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 how various women are at risk and how they are protected (Cavanagh, 2016). 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 issue, given its unconscious and non-penalized nature and the difficulty of proving and addressing it (Aly, 2014). Early in the 1980s, women’s increased use of the Bus Rapid Transit system (BRT) and fear/perceived risk of sexual harassment in particular, inhibited women from using public transit (Scheer, 2006; Melfi, 1995). This study aims to bring a whole journey perspective to the experience of women while in transit, and to describe women’s fear of victimization in public spaces (Lester, 2013). Within 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 focuses on particular contexts as unsafe and threatening. Within these contexts, transport environments have received little attention. While there is a concern about how a woman can be considered safe, sexual harassment and victimization is a unique concern for women. Women travel to and from work, and as a result, more than 80% of the journey woman and men fear most was fear of victimization. Specifically, the questions below have not yet been fully consid-

AIMS

Our proposed project aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how fear and perceived risk of victimization in general, and fear of sexual harassment specifically, are associated with 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 the crime opportunity framework, public health, and risk, and planning to form a theoretical framework that employs a situ-

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 participants of BRT, and other forms of transportation feeding into the BRT.

2. Undertake rapid assessment of forms of harassment through focus group discussions and interviews with the mobile app pilot and app users.

3. Prepare three output dissemination to ensure research uptake in Pakistan and other similar low- and middle-income countries. First, we will prepare a problem-oriented response guide to sexual harassment in public transit. Second, we will prepare a report of findings, and finally, we will prepare an app that allows others to replicate our research to promote the findings from this study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This project has a number of key outcomes. First, it will provide evidence-based insights and recommendations to other public sector stakeholders (Commission on the Status of Women, Women Development Department, Department of Transport, Punjab-Mohmand Authority, Department of Planning, etc.) in Pakistan, and other similar stakeholders in other cities globally and other low- and middle-income countries. This could help modify design features of public transit systems to reduce the opportunities for sexual harassment, thereby improving their economic wellbeing. Second, it will make an academic contribution to transport policy and women’s empowerment literatures through an innovative research methodology. We will contribute to an underutilized line of inquiry, specifically targeting reasons for the uptake in Pakistan, and other low- and middle-income countries.

Further, although our study will take place only in Lahore, the theoretical framework and research methods can be applied 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 risks and develop crime prevention strategies. The study will also be guided by opportunity theories and SCP principles will ensure that responses to sexual harassment and sexual victimization in public spaces are matched to specific forms and methods of sex-based discrimination in different countries and settings.

Finally, the intended impact of this project is the utilization of the same app for use in other low- and middle-income countries. The project outputs (i.e., the mobile survey app, the project blueprint, problem-oriented guide, and the online product) will be available for other researchers to replicate our approach.

TIMELINE

April-May 2017: Mobile survey development and 1B Alpha testing

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 survey

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

October-December 2017: Primary data coding and cleaning

January 2018: Data analysis

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

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