospital. From St. Raphael Hospital to the General Hospital, Isolo, where there was no surgeon to attend to him, it was the story of Nigeria's systemic failure as a country. He finally gave up at Lagos State University Hospital, Ikeja.

"If I am angry at all, it is not with the bloody coward who killed him and fled in panic. I will forgive the hit-and-run killer. And the Dimgba Igwe I know, will forgive the man who killed him. What I cannot forgive is a nation with health institutions that can do nothing, once your life is in danger. It's the same story all over Nigeria," Awoyinka wrote in a column published by Daily Post.

Jogging requires safety - Fitness enthusiasts

A fitness expert, Mike Nwagbara, explained that though jogging had many health benefits that more citizens need to explore, there was a need for people to ensure that their safety is guaranteed and to be mindful of their environment.

"It is an exercise that boosts your cardiovascular health and keeps workouts interesting because it boosts your motivation, so it is recommended for people who want to build their muscles, stamina, and aerobic capacity. Jogging helps you to lose fat and gain more energy."

"But while jogging is good, it's important for persons who desire to be fit to be mindful of their environments and ensure that their safety is guaranteed while they jog. If they can't ensure this, they can register in a gym or get a trusted trainer who will prescribe them a regime that suits their schedule," Nwagbara noted.

But a fitness trainer, Emmanuel Adeoye, in a chat with **Saturday PUNCH**, lamented that unsafe driving and certain habits could predispose people who regularly jog to dangers.

He explained, "Jogging on Lagos roads is a dangerous sport because the danfo (commercial) drivers always behave like the devil's firstborn. With my experiences so far, I would liken jogging on Lagos roads to the devil test-running a new version of Temple Run with one's life."

"Some of the drivers are already in an induced state when they are turning the wheels in the morning and could crush you before they know you are jogging. That's why I don't jog alone, I do it with my fitness partners in the area."

"I have stopped listening to music while jogging on the streets because it's dangerous in Nigeria. Whether you are having a walk, cycling, or jogging, I won't advise you to have your ears plugged in because there are drunk drivers, and there are also robbers, rapists, and murderers roaming the streets."

A movie scriptwriter and fitness enthusiast based in Ogun State, Abiola Omolokun-Ola, told our correspondent that jogging with fellow joggers had proven to be the safest for him.

He said, "I don't jog alone and it's only on selected Saturdays with other gym mates to a specific limited distance. When we hit the road in groups it makes it inspiring."

"In addition to this, we are all familiar with the area and we don't jog while it's still dark. I find it dangerous to be jogging along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway while it's still dark. Even trekking has become very dangerous because you can be attacked by hoodlums or even kidnapped."



•Onyebuchi

"So before you start jogging, let your family know where you are going, and how they can reach you, but the safest is to jog with a group of friends or gym partners."

Similarly, an Ibadan-based fitness enthusiast, Obinna Onyebuchi, told **Saturday PUNCH** that he preferred to jog when the day was bright enough for him to see his environment.

"Jogging is a good exercise that helps prepare the body for a workout and minimise injury. In fact, before I touch any weight, I jog for at least a mile so that my blood is warmed up."

"But while I take priority over my body, I also have to ensure my safety. For instance, I usually wait until the day has dawned properly before I set out. I know with that, I can clearly see who is coming or moving and I can see the ground I am stepping on."

"The road around my area could be a challenge because those not familiar with the terrain could fall into a ditch or step on dangerous objects if they can't see properly."

"There is also a probability that an oncoming vehicle or motorcycle could knock someone down and that usually happens when you jog before sunrise. I avoid terrains where cars or bikes are known to pass. I also avoid jogging in unknown terrains or bush paths and I don't wear earphones so I can hear what's going on around me," he stated.

Poor road infrastructure, **Saturday PUNCH** learnt, is a factor that can predispose people passionate about jogging to hazards. As such, treadmills are recommended.

Speaking on this, a Lagos resident who enjoys keeping fit, Donald Eke, "When you look at several other areas in the state, you will notice that there is still much to be done for people to be safe while jogging. First of all, there is a need for good roads and sidewalks."

"You will find that some road slabs have been removed or are broken. Some of the roads, especially on the mainland, have no sidewalk where you can run, so you have to dodge vehicles, bikes and even wheelbarrows when trekking or jogging around the area."

"Another issue is the lack of streetlights in some streets. Yes, the best time to jog is at dawn, but when there is no functional streetlight, any crook or hoodlum can hide under the cover of darkness to inflict harm on people jogging."

"Then, some vehicle drivers also violate traffic rules by taking 'one way,' so as you are jogging, you are also forced to look behind from time to time to avoid being knocked down by an oncoming vehicle. These things alone made me stop jogging for a while and instead opt for a treadmill."

"There is a need for our roads to be properly managed, our streets well-lit and secured for people to generally embrace early morning jogs."

Emergencies need to be upgraded - Medical practitioner

However, a medical practitioner, Dr Olaleye Oluwasanmi, pointed out that more still needed to be done for the country's healthcare to be able to adequately care for people attacked while jogging.

"First, our emergency services should be made accessible to all citizens, upgraded and equipped with necessary facilities that will help in saving lives. There is also a need for first aid and lifesaving kits to be made more accessible to the public."

"This is one of the first differences you will notice in advanced countries. Not only are most citizens well-trained to administer first aid to children or strangers, but there are also lifesaving bleed-control kits installed at strategic places."

"Most importantly, there is a need to curb the brain drain in the medical sector so that the country will stop losing precious lives due to the mass exodus of medical professionals," Oluwasanmi added.



•Eke