



Experience of harassment in public transport among female passengers in Mymensingh city

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon, nor it is limited to a particular culture, region, or civilization. Many women work outside the home to support their families and rely on public transportation to go around. Many school, college and university going girls even many housewives also use public transport to go their destination. Women's engagement in various sectors causes them to commute frequently. In Bangladesh, harassment in public transport is very common issue. This study aims to quantify the frequency of harassment experienced by female students of school, college and university, housewives and working women, different forms of harassment, as well as the perception and reasons of harassment against respondents. Women expect to feel safe, secure, and comfortable when using public transport. In this study, literature review, Interview, questionnaire survey and FGD have been conducted to collect information. The result of the study shows that about 95% of women including working women, house-wife and students experienced harassment in public transportation in Mymensingh city. Additionally, this study presents several expected solutions provided by the respondents.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increased national attention to the problem of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is one of the foremost social problems in our society. However, it's increasingly been discussed as a significant challenge both within their private lives and in the public sphere. With more women stepping out of the house and absorbing opportunities for education and work, gender-based harassment loom ever larger. Numerous women are employed outside their households to provide for their families, relying on local transportation to reach their destinations successfully. They cannot move anywhere freely. They face several problems and uncomfortable situations which might be called harassment. Females of all ages encounter various forms of sexual violence in public spaces, ranging from unwelcome remarks and gestures to incidents of rape, with public transportation being a primary location for such phenomenon. As a result, this reality significantly curtails the freedom of movement for women and girls. A study found

that some women think that harassment by men is just a natural part of their behavior, some women end up blaming themselves when they experience such incidents (Dipu & Ferdous, 2019). Dignity of human rights is reducing by sexual harassment (Gautam et al., 2019). It reduces their ability to participate in class, work, and public life. It creates problems that bound their access to essential services and their daily outdoor activities which negatively impact their health and mind. It can have effect on women long-term mental trauma (Tripathi, Borrión, & Belur, 2017). Women harassment in transport is the most severe issue in the world mainly in developing countries. Development organization BRAC has revealed a study that shows that Ninety-four percent (94%) women commuting public transport in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical, and other forms (BRAC, 2018). The study identified factors including lack of implementation of laws, excessive crowds within the buses, and weak or no monitoring (absence of Close Circuit (CC) cameras) because the major causes behind harassment in roads and

conveyance, especially within the buses. According to the research, 35 percent of respondents using transport said they faced molestation from males belonging to the age bracket of 19-35 years. Approximately 59 percent of the people surveyed experienced harassment from men aged 26 to 40 years. The types of harassment reported included intentional touching of the victim's body with the chest or other body parts, pinching, standing too close and pushing, touching the victim's hair, placing a hand on their shoulder, and touching their reproductive organs. When asked what women do after experiencing such harassment, 81 percent said they chose to stay quiet about it, while 79 percent mentioned that they decided to leave the place where the harassment occurred (BRAC, 2018)

The research titled 'Sexual harassment publicly transportation among female students in Kathmandu valley' revealed a notable increase in sexual harassment incidents in public transportation for female students living alone and commuting more frequently in the evening. Moreover, the research has established a compelling correlation between public vehicles and sexual harassment among female students in the Kathmandu Valley (Gautam et al., 2019).

New research conducted by Oxfam International highlighted the alarming prevalence of sexual harassment against women, girls, and gender non-conforming individuals on public transport in urban Sri Lanka. The study reveals that this harassment is often tolerated and considered normal male behavior by commuters (Oxfam International, 2019). These harmful beliefs place blame on the victims, attributing the harassment to their behavior, appearance, or lack of submissiveness. Shockingly, 90 percent of women and girls in Sri Lanka have experienced sexual harassment on buses and trains at least once in their lives, and over half of them report experiencing regular violence. However, the research also sheds light on the reluctance of women to seek help from law enforcement, with just 8 percent doing so, and the lack of intervention by bystanders, with 82 percent rarely stepping in to stop abuse.

M. Shafiq-Ur Rahman investigated in his study about women friendly bus service in Dhaka city for safe transport of women. In several times Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) had provided services of 'women only' bus but couldn't survive. The study looks into the past "women-only" bus service to understand why it couldn't succeed. It examines service quality and learns from past mistakes. Different countries of the world also provide women only bus service, like Pakistan, Dubai, Japan (Rahman, 2010). From early 1980s, BRTC was trying to initiate this project but failed. Transport and mobility play a vital role in empowering women in Dhaka City. However, women face physical harassment and insecurity while using public transport. To address this, a "women-only" bus service has been introduced on specific routes. It was found that in July 2008, 6 buses were providing women only bus service in 3 different routes. Due to lack of publicity this project couldn't make success. (Rahman, 2010).

To improve the service quality, effective publicity campaigns, gender-awareness training for staff, and better customer service are essential. Additionally, ensuring proper seat reservations for women and addressing men's behavior towards female passengers can enhance women's transportation experiences in the long run.

In Bangladesh, gender-based harassment, especially sexual harassment, isn't a replacement phenomenon for ladies. In every part of the country, women face harassment in transportation. This study mainly aims at exploring the harassments experienced by female passengers including students of school, college and university, housewives and working women and examining the respondent's perceptions and reasons of harassment in public transportation as well as identifying women's expectations for their safe, secured and comfortable trip using public transport.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study has been conducted through a mixed method approach having both qualitative and quantitative approach. Primary and secondary data are collected to perform this study. The sample

consists of 80 respondents. Questionnaire survey of 40 respondents including female students of School, college and university, working women, housewife; KII with 10 University teacher 's and 10 NGO officials and two FGDs with 10 female and 10 male public transport users are conducted to collect primary data. During this study, the journal articles, reports, several official records, and electronic documents are used as secondary sources of information. The sample size is selected according to the frequency of traveling with public transport. Along with female respondents, male respondents have been selected to know their perspective about women harassment in public transport. Purposive and simple random samplings have been used to select respondents.

RESULT

In this section, the study explores the present scenario of women harassment in public transport in Mymensingh city. First of all the number of public transport users are identified. Here, 40 female respondents are surveyed for this study purpose. Each woman in this survey used public transport for their daily communications.

Number of public transport user

Table 1: The number of public transport user

Do you ride in public transport?		
Frequency	Yes	No
40	100%	0%

Source: Survey Conducted in January, 2022

From the above Table 1, every woman in this survey uses public transport for their daily communications. Women from both developed and developing countries have stopped following their traditional roles and are involved in education, jobs, and public life and they regularly use public transport.

Mode of Transport

In this study, it has found that the quantity of bus users (60%) is higher among female passengers, compared with the auto-rickshaw users (14%) or

CNG users (12%), Leguna users (8%), others (6%). Most of the women use Bus to travel. From the findings of the study, women face harassment mostly in bus transport.

Experiencing harassment

The sexual harassment is not merely physical but psychological also which produces a lot of stress and frustration. The study findings indicate a very high prevalence of harassment confronted by female respondents. Women are the victims of mental and physical harassment while traveling by public transport. This survey presented that 95% female commuters faced sexual harassment by male passengers or by bus helper or driver (Figure 1).

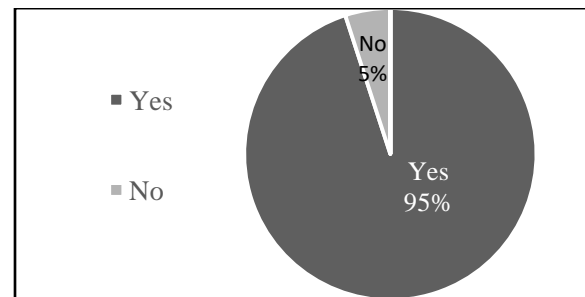


Figure 1: Experiencing Harassment in public Transport

Frequency of incident of harassment

It was observed that only 2.5% women faced any situation while travelling by public transport that made them feel harassed.

Table 2: Frequency of incident of harassment

How often this happened to you?		
Option	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	7	17.5%
Only once	15	37.5%
2-4 times	14	35%
5-10 times	3	7.5%
Never	1	2.5%
Total:	40	100%

37.5% percent of respondents reported that they felt harassed only once while commuting. Students and working women largely travel every working

day and thus, they face such incidences more frequently. 17.5% percent of respondents reported that they felt harassed daily. 35% percent of respondents said that they felt harassed about 2-4 times, 7.5% percent of respondents gave their opinion that about 5-10 times they were harassed by male passengers or by bus helper (Table 2).

Types of harassment

95% women said that they have experienced harassment in transport. It can be classified

Table 3: Types of Harassment

Types of Harassment	Frequency of Harassment Types	Percentage
Uncomfortable/inappropriate stares	16	40%
Unwanted physical contact Jokes of a sexual nature	13	35%
Unwanted comment on dress or appearance	12	30%
Physical Abuse	10	25%
Verbal Abuse	8	20%
Invasion of personal space	4	10%
Stalking	2	5%
Display of sexual offensive materials	1	2.5%

One woman experienced multiple types of harassment, and respondents selected various options when answering questions about the types of harassment. 40% women said that they faced uncomfortable/inappropriate stares by male passenger. 35% faced unwanted physical contact jokes of a sexual nature by the male passenger of transport. Other types of harassment include verbal abuse (20%) and stalking (5%). Women also face physical abuse (25%). They get unwanted comment on dress or appearance (30%).

Satisfaction level of female commuters

Maximum respondents said that they are dissatisfied (42.5%) with public transportation system where 32.5% respondents are somewhat satisfied, 5% respondents are extremely dissatisfied and 15% are satisfied and 5% of the participants did not response to this question.

harassment into two different types: mental (verbal-nonverbal) harassment and physical harassment.

Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions; pressure for dates; letters, telephone calls, or materials of a sexual nature, Internet etc. are most frequent forms of harassment.; Sexual looks or gestures; deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching; pressure for sexual favors and actual or attempted rape or sexual assault (Table 3).

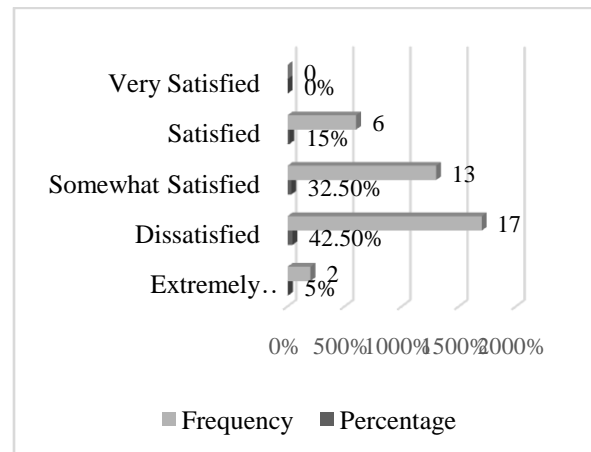


Figure 2: Satisfaction level of female commuters

Reaction of women during harassment

In terms of the reaction of the respondents against the harassment it has found that the majority (25%) of the respondents reacted when sexually harassed but there were 13% of the respondents did not react when sexually harassed. That might be due to a sense of embarrassment, or a fear of

social stigma. Some respondents said they walk faster (20%) and changes the place.

Table 4: Reaction during harassment

How do you act after being harassed?		
Options	Frequency	Percentage
I walk faster	8	20%
I confront the person	10	25%
I submit a complaint	6	15%
I choose a special seat	8	20%
I look at a certain place	1	3%
I do not do anything	5	13%
Other	1	3%
Didn't respond	1	1%
Total:	40	100%

Reasons of sexual harassment

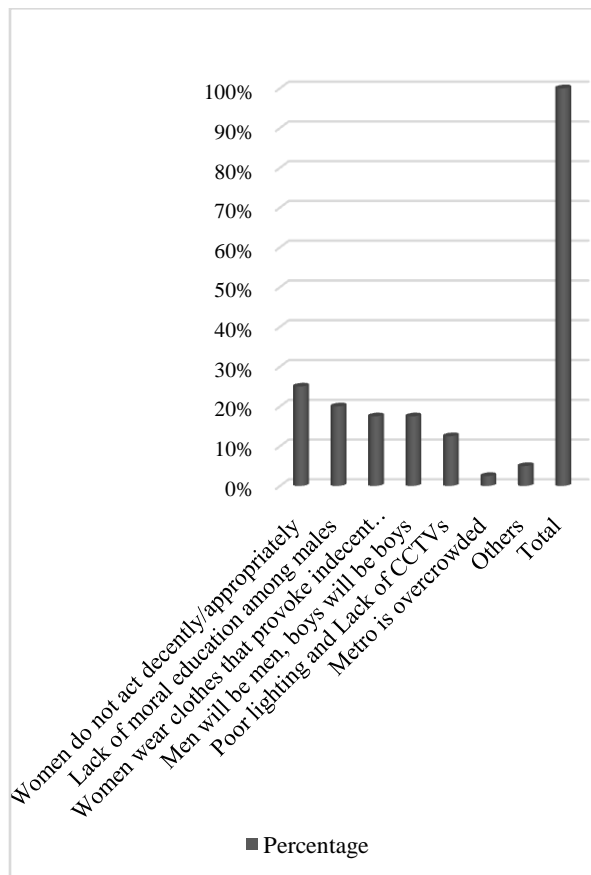


Figure 3: Reasons of sexual harassment

Most mentioned reasons are "Women not acting decently" (25%) and "Lack of moral education

among males" (20%). 17.5% people think that the dress of women provoke incident behavior among men. "Men will be men" tie at 17.5%. "Metro overcrowding" by 2.5%, and 5% falls under "Others". Moreover, lack of enough lighting and CCTVs (12.5%) is another reason (Figure 3).

Perspective of respondents about safety and security of Public Transport for women Female respondents said that public transport of our country is not safe for women (97.5%). Where only 2.5% women think it's safe.

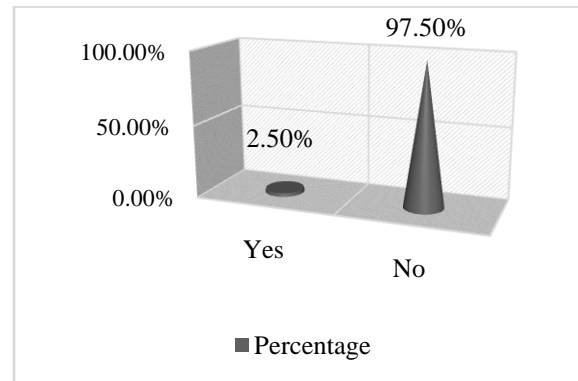


Figure 4: Perspective of respondents about the public transport

Respondents were asked why public transport isn't safe for women, and they provided their insights during an open-ended discussion. They expressed concerns about the prevalence of sexual harassment in our country's public transport system, which includes issues like eve teasing, rape, and bullying. Women often feel harassed by men of various age groups, especially middle-aged individuals.

One significant problem is the overcrowding of public transport, which creates opportunities for harassment. Additionally, there is lack of security and safety measures. Many women reported uncomfortable experiences, such as bus conductors attempting to touch them when boarding the bus, a distressingly common occurrence.

The situation worsens during night time journeys, making it very risky for women to travel alone. They also highlighted facing different forms of

physical abuse during their commutes. In summary, the consensus among the respondents is that public transport is often uncomfortable and lacking in security, which poses a significant issue for women's safety and well-being.

Role of other passengers during incidents

According to recent data, a significant portion of the population tends to react in various ways (Figure 5) when confronted with instances of harassment. The statistics reveal that most of the people keep silence (47%) when someone is harassed in front of them. Some case shows that people blame the victim (3%). On a more positive note, the survey conducted also shed light on the fact that 38% of respondents chose to offer their support to the victim in such situations. The survey finds that 38% people supported the victim.

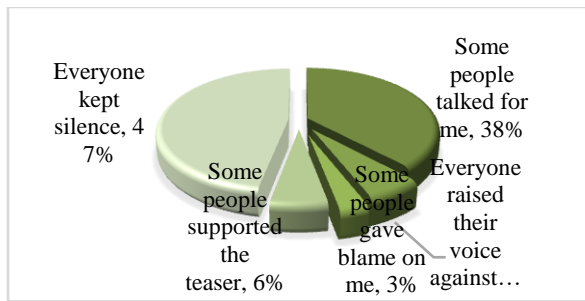


Figure 5: Public attitude in transport during women harassment

Expected solutions

Respondents gave their opinion regarding their expectations that provide women friendly facilities in public transport.

Type of Respondents	Expected solutions
KII Respondents	Rail route need to be increased, this will reduce the crowd in public transport; The girls' have to continue protesting and every girls' need to learn martial art, and this will increase her confidence. Public transport services need to be increased as well as reserved seat should be ensured for women in public transport;

	Law and order related to the harassment of women need to be re-arranged. The praetors must be brought to quick trial. Zero tolerance policy should be introduced in crime suppression.
FGD Respondents	FGD-1: The picture of the harasser should be made viral locally and nationally as he can't tease girls' anymore; Increasing public awareness through TV channels, news etc. Ensuring CCTV/web cam in public transport and Mobile Police checking should be increased.
	FGD-2 If any girl or women face such harassment she has to dial hotline number such as 999; Less crowded transport needed;
General Respondents	Every woman needs to learn self-defense techniques and Martial art needs to be introduced from primary school; Educated bus driver must be officially hired; Religious education must be provided from the beginning to strengthen the sense of principle and the place of humanity;

DISCUSSION

The research sheds light on the prevailing scenario of women's harassment in public transport, focusing on the experiences of 80 respondents in Mymensingh city. The study findings provided valuable insights into the frequency, types, and reactions to harassment, as well as the overall satisfaction and safety perceptions of female commuters. The study indicates that all surveyed women, encompassing both developed and developing countries, utilize public transport for their daily communication needs. It is horrible that 95 percent of women of this study have been harassed in public transport. They are harassed in various ways by male passengers or drivers or helpers. There is a tendency of local buses to carry extra passengers. Due to extra passengers' women cannot travel in bus easily. The frequency of harassment incidents varied, with daily occurrences reported by 17.5% of respondents. According to the study, harassment may be

divided into two categories: mental (verbal and nonverbal) and physical. Uncomfortable stares (40%), unwanted physical contact, and sexual jokes (35%) emerged as the most common forms of harassment. The variety of forms of harassment highlights how complex the issue is. A significant proportion of female commuters expressed dissatisfaction (42.5%) with the public transportation system, reflecting the need for improvement. The overwhelming opinion (97.5%) is that women are not safe using public transit. Concerns about overcrowding, lack of security measures, and uncomfortable experiences contribute to the negative perceptions of safety among female passengers. The reactions of female respondents to harassment varied, with 25% choosing to confront the perpetrator. However, 13% did not react, potentially due to embarrassment or fear of social stigma. Walking faster and changing seats were common responses, highlighting the adaptive strategies employed by victims. Respondents identified various reasons for sexual harassment, including the predominant factors highlighted by respondents are "Women not acting decently" at 25% and "Lack of moral education among males" at 20%. Approximately 17.5% of participants believe that incidents are provoked by the attire of women, and a similar percentage subscribe to the notion of "Men will be men." The influence of "Metro overcrowding" is reported by 2.5%, while 5% attribute incidents to various "Other" factors. Additionally, a notable portion, accounting for 12.5%, identifies the lack of adequate lighting and CCTVs as a contributing factor. The study concludes by presenting the expected solutions from key informant interviews (KII) and female respondents. These include increasing rail routes, promoting self-defense education, ensuring reserved seats for women, and implementing a zero-tolerance policy for crime suppression. Focus group discussions (FGD) suggested strategies such as making harassers' images viral, increasing public awareness, and enhancing security measures through CCTV, and mobile police checking. This study emphasizes the urgency of addressing harassment in public transport, emphasizing the need for comprehensive solutions involving infrastructure improvements, awareness campaigns and legal measures to ensure the safety and well-being of female passengers.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is crucial to ensure that women have access to safe, high-quality, affordable, and reliable transportation, which can free up their time for productive activities and enhance their access to essential services such as health, education, markets, and job opportunities. Within the study group, there is a common lack of awareness regarding available legal procedures. This social issue is influenced by various factors, including the position of women in society, male dominance, and cultural beliefs concerning women's rights. World Bank has launched different projects to ensure women's safety in public transport. Engaging the community in project design, implementation, and monitoring. Utilizing ICT innovation to report harassment cases, collect data, and improve access to information and services addressing harassment. Providing training to transport staff on physical security and gender-related issues. Implementing communication campaigns to raise awareness and challenge social norms, attitudes, and behaviors linked to violence against women and girls (World Bank, 2016).

However, examining different literatures and the information from the respondents, the following recommended measures can be taken to reduce women harassment in public transports-

There is no reserved women's seat in Shalban super bus. Respondents said that reserved seats should be introduced to tackle the harassment against women.

It has expected that Mobile vans of police should remain on rounds on regular basis to check transport. Overcrowding in bus is common issue in Trishal-Mymensingh route. Even in gate lock bus there is a tendency to carry extra passengers. Proper monitoring by petrol police team can contribute to stop such problem.

The media can increase awareness about women harassment in public transport and provide information about the laws and punishments for those who commit such acts. Awareness raising posters should be put up inside transports. Media (newspaper, radio, television, and social media)

can play a great role in endorsing this issue and can alert the authority and public.

When women learn self-defense, it can truly change their lives. It gives them confidence, knowledge, and determination, making them feel empowered and strong. Girls can defend themselves safely in 95% of real-life situations. So martial art training should be introduced from primary level (KWU, 2022).

It is imperative to establish counseling and training programs for drivers and conductors either quarterly or annually.

Conducting awareness campaign targeting bus authorities, bus drivers, helpers and passengers is essential to promote women's safety and address their specific problems.

'Women only bus service' can reduce transportation problem of women (Rahman M. S.-U., 2010). There are only few women-only buses provide services in Dhaka City which was initiated by Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC). This service should introduce in every district in Bangladesh.

There are needed bigger buses with larger women's section. Large two-door bus or double door bus can be introduced where doors can be separated with a designation of women-only and men-only door.

Most of the women believe that a women-friendly environment can be ensured if the male passengers change their deep-rooted values and mindset towards the women. This can be generated by raising moral values and giving family education from the childhood.

Incorporating principles of mutual respect and a code of behavior is essential to be included in the school education curriculum under Gender Studies. Moral education from family and intuition

can reduce male's perspective and offences towards women (Islam, Islam, & Haque, 2016).

Existing policy and regulations should be enacted to prevent harassment and giving punishment to the culprit, but women have to face financial and social obstacles in seeking justice as the legal process is lengthy and complicated. It is necessary to amend the existing laws and regulations.

Harassment against women in transportation as a human rights concern and addressing it is essential to create an equal, peaceful, safe and impartial transport for women. Women deserve the right to move in a friendly and supportive setting in transport. This will truly empower them.

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