

Reducing VAWG in Transport

Tags: Investment, Infrastructure, PPP, Case Study, Evidence

Creating safe and inclusive urban environments is a top priority for UK government, who have signed up to several international commitments in this area, including Sustainable Development Goal 11 to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable', with a target that directly contributes to addressing women and girls' safety in public spaces.

Violence and the threat of violence holds back economic growth in urban areas, limiting women's mobility, access to economic opportunities, and the ability to move into higher paid or more secure jobs. In Mexico City, World Bank funded research¹ found women living on the periphery of the city are making difficult decisions over the trade-off between economic opportunity and personal security, as women's earnings are three times higher in the city centre, but over half experience sexual harassment on public transport. The cost of violence against women ranges from 1.4% to 3.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to recent costing studies within developing country contexts.

1 in 3 women experience some form of physical and sexual violence in their lifetime.

Violence limits the success of urban and infrastructure programs aimed at improving access to resources and services. Safe, inclusive and well-planned public spaces, infrastructure, urban services, and transport can reduce violence and harassment that women and girls face and increase access to economic opportunities.

Reducing violence against women and girls on Public Transport

What are the risks? Women and girls face several risks of violence and sexual harassment relating to transportation and transport infrastructure:

- **As passengers on public transport and walking to and from transport hubs³**
- **As transport workers** (See box inset)
- **Dangers of poorly designed dark underpasses,** alone or with children.
- **During construction of transport infrastructure projects.**

Harassment, molestation and abuse are daily occurrences for the 7,000 women bus conductors Maharashtra, India. In an extreme case, one female conductor was brutally beaten and her clothes torn off by a male passenger after she reprimanded him for using the wrong bus door in 2014.²

What are the key opportunities and promising practice?

Improving safety at and around transport hubs, including bus stops: Safety on public transport includes the process of getting to and back from the transport hub. Women report that they face harassment not only inside public transport but also in the 'last mile' to and from the transport hub to their destination. This is often referred to as **last mile connectivity**. First mile and last mile refer to the first and last leg of a journey from home or any destination to and from a public transport stop. Addressing safety and transit options at a transport waiting facility such as a bus stop or metro station is central to safety and improved mobility for women.⁴ Some of the factors that need to be taken into consideration are lighting, good walk path, and availability of safe and efficient para transit facilities such as



Figure 1: The three common stages of public transport journeys

¹ Dominguez Gonzalez (2016)

² Johari (2014)

³ UN Women scoping report found 90% of women in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, have experienced some form of sexual violence when accessing public transport. UN Women (2014)

⁴ Shah, S (2016)

bicycles, buses, rickshaws, taxis etc.⁵ Information about timings and schedules is also part of improved last mile connectivity.⁶ This information should be made available in a well-lit and inhabited area so that women are able to access it. Ensuring the presence of more women could be done through women taxi drivers, ticket collectors and women police in the areas outside transport hubs. Further, “eyes on the street” around these hubs is important and this can be achieved through small shops and vendors in and around the area.

Use transportation infrastructure to raise awareness about VAWG. Large numbers of passengers flow through a transport system every day, creating opportunities to advertise support services for survivors of violence (e.g. hotlines and reporting facilities), and display messaging to change norms and attitudes that perpetuate VAWG.⁷ For example, in Rosario, Argentina, public transport cards were printed with ‘No to Sexual Harassment’ slogan and telephone hotlines for reporting violence, as part of a Safe Cities campaign (see card above).⁸

Female-only transport remains a contentious solution. Women-only public transportation schemes, such as female-only passenger cars on subways, local trains and women-only buses and taxis, may operate some or all of the time (e.g. during peak hours).⁹ The evidence remains mixed¹⁰ that female-only transport increases women’s mobility in settings where they regularly receive sexual harassment and assaults. Some women have expressed concerns about ‘pink trains’ in Sao Paulo, Brazil that they should feel safe in public. In Bogota, Colombia, women reported that it was a superficial fix which did not address men’s behaviour.¹¹ If temporary ‘quick win’ segregation strategies are used, they should also be accompanied with long-term gender-transformative solutions aimed at changing norms around the acceptability of harassing women on public transport.¹²

Plan road crossings with VAWG in mind. Poorly designed, dark underpasses and tunnels often cause fear for women and girls using them, who may feel trapped with no opportunity for escape. For example, during a safety audit in Cairo, girls identified a ring road that splits their community as the highest risk for their safety, both in terms of traffic accidents crossing the road, but also the pedestrian tunnels that run under the road are poorly lit, long, have sewage floods, and are poorly maintained, putting girls at risk of sexual harassment when having to use them.¹³ Where possible, urban planners should design safe alternatives to underpasses (e.g. open truss bridges or safe road crossings), and ensure existing underpasses are well-lit.

Training transport workers to be more gender-sensitive The ‘Building Bonds for Gender Sensitisation’ programme in New Delhi, India, provides training for drivers of auto-rickshaws, taxis and buses on keeping women safe. Over 145,000 drivers have been trained; almost 96% reported that the training was useful and have applied inputs from the trainings to their daily lives. The programme has been scaled up by the State Transport Department in New Delhi, who have made it mandatory for all auto rickshaw drivers at their annual vehicle check.¹⁴ Similarly, UN Women Morocco has developed a partnership with private bus company ALSA to integrate the issue of sexual violence prevention in the drivers’ training modules. Videos on sexual harassment are also regularly broadcast on the buses’ screens.¹⁵

Working with transport workers to report trafficking and sexual exploitation. Transport workers on long-distance routes across international borders are in a unique position to help end trafficking by identifying and reporting any suspicious sightings. In the United States, the delivery-courier company UPS is currently training over 8,000 freight drivers to help them spot signs of trafficking between delivery nodes. In December 2016, a pilot programme was rolled out across ten US states where drivers received training and a wallet

⁵ Safetipin (2016)

⁶ World Bank (2013)

⁷ World Bank (2015)

⁸ UN Women (2015a)

⁹ Women-only cabins in public transportation have been used in many countries, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates (World Bank, 2015)

¹⁰ There are few evaluations assessing the impact of female-only transport. It has been reported that women-only cars in Mexico City’s Metro and bus systems helped reduce the number of sexual harassment cases from five to one per day (as part of a broader initiative). (Forde, 2013)

¹¹ Grant (2014) and Jaramillo (2014), cited in Gekoski et al (2015)

¹² Uteng (2011)

¹³ Travers et al (2013)

¹⁴ Manas Foundation: www.manas.org.in; Fulu (2016)

¹⁵ UN Women (2015b)

card with signs of trafficking, helpful phone numbers, and instructions on what to do if they spot trafficking.¹⁶ In Cambodia, ChildSafe International¹⁷ conducts a training course for taxi and tuk tuk drivers to identify potential cases of child trafficking and abuse. At the end of the training sessions, participating drivers must pass an examination and receive a certificate that they can show to passengers as a sign that they are not involved in the facilitation of prostitution or trafficking.

Key reading

International Transport Workers Federation (2013) ITF Action Guide on Violence against Women
World Bank (2015) Violence against Women and Girls: Transport Brief

Gekowski et al (2015) What Works' in Reducing Sexual Harassment and Sexual Offences on Public Transport Nationally and Internationally: a Rapid Evidence Assessment

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¹⁶ UPS is working with Truckers Against Trafficking: <http://www.supplychaindive.com/news/ups-freight-truckers-against-trafficking-training-human-rights-violations-2017/433951/>

¹⁷ 83 ChildSafe International is a network of local and international people, businesses, and groups based in Cambodia to prevent child abuse. Drivers attend five training sessions where they develop practical skills to help them identify potential cases of child trafficking and abuse, e.g. if they were transporting young street children to brothels (Protection Project, 2012).