

PAKISTAN

Mapping for Policy: A “Whole Journey” Approach to Tackling Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violent Victimization in Public Transit

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BACKGROUND

The past 40 years have seen dramatic changes in the policy, practice, and research on violence against women and girls (VAWG). Specifically, on the research topic of sexual violence victimization (SVV), a considerable amount of research has been done to examine SVV at home, at work, and on college campuses. However, until very recently, little attention has been given to sexual harassment in public spaces, and especially sexual harassment while in transit.

Sexual harassment in the public domain is an under-recognized global human-rights violation that disproportionately affects women and girls every day. Especially in low- and middle-income countries, where women and girls are increasingly entering into the public domain, they have increased mobility needs and are exposed to a higher risk of SVV in public spaces.

Recent studies demonstrate a high prevalence of SVV in many countries. The existing research on SVV in public places often typifies particular contexts as unsafe and threatening. Within these contexts, transit environments have received little attention.

While fear of crime is a concern for anyone who uses public transit, sexual harassment and victimization is a unique concern for women. Current studies provide little insight into which stage of the journey women and men are most fearful of victimization. Specifically, the questions below have not yet been fully considered:

- Which kinds of victimization do women experience?
- How does the fear of crime, victimization or sexual harassment on public transport inhibit women's ability to participate in economic activities?
- At which stage(s) of the journey do women encounter sexual harassment?
- What precautions do women take at each stage of their journey to avoid certain types of victimization?
- What are the transit environment specific factors that affect women's fear of crime?
- How does women's fear of crime change at different times of the day? (e.g., How does nighttime darkness exacerbate fear of different types of victimization?)
- How much is women's fear increased when traveling unfamiliar routes?
- Do spatiotemporal hotspots of women's fear of victimization overlay with hotspots of crimes or other situational factors or neighborhood-level characteristics?
- What are women's safety needs and what are women's suggestions regarding safe travel?
- Are there differences between men and women in responses to questions above?

Examination of public transit needs requires the consideration of the whole journey from start point to end point. If one link of the journey is wrong the whole journey may be cancelled or replaced by a car trip. In partnership with the Information Technology University Pakistan, Punjab Information Technology Board, and HomeNet Pakistan, this study aims to bring a whole journey approach to fill this gap in knowledge, using an 18-month, mixed-method case study of the fear of victimization (including sexual harassment) among women and men in buses, around the bus stations, and on their way to the bus stations in Lahore, Pakistan.

The study builds on the considerable empirical work the team has undertaken with funding from DFID's International Growth Center, USAID's Pakistan Strategy Support Program, and Canada's International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) GROW Program.

AIMS

Our proposed project aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how fear and perceived risk of victimization in general, and fear/perceived risk of sexual harassment in particular, inhibit women's increased use of the Bus Rapid Transit system (BRT) system in Lahore, Pakistan.

METHODS

The study will be conducted in two phases, combining concepts from criminology, sociology, geography, public health, and urban planning to form a theoretical framework that employs a situational crime prevention approach. In Phase 1, we will develop and pilot a mobile survey app to capture the fear and perceived risk of crime in transit and around Lahore BRT in real-time or near-real time through a short survey. In Phase 2, we will undertake a rapid assessment methodology (RAM) of the sexual harassment problem in transit via interviews with the mobile survey participants and stakeholders (e.g., Punjab's transit, law enforcement, planning authorities, and advocacy groups), and safety audits conducted in transit including of the vehicles and stations of the BRT.

ACTIVITIES

1. Develop and pilot a mobile fear of crime survey delivered via an app with feedback from government and other public and private sector stakeholders. We will pilot the app with female and male passengers of the BRT, and other forms of transportation feeding into the BRT.
2. Undertake a rapid assessment of the BRT through a) focus group discussions and interviews with the mobile app pilot test participants, b) interviews with aforementioned stakeholders, and c) safety audits at target sites along the BRT line that have been identified to be fear hotspots by the pilot participants and crime hotspots by the team's prior analysis.
3. Prepare three outputs for dissemination to ensure research uptake in Pakistan, and other low- and middle-income countries. First, we will prepare a problem-oriented response guide to sexual harassment in public transit for use by practitioners. This guide will: a) describe the problem of sexual harassment of women in transit environments and the factors increasing the risk for such victimization, b) outline a series of questions to help readers analyze their local public transit sexual harassment problem, and c) review the responses to this problem globally and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice. Second, we will prepare a blueprint describing the study design, methodology and partnerships – allowing other researchers to replicate our approach. Third, we will prepare a visually appealing online feature with photographs, maps and data visualizations from our research to promote the findings from this study.
4. At the end of the project we will hold a stakeholder meeting in Lahore, Pakistan where we will present the findings from the study and the problem response guide. The aim of this meeting will be to connect various stakeholders to each other (such as law enforcement, city planners, transit authorities, bus operators, and VAWG advocacy groups) and to encourage their consideration of the recommendations from the study.

TIMELINE

April-May 2017: Mobile survey development and IRB application

April-June 2017: Fear of crime app beta version development

April-August 2017: Crime data acquisition, cleaning, and crime hotspot analysis

July-August 2017: Fear of crime app beta version testing and debugging

September 2017: Fear of crime app piloting and rapid assessment in Lahore

October-December 2017: Primary data coding and cleaning

January-March 2018: Data analysis

April 2018-August 2018: Preparation of the blueprint, problem solving guide, and the online product

September 2018: Webinar or in-person workshop with Punjab stakeholders

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This project has a number of key outcomes. First, it will provide evidence-based insight to the provincial governments and other public sector stakeholders (Commission on the Status of Women, Women Development Department, Department of Transport, Punjab Metrobus Authority, Department of Planning, etc. in Pakistan, and other similar stakeholder in other cities globally) and local advocacy groups about the gender differences in mobility needs. This could help modify design features of public transit services to reduce the opportunities for women's sexual harassment, thus improving their economic wellbeing.

Second, it will make an academic contribution to transport policy and women's empowerment literatures with an innovative research methodology. We will contribute to an understudied line of inquiry, potentially opening avenues of further research.

Further, although our study will take place only in Lahore, the theoretical framework and methodology will provide a blueprint for the replication across different settings. Both phases of this study will be guided by crime opportunity theories and the principles of Situational Crime Prevention. They help identify place-based crime and disorder problems and inform interventions against different forms of victimization by strengthening capable guardianship at places by increasing the risks and efforts, reducing rewards and provocations, or removing excuses for crime. When applied to the problem of women's victimization in public spaces, RAM guided by opportunity theories and SCP principles will ensure that responses to sexual harassment and sexual violence victimization in public spaces are matched to specific forms and mechanisms of sexual victimization in different country settings.

Finally, the intended impact of this project is the utilization of the project outputs (i.e., the mobile survey app, the project blueprint, and the problem-solving guide for addressing sexual harassment in public transit) in mobilizing transportation and law enforcement policies and measures to achieve gender equality in access to public transportation in Lahore, Pakistan and in the long-term in other metropolitan cities in Pakistan and other countries.

