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Sexual Harassment in Public Transport in Dhaka City: A Socio-legal Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The present study is undertaken to find out the current legal framework on sexual offences in Bangladesh and the prevalent status of sexual offences in public transport in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The present legal framework on sexual offences is not appropriate to address the ongoing problems. Enactment of appropriate laws is imperative to fill up the present legal vacuum in addressing sexual offences in Bangladesh. To understand the current scenario of sexual offences in public transport in Dhaka city a systematic approach was adopted in this study. The paper finds that the incidence of sexual harassment in public transport in Dhaka city is unfortunately very high. The primary victims of such incidents are the women and so sexual harassment in public transport in Dhaka city is predominantly a gender-based violence. The study also finds the causes and barriers to redressing the current sexual offences in transport. It is shown in the paper that the victims are in many respects not willing or capable to resort to legal assistance for so many reasons. The article finally suggested some possible solutions suggested by the victims to the problems of sexual violence in public transport in Dhaka city.

Keywords: Harassment, Sexual harassment, Sexual offence, Public transport, and Gender-based violence.

INTRODUCTION:

Public transports are apparently the major transportation system for the highest number of people for quick mobility in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. But unfortunately, in the transportation planning and implementation the gender perspective has not been well considered. Consequently, the women, especially the young college, university going girls and working women are often harassed in the form of verbal teasing words, jokes, hints, unexpected obscene comments and even in the form of physical touch or assault on public transportation and related places. This intolerable harassment makes the women unstable

and uncomfortable and results in limiting the mobility in many respects. Women's participation in educational, professional and public life is also hindered because of such heinous situation on the public transports. The sexual harassment on public transports should not be considered to be a tiny matter. If the matter is not well addressed by the state to reduce and prevent, the constant harassment on transportation will have a long lasting effect on both the victims and the aggressors. The perpetrators may lose the sensitivity to violence against women and may feel it to be very easy to get pleasure whenever they desire. On the other

hand, the physical and psychological well-being of the victims may seriously be hindered.

Generally, harassment on public transportation may be verbal and non-verbal behavior that includes obscene comments, catcalls, touch, tweak, groping, and sometimes attack. It is presumed that such behavior is not associated with more serious forms of harassment, such as rape although rape in public transportation is also gradually becoming prevalent in the society, especially at night when a girl is commuting alone as a passenger in a public transport. Meanwhile, Bowman, (1993) notes that although street harassment includes a variety of comments, behaviors and gestures, it does have some distinct characteristics: the targets of street harassment are women; stalkers are men. Stalkers don't know their goals; meeting faces to face. The forum is public, like a road, pavement, bus, bus stop, taxi, or any other place that the public can access. The absence of safe public transport for women limits their ability to move around and results in the deprivation of their fundamental right to freedom of movement. According to Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights everyone has right to freedom of movement. Also, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ensures freedom of movement under Article 36 pointing that every citizen has the right to free movement in the country subject to reasonable legal restrictions required by law for the public interest. Within the purview of this constitutional provision, there should not be any hindrance to womenfolk in their enjoyment of free movement. As unsafe public transportation severely hinders the free movement of women, the matter should be immediately addressed. The existent laws on sexual offences are not sufficient in addressing all kinds of such offences. The legal vacuum along with the less enforcement of existing insufficient laws is also a contributory factor of violence in public transports in Bangladesh.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a socio-legal study of the real scenario of harassment in public transports in Dhaka city, the legal position of such sexual harassment and the solutions of such unexpected behavior to the womenfolk. Among the public vehicles in Dhaka city, buses/minibuses and *leguna* (motorized minivan) are most familiar and so in carrying on the

study, these vehicles are given utmost importance in collecting data. The findings indicate an exorbitant prevalence of harassment confronted by female respondents. The highest incidence of harassment is reported by students, followed by working women. Less than four percent of working women and students reported that they never faced any harassment while commuting. Higher prevalence of harassment among students and working women could be related to younger age and higher frequency of commuting. The main culprits in this respect are fellow passengers (75 percent), followed by bus conductors (20 percent) and, sometimes, even the bus driver (5 percent). The common sexual harassments in the public transports are staring/leering, deliberate contact/groping, sexual innuendos and obscene gestures. Lack of law enforcement and lack of education and awareness of gender sensitivity are primary reasons of such unexpected behaviors. In these situations, the victims are sometimes not willing to resort to the legal assistance. Though sometimes the victims are willing, for various reasons they cannot resort to the legal assistance. Separate ladies transportation system, enhancing the ladies section in common buses, implementation of laws and spreading the awareness of gender sensitivity are some of the measures among so many others which may be opted for reducing such unexpected incidents in public transportation.

Objectives of the Study

The present research is carried out with a view to providing an in-depth understanding of the present socio-legal status of sexual harassment in public transportations in Dhaka city, the legal framework on such sexual offences and the thought of the victims about the causes and probable solutions of such problems. Specifically, it has the following objectives

- 1) To explore the status of current legal framework on sexual offences in Bangladesh
- 2) Quantify the prevalence of harassment confronted by college and university going girls, working women, and homemakers in public transports.
- 3) Finding out the probable causes of such unexpected incidents
- 4) To identify the major difficulties in reducing such offences

- 5) To explore the possible solutions in redressing the sexual offences in public transports.

Literature Review

The review of existing literature from around the world and Bangladesh points to a huge incidence of harassment in public transport. It also highlights the present legal vacuum in Bangladesh, the possible solutions in ending the sexual offences. Islam, M. A. & Amin, T. (2016) found that sexual harassment and eve-teasing is an offence against the honor, respect and dignity of a human being. Our laws in Bangladesh in this respect are not well defined. Proper implementation of laws is necessary to reduce the incidence of such offences. Islam, (2019) found that the legal framework on sexual offences in Bangladesh is not strong and in many respects confusing and not all-inclusive. Also, in Bangladesh the rate of sexual offences are high and in a consecutive perusal of a daily newspaper it was found that at least one rape case, the most dangerous sexual offence, is reported every day in Bangladesh. Khan, M. M. A. & Halder, G. D. (2022) stated that sexual harassment may occur in many places and the victims may face in different life situations. Harassment in educational institutions, in online platforms especially in social media and in public transports is very common phenomenon in Bangladesh. About 94% women using public transports face some sort of sexual harassment in Bangladesh. Also, laws on sexual offences in Bangladesh are scattered that should immediately be amended and appropriate laws should be enacted. Dear and Wolch, (1989) described transportation to be an important precondition to accessibility to workplace. A larger proportion of captive riders, public transport users, are women in comparison to men. For these women, using public transport is crucial as it allows them access to employment, educational, leisure opportunities, and the public sphere in general (Smith, 2008). Public transport is an “important enabler in accessing the public sphere” without which women may be kept away from educational institutes and workplaces Fernando and Porter’s, (2002) as mentioned in Harrison, (2013). Fitzgerald *et al.* (1997) found that the effect of sexual harassment is longer lasting and sometimes the victims of harassment think for quitting the job. Sexual harassment is a mammoth barrier in the development of mental and psychological

wellbeing of a woman and the victims are likely to face severe depression and distress (Ho *et al.*, 2012). This may weaken a woman's ability to freely access and utilize public spaces and it is likely to negatively impact upon their social and economic wellbeing (Fileborn, 2013). Finding out the extent of sexual harassment is quite difficult as information collection from all women can-not be done. At the same time, it is also argued that rates of harassment might actually be underreported because many women accepted harassment as ‘normal’ and do not report it. Nevertheless, undoubtedly harassment prevails in public transport and connected spaces. Radha, (2011) found that the main cause of sexual violence in public transport in Nepal is the prevailing supremacy of masculinity among men. In the survey, majority of the drivers reported that they considered this to be their powerfulness as well as a means of entertainment.

However, conductors and passengers also took action sometimes in protection of women against violence because they felt themselves superior by sex and physically strong. Surprisingly many women mentioned that they felt themselves physically weak, insecure and powerless while travelling in public transport especially during office hours. Jagori, (2010) conducted a survey to investigate harassment faced by women in Delhi, India. The study used purposive sampling methods to collect information (through interviews) from 5010 men and women of diverse occupational categories spread across 50 sites in Delhi. Intercept survey technique was used to select respondents in a variety of public spaces, including markets, parks, bus stops, residential areas, etc. Their results revealed that sexual harassment was considered to be the biggest risk for women’s safety in Delhi. Women felt unsafe and were afraid of being physically hurt, harassed, molested or even raped in deserted spaces, as well as in crowded spaces, most commonly in crowded public transport. Mitra-Sarkar and Partheeban, (2009) assessed harassment faced by women commuters in Chennai. The findings indicated that 66 percent of these women were college students, majority of whom reported to have been harassed while commuting. Countries have adopted certain measures to deal with this type of harassment. For instance, women-only public transport has been introduced in a number of

cities. Women-only public transport is found in Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Cairo, Delhi and Manila among others, while some cities are also thinking to introduce this option (Boros, 2014). In Bangladesh, women buses are now in operation on a pilot basis. However, segregation is not the proper solution to this problem. Modification in behavior and attitude of society should be amended (World Bank, 2014).

METHODOLOGY:

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in conducting the present research. In assessing the legal framework on sexual offences in Bangladesh both primary sources i.e., statute and legislation and secondary sources i.e., journal, books and other relevant reports were taken into consideration. Also a primary survey has been carried on for collecting data from the victims of sexual offences in the public transports in Dhaka city. The universe for the survey consists of females who travel in public buses and/or *leguna* frequently. In order to add diversity, the universe is further classified into three categories: (1) students, (2) working women and (3) homemakers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select female commuters in the category of students from colleges and universities and working women from shopping malls, beauty parlors, food chain outlets, hospitals, etc. For selecting female commuters in the category of homemakers, snowball sampling technique has been used. The survey took into consideration the protection of all respondents and researchers. Respondents were advised that their participation was voluntary and were assured of complete anonymity. Furthermore, they were advised that they did not have to answer any question they felt uncomfortable about. The data gathering instrument is a structured questionnaire consisting of both closed and open ended questions in line with the objectives of the study. Data obtained from the survey was processed using the statistical software SPSS.

Legal Assessment of Sexual Harassment in Public Transport

Sexual harassment is one of the most prevalent offence genres of Bangladesh. Sexual harassment is defined as ‘any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation’ (UNHCR, n.d.). Sexual harass-

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ment needs to be eradicated to maintain human dignity in the society as all kinds of offenses and crimes are the barriers in achieving high dignity of humankind in the society (Islam, 2019). But it is a matter of sorrow that in Bangladesh, the laws on sexual offences are not organized and mostly are insufficient in addressing various kinds of unexpected sexual misconducts prevalent in the society. The Penal Code, 1860 contains provisions on sexual offences from three dimensions in three distinct sections. Firstly, Rape, the most heinous sexual offence, has been defined in section 375 of the Penal Code, 1860 but the definition is criticized being archaic and not all inclusive in defining the offence. However, section 376 of the Code of 1860 contains the punishment of rape to be rigorous life imprisonment. Secondly, out-raging the modesty of a woman by assault of criminal force is made punishable with a maximum of two years imprisonment, or with fine, or with both under section 354 of the Penal Code, 1860. Under this section non-penetration sexual assault has become punishable.

Thirdly, the humiliation of the modesty of a woman by uttering any word, making any unexpected sound or gesture, exhibiting any object or intruding the privacy of such woman is made an offence punishable with a maximum of one year simple imprisonment, or with fine, or with both under section 509 of the code of 1860. In this way, the Penal Code, 1860 endeavored to address sexual offences in various sections (Faruq, 2011). The offences of sexual harassment were also addressed in the *Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain, 2000* (The Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000). Section 10(1) of the Act of 2000 defines sexual torture to be a man’s intentional touch of the sexual or any other organ of a woman or of a child by any of his physical organs or by any other materials with a view to satisfying his unlawful sexual desire. This type of sexual offence was punishable with minimum three to maximum 10 years of rigorous imprisonment with indefinite amount of fine. Section 10(2) of the said Act defines sexual harassment to be a man’s outraging the modesty of a woman by words or by erotic gestures. A rigorous imprisonment from minimum two to a maximum of seven years imprisonment plus an indefinite amount of fine was provisioned for this offence. However, section 10(2) was repealed

in the year 2003 when the law was amended. After the amendment of 2003, non-physical contact, sexual words or erotic gestures cannot be tried under the *Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain, 2000* (The Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000). Rape is explained in the Act of 2000 under section 9 to be the non-consensual or consensual but under fear or deception sexual intercourse by a male with a woman of above sixteen years. Also, sexual intercourse with a woman under sixteen is considered to be rape whether with or without consent. This definition of rape is not free from criticisms because this is a gender-biased definition of rape (Islam, 2009). Also, this definition does not recognize the forceful intercourse of wife to be rape when she is above sixteen (Islam, 2009). After the amendment of 2020, the rape is now punishable with death penalty or lifetime imprisonment under section 9 of the *Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain, 2000* (The Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000). Women's teasing is punishable with a maximum of one year or with a maximum fine of two thousand taka or with both under section 76 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance, 1976. In the section, women's teasing is defined to be the willful indecent exposition of a man in any street or public place in such a manner as may be seen by a woman, or willful pressing or obstructing a woman in street or public place, or insulting, annoying by using indecent sounds, gestures or remarks in any street or public places. Likewise, other metropolitan police acts/-ordinances inserted almost similar provisions to recognize and penalize the offence of teasing women. However, the jurisdictions of such laws are limited only within the respective metropolitan areas. Section 69 of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Act, 2001 considers the sending of any obscene, indecent, threatening or grossly humiliating messages to another to be sexual harassment and the act is punishable up to six month's imprisonment or fine up to fifty thousand taka or with both. But, these all are scattered laws that are not inclusive of all kinds of sexual offences in the prevalent society of Bangladesh. Also, no national law having countrywide jurisdiction is available in Bangladesh that addresses all kinds of sexual offences in it.

The Honorable High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh issued the Bangladesh govern-

ment an eleven-point directive to fulfill the vacuum of sexual offences law in the country in responding the writ no. 5916 of 2008 filed by Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA). The directives suggest the government to address non-contact and modern technology based sexual harassment in the new policy and law (Matubbar & Arifuzzaman, 2022). However, in Bangladesh the legal vacuum has not yet been fulfilled by enacting a new all-inclusive law. Among other forms of sexual harassment, in the public transport the quantity of sexual harassment is severe. Around 83 percent women commuting regularly in the public transport of the country faces some sort of sexual harassment (Haq, 2019). But, unfortunately there is no a specific law or provisions that directly address this severe daily phenomenon of sexual harassment.

RESULTS:

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic profile covers age, marital status, education, income and status through the light on the basic characteristics of respondents as illustrated in **Table 1** and **2** it has been seen that the analysis reveals the transport choices of the different segments of the population. It needs to be mentioned here that transport choices available to commuters are quite limited.

Age profile

Overall, the sample respondents are young. In this group 95 percent of them are 15-45 years. The largest segment (46 percent) is in the age bracket of 25-35 years, with 56.86 percent students and 35.29 percent working women. The second largest cohort is of age group 15-25 years, with 35.29 percent working women and 7.84 percent house wife. About 8.24 percent and 3.14 percent are in the age bracket of 35-45 and 45-55 years respectively.

Marital status

Approximately half of the respondents are single with nearly 39.22 percent students and 35.29 percent working women and the remaining 5 percent are unmarried girls in the family, who are neither students nor working. Over 47.84 percent of respondents are married. Among them more than 7 percent are house wife. Besides, about 11.76 percent are divorced and 1.18 percent is widowed.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents					
Age	Profession			Total	Percentage (%)
	Working Women	House wife	Student		
15-25	25	5	75	105	41.17
25-35	45	10	63	118	46.27
35-45	11	3	7	21	8.24
45-55	6	2	-	8	3.14
Above 55	3	-	-	3	1.18
Total	90	20	145	255	100%
Percentage (%)	35.29	7.84	56.86	100%	
Marital Status of the Respondents					
Single	13	-	87	100	39.22
Married	62	16	44	122	47.84
Divorced	12	4	14	30	11.76
Widowed	3	-	-	3	1.18
Total	90	20	145	255	100%
Percentage (%)	35.29	7.84	56.86	100%	

Table 2: Educational status of the respondents.

Categories	Number	Working Women	House wife	Student	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	4	-	4	-	1.78
No formal Schooling but can read and write	7	3	4	-	3.11
Under SSC	17	9	2	6	7.56
SSC	37	8	3	26	16.44
HSC	44	26	4	14	19.56
Bachelors	78	31	2	45	34.68
Post Graduate	65	10	1	54	28.89
M.Phil.	3	3	-	-	1.33
Total	255	90	20	145	100%

The respondents were generally well educated. The majority of them attained a Bachelors' (34.68%) or Post graduate (28.89%) status. Almost one third of the respondents claimed they completed HSC (19.56%) and SSC (16.44%) levels. A small proportion did not have the opportunity of formal schooling; 1.78% of the respondents were not literate, while 3.11% of the res-

pondents said they never went to a formal school but could read and write, having learned from relatives, friends or a Madrassa (*Maktab*) school. Among working women, 12.16 percent held a Bachelor's degree, 5.10 percent held a Master's or M.Phil. Degree, 7.56 percent had under SSC Degree.

Status of Sexual Harassment in Public Transports

Table 3: Experience of harassment in Buses, Mini Buses, *Leguna* and other public vehicles.

Categories	Working Women	House wife	Student	Total	Percentage (%)
Once	7	-	17	24	9.41
Sometimes	21	9	58	88	34.51
Many Times	59	11	63	133	52.16
Never	3	-	7	10	3.92
Total	90	20	145	255	
Percentage (%)	35.29	7.84	56.86		100%

This section examines the incidence of harassment in buses, minibuses, *leguna* and other public vehicles. **Table 3** shows frequency of incidence of harassment in buses, minibuses *leguna* and other public vehicles. The highest incidence is reported by Students. Only 1.17 percent of working women and 2.75 percent of students reported that they never faced any action during travelling in buses, minibuses, *leguna* and other public vehicles that made them feel harassed. Almost 34.51 percent of working women, house wife and students reported that they felt harassed more than once while commuting. Nevertheless, 35.29 percent of working women and the highest 56.86 percent of the students faced sexual harassment in public transport respectively. Moreover, Students and working women were more presumably to experience sexual harassment compared to homemakers, which could be related to their younger age and higher frequency of commuting. Students and working women largely travel every working day and, thus, confront such incidences more frequently. **Fig. 1** points to the perpetrator or harasser. The major culprits in this respect are fellow passengers (75 percent), followed by bus conductors (20 percent) and, sometimes, even the bus driver (5 percent).

Table 4 identifies location of harassment in public transport: inside the bus/minibus, *leguna* or other vehicles or at bus/*Leguna* stopping place. Among all three categories of respondents, the vast majority 48.63 percent cited such incidents inside the buses/-minibuses and *leguna*. Furthermore, almost 30% of the respondents had been sexually harassed in the outside of the vehicles. Additionally, a few respondents said that the women are sexually harassed in the bus, mini bus or *leguna* stopping place.

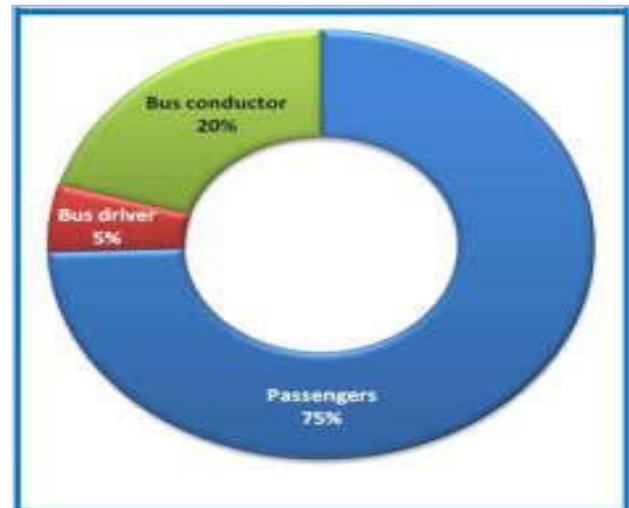


Fig. 1: Perpetrator.

Table 4: Place of harassment.

Categories	Working Women	House wife	Student	Total	Percentage (%)
Inside Bus/ Leguna /Others Vehicles	48	12	64	124	48.63
Inside the Vehicles	30	5	44	79	30.98
Place of Bus/ Others Vehicles Stop	12	3	37	52	20.39
Total	90	20	145	255	
Percentage (%)	35.29	7.84	56.86		100%

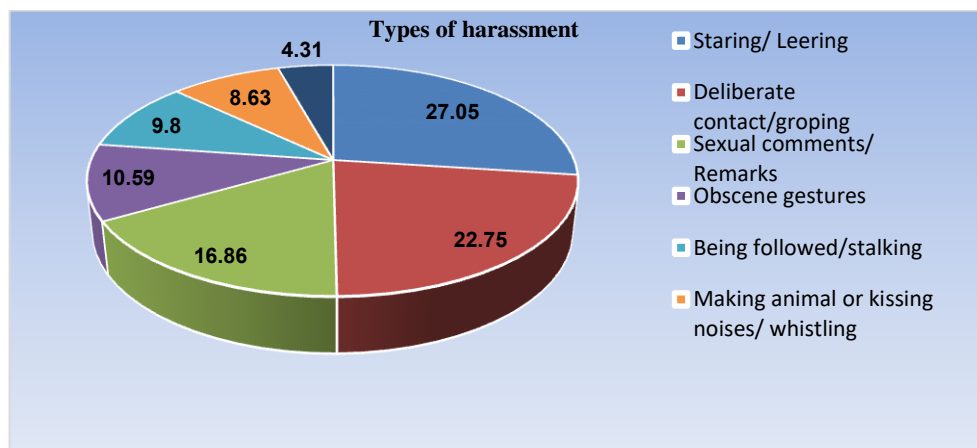


Fig. 2: Types of harassment.

This section is organized around a scenario illustrating the discrepancy and troubles respondents experienced when using public transportation. Here most of the respondents have replied that they faced sexual harassment in public transport. Fig. 2 expresses the types of harassment reported by all three categories of female commuters. Two major types of harassment accounting for 49 percent responses each are staring/-leering

and deliberate contact/groping. Comments/remarks with sexual innuendos and obscene gestures are also fairly common constituting 16.86 percent and 10.59 percent respectively. Other types of harassment that are stated include men blocking the way for women to disembark or following after disembarking and stalking or making animal or kissing noises.

Causes and Suggested Solution to Reduce Sexual Harassment in Public Transports

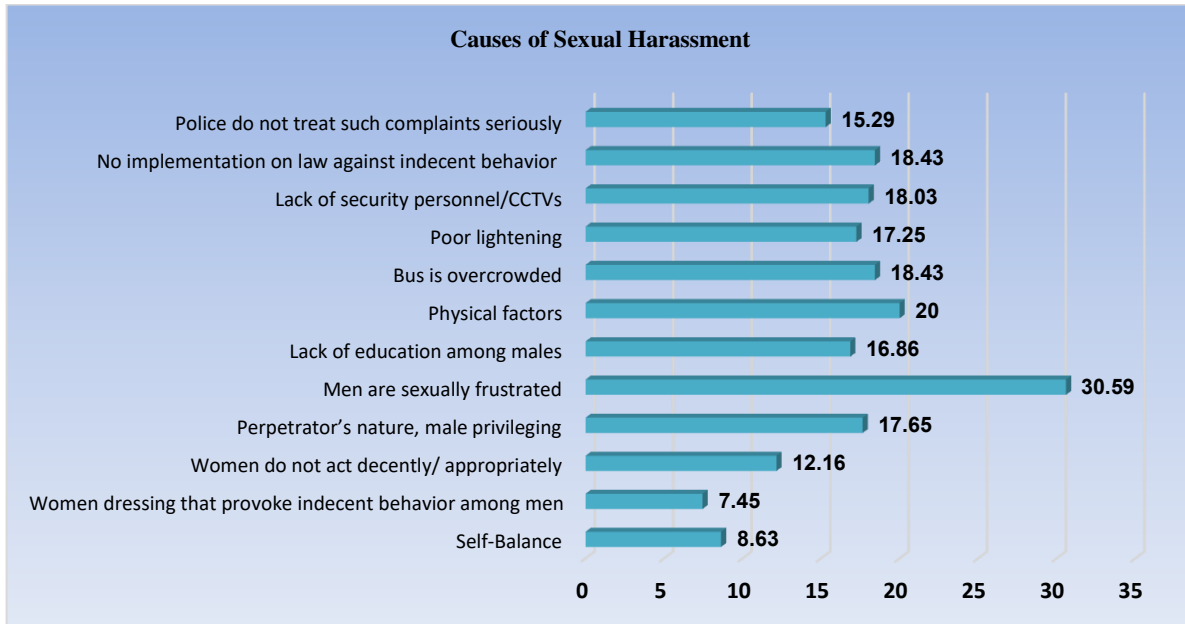


Fig. 3: Causes of Sexual Harassment in Public Transport in Dhaka City (Multiple choices).

Women’s attitude towards perceived factors that motivate harassment in public transport is also explored. The responses are categorized in terms of self-blame, male nature, physical factors, and policy factors. It is interesting to find that respondents largely attribute male nature and privileging as a major reason for harassment. Within this, lack of education and sexual frustration are significant components. The next important

factor is physical, i.e., over-crowding in buses. Students also indicated policy factors like carelessness of police in treating such complaints and failure of implementation of laws and punishment of perpetrators. Some respondents also blamed women themselves in provoking such incidences by wearing inappropriate dresses.

Respondents’ observations indicating acts that promote harassment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV plays show harassment scenes and plant ideas in vulnerable and cunning minds. • Some buses display ‘obscene’ posters, jokes, cartoons, pictures or advertisements and play ‘unethical loud music/songs’, which encourages bad behavior. • It is not only uneducated men who harass us; educated men too are as bad. • Men who are unemployed spend time at bus stops and harass women for fun. • If women dress improperly, they invite harassment. • Women’s dress is not the cause, even <i>burqa</i> clad (veil wearing) women have to face harassment

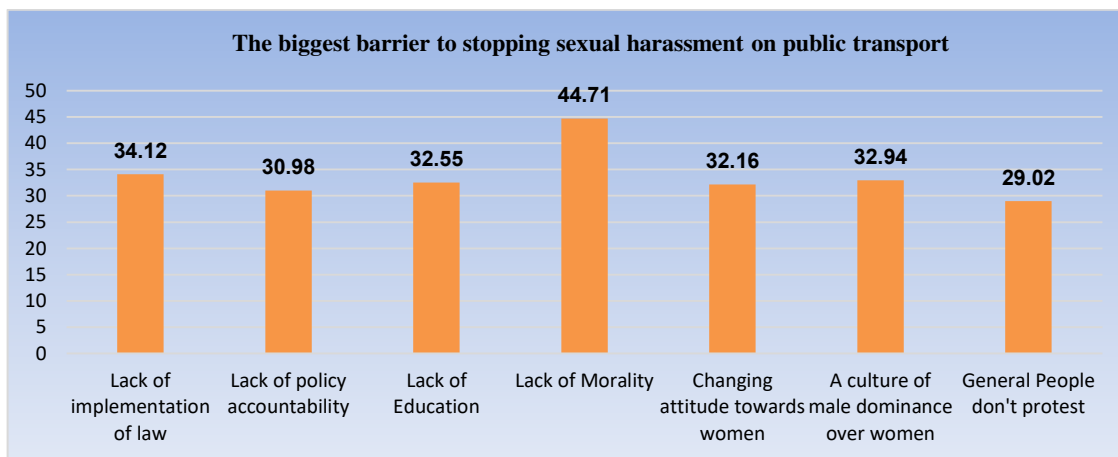


Fig. 4: The biggest barrier to stopping sexual harassment on public transport (Multiple choices).

In this part, the respondents commented about some points created from the field where unwanted sexual advances are of the crucial issues. The respondents mentioned some obstacle to stop the sexual harassment on public transport. Almost 32.94% of the respondents have opined that due to male domination they could not do what they feel better spontaneously. Beside, lack of implementation of law and weak policy accountability is also the biggest barrier to stop sexual

harassment in public transport and almost 34.12% and 30.98% of the respondents replied. Moreover, more than 32.55% of the respondents told that lack of proper education was another reason. In addition to it, majority (44.71%) percent of the respondents expressed that the violence against women is increasing due to the lack of moral sense. Furthermore, more than 32.16% women opined that sexual abuse had increased due to men’s crummy view against women.

Table 5: Measures Suggested by Respondents: (Multiple choices).

Categories	Number	Percentage (%)
Separate ladies bus	144	56.47
Increase size of female's section in bus	135	52.94
Police provide help to female commuters	76	29.80
Spread awareness regarding female	112	43.92
Implement law properly	145	56.86
Increase number of buses	144	56.47
Operate only big Bus	44	17.25
Buses should have adequate light at night	65	25.49
Driver should stop bus at bus-stop while women are getting-off	87	34.11

Respondents were asked to suggest measures that could help in preventing harassment and in providing women friendly facilities in public transport and they were allowed more than one suggestion. These responses are presented in **Table 5**. More than 56.47% respondents’ recommended distinct ladies

buses or in the common bus, a larger ladies section with strict separation between male and female sections. Students and working women also asked for the police to play their due role in providing help to female commuters who complain of harassment.

The Status of Legal Assistance in Harassment Incidents in Public Transportations

Table 6: Willingness to resort to legal assistance dissecting.

Categories	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	16	6.27

Yes, when it is serious	28	10.98
Yes, but no easy way to report it	41	16.07
Yes, but I'm not aware of this process	49	19.22
No, I don't think it's necessary	18	7.06
Never, I don't see any benefit in reporting	17	6.67
Never	86	33.73
Amount of unreported cases of sexual harassment in public transport dissecting		
1-25%	45	100%
25-50%	32	
50-75%	51	
75-100%	127	

Table 6 illustrated the respondent’s willingness to resort to assistance dissecting after the committal of sexual abuse in public transport. More than 10% respondents told that they reported to the police or higher authorities when the case is very serious. A total of 41 respondents replied most people thought they wanted to seek help from the legal assistance when they were

sexually assaulted, but there was no easy way to report. On the other hand, 19.22% of the respondents were not aware of reporting being sexual harassment. In addition, 7.06% of the respondents had no interest to report where 33.73% respondents never reported willingly due to self-esteem and fear of dignity.

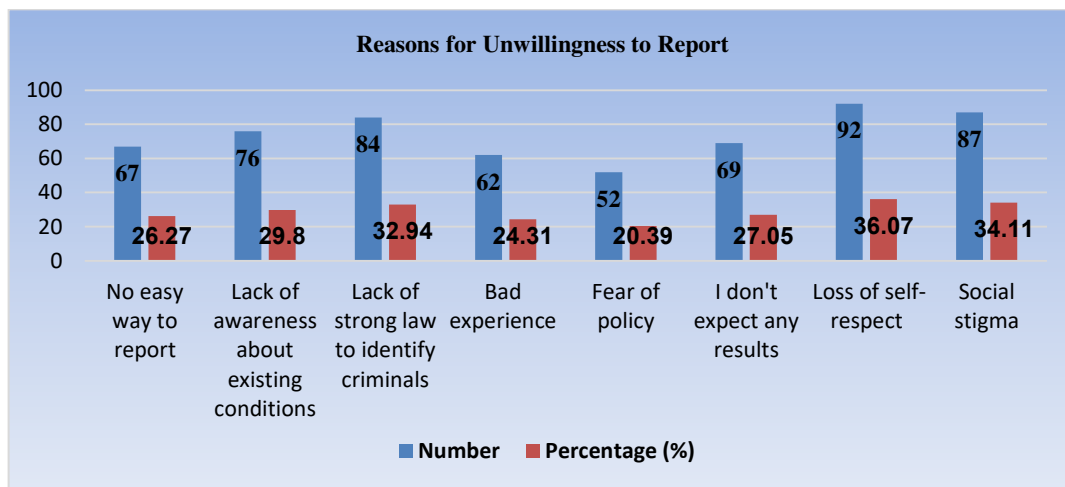


Fig. 5: Reasons for Unwillingness to Report to Law Enforcement Agencies (Multiple choices).

In this segment, the respondents were asked to know the reasons of unwillingness to seek assistance from various agencies to stop sexual harassment on public transportation. More than 26.27% of the respondents said that the way to report the law enforcement agencies was not easy. In addition, over 29.80% of respondents stated that one of the main causes of sexual harassment on public transportation was lack of public awareness. Furthermore, almost 32.94% of the respondents have replied that the weakness of the law is another reason to identify the culprits. Besides, almost 24.31% of the respondents had bad experience when they reported to higher authorities. A few respondents told about the fear of policy. They claimed that sexual

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harassment might be prevented if the media revealed the disparity and made everyone aware of the law. Besides, more than 36.07% and 34.11% of the respondents talked that they did not report to the authorities due to losing their dignity and social stigma. They believed that sexual harassment would decrease if law was enforced through investigations into allegations of sexual harassment & apprehended offenders. These issues might be reduced if law enforcement provided security and support both physically and mentally.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

In Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka city, the problem of sexual harassment in public transports seems to be

much larger and much more deep-rooted. Lack of proper education on gender sensitivity, the failure of law implementation as well as the legal vacuum on addressing such unwise behaviors are some of the reasons of sexual harassment in transports. A large section of women are even not interested in filing complaints against the perpetrators in such incidence because of lack of bravery, complexity of filing complaint and non-cooperation of fellow passengers. So, to reduce this type of behaviors, all round initiatives both from government and the general public should be taken. Also, the government should consider the issue of sexual harassment on priority basis and enact appropriate laws to fill up the current vacuum of laws on sexual offences in Bangladesh. Enacting proper laws on sexual offences may foster the development of intergender respect and may stop gender discrimination and gender based violence in the society. It can be concluded saying that in the absence of systematic change, the measures being suggested to address harassment of women in public transport remain mere palliatives. The literature and findings from this research suggest that unsafe public transportations are a major barrier in the mobility of women section of the society. The sexual harassment in public transportation in Dhaka city is primarily gender based violence and the main victim is the woman. So, to ensure equal rights of both men and women in the society, they should be given equal opportunity to avail all such facilities to run the race. Also, the present legal framework to address the prevalent sexual offences is not satisfactory and so, the government should come forward to initiate the building of need based appropriate laws considering the constant societal change. The analysis identified the following set of recommendations to help prevent occurrences of harassment -

- 1) A major factor that leads to harassment in buses/mini-buses is overcrowding. Findings from survey indicate that women's first priority is to introduce separate buses for them. Their second priority is to introduce bigger buses with larger women's section and strict partitioning between women's and men's section.
- 2) Sensitizing police officials about handling gender related cases has also been suggested. Generally, women hesitate in going to police stations due to women unfriendly attitude of police officials and its

overall environment. The process of registering a case is also very cumbersome and the police do not take such cases seriously. Also, the case filing should be easy to understand.

- 3) Women police stations need to be expanded and strengthened by bringing in motivated and result oriented lady police officers and training of the existing staff. These women police stations need to be in the mainstream, rather than a side-lined activity. Also, mobile vans of women police should remain on rounds on regular basis.
- 4) Specific laws should be enacted in addressing this sort of unexpected behavior in public transportations. Sexual offences are arguably one of the underreported crimes in the world. Nonetheless, the number of reported incidents is also very high in the society. Appropriate laws should be introduced in addressing all kinds of abuse against women.
- 5) Another important recommendation is to create awareness among the general public about respecting women and refraining from obnoxious behavior. None of the drivers, conductors or passengers is aware of the code of conduct in public transport and basic human rights of passengers. In this connection, media can contribute in raising awareness against harassment acts as well as providing information about laws on such harassment and punishment to perpetrators. Although a long-term process, inclusion of material in school curriculum on respecting women will pave the way in this regard.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The authors declare no possible conflict of interest in the present study.

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