

## **INVESTIGATING WOMEN'S SAFETY IN NEW DELHI'S URBAN TRANSPORT SYSTEMS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to investigate the reasons due to which public spaces, and public transportation in particular, remain largely inaccessible to women. In order to probe contemporary issues around urban transportation in Delhi, the author conducted a survey of 200 women using the Delhi Metro along with detailed interviews of 5 women, with the hope of better understanding the nuances of the problems regarding sexual harassment and gender insensitivity faced by women while accessing different forms of public transportation in India. The paper also seeks to identify the parameters that cause women to choose between varied forms of transportation based on relative security and safety. The data has also been compared to surveys conducted across the globe to place problems in a comparative context. Lastly, this paper analyses global grassroot programs that address this issue along with their respective impacts in order to think of prospective solutions for changing the mindset and actions of individuals and governments and making public spaces safer and more accessible for women.

**Keywords:** Women's Safety, Public Transportation, Public Transport Policies, Gender-related Problem, Delhi

### **INTRODUCTION TO GENDER-RELATED PROBLEMS IN CIVIC TRANSPORTATION**

In order to gain a holistic understanding of women's issues in relation to public transportation, it is imperative to trace them back to their most fundamental roots. Patriarchy is an all pervasive identity marker, and consequently, the basis for the most normalised forms of oppression ever known to humanity. The internalised and widely accepted nature of patriarchy makes it difficult for people to bring about structural change. This perpetuates the oppression of anyone who deviates from the patriarchal values and roles prescribed to them by virtue of their gender identity. These people are usually women and members of the LGBTQ+ community who want to break out of the 'caregiver' role assigned to them so as to exercise their individual agency and

achieve self actualization. Patriarchy and gender identity pervade all aspects of a person's life and have a severe impact in the different lived experiences that people – particularly women – go through.

Thus, crimes against women in public transportation is not just about individual acts; rather, it speaks more about a culture that we as a society are implicit in partaking. Transportation, as such, is not gender-neutral. This was the key message that came out of a high-level gender discussion co-hosted by the World Bank and the World Resources Institute during the recent Transforming Transportation 2018 conference, which was held in Washington DC between January 11 to 12, 2018. According to the research conducted, 80% of women are afraid of using public transportation because of personal experiences relating to sexual harassment. These figures are much worse, around 94% for developing countries like India; a mere indication of the problem at large. The fact is that sexual harassment is only superficially dealt with by the state machinery. The problem is invisibilized through relentless victim-blaming, normalization of harassment, and negation of harm – all to avoid undesirable and uncomfortable conclusions for those who occupy positions of power. These narratives are ignorant at best and complicit at worse when it comes to dealing with such situations, and are largely floated by religious and political conservatives across all societies to maintain the power structure that patriarchy establishes through gender roles. The problem however is not limited to sexual harassment and assault. For example, in Bogotá, Colombia, between 6:00 am and 12:00 pm, women are proportionally more likely to be victims of robbery than men at critical times of day because that is when people go to work.

Such instances of violence are largely detrimental to societies at all levels. Firstly, there is the humanitarian argument that any civil society must be cognizant of, which is that the lack of safety of women in public transport prevents women from achieving self actualization, which is a basic human right. Beyond that, this largely involves the violation of other basic human rights as well, including the right that a person has over their bodily autonomy which is clearly infringed upon during harassment. Secondly, there is a general loss in the economy because of a reduction in the participation of women in the process of production. According to the World Bank the global GDP loses out by \$5.8 trillion dollars due to the gap between participation of men and women in the economy. Also, this creates and perpetuates a socially regressive society where not just patriarchy but also other forms of oppression are acceptable.

### **THE CASE IN NEW DELHI: ANALYSING NEW DELHI'S PUBLIC TRANSPORT POLICIES FOR GENDER SENSITIVITY**

According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation, New Delhi is one of the three worst urban centers when it comes to the safety of women, along with Sao Paulo in Brazil and Cairo in Egypt. The same poll found Delhi to be India's 'rape capital'. There were 2,155 rapes recorded in Delhi in 2016 - a rise of 67 percent from 2012, according to police data. Forms of sexual harassment are very prevalent not just in public transportation but also in workplaces, during festivals and social events – essentially, in most public settings. Violence against women has become gradually entrenched in the culture of specific sections of the society which constitute the majority of the population. This violence does not only happen in public spaces but is very common in private settings as well. 27% of married women experience physical violence at home, at the hands of their husbands. Moreover only half of those cases are reported to the police. Marital rape is also extremely common, and it is not even recognized by law as a criminal offence in India.

A research conducted by women's organizations Jagori, Lawyers Collective, Sakha, Azad Foundation and others looked at eight parameters, including lighting, openness, gender diversity and security to analyse the safety of women in modes of transportation. This report concludes that women in Delhi are systematically denied the freedom of mobility. Taxi services like Uber and Ola remain largely unregulated by the government when it comes to checking the safety of women using them. Worse, there have been several instances of rape committed by taxi drivers as reported by women who use these services. All measures taken by the Government have either been tokenistic or temporary. None of them have attempted to deal with the root of the problem. Despite mass outrage in the country post these incidents, sexual harassment by taxi drivers continue to be an obvious barrier for women. Better background checks and sensitivity training of taxi drivers are imperative to make them safer and more accessible to women.

Buses, however are the least popular method of transport amongst women because they have been the most unsafe when it comes to reported incidents of harassment. The DTC bus network is the mainstay of Delhi's transport system with more than 4.5 million people using it every day. But just 5% of the 4,121 DTC buses are under surveillance, and there is virtually no safety mechanism in place. By November 2014, the DTC had installed non-Wi-Fi CCTV cameras in 200 buses as part of a pilot project. Since then, however, there has been no increase in the number of buses with such surveillance.

The Metro seems to be the best option for travel, but it has its fair share of problems too. Metro stations have decent levels of security; the compartments in the metro have cameras installed which help in effective monitoring. Moreover, all metro trains have a full compartment reserved for women along with few seats in every other compartment being reserved as well. However, metros, just like buses often get extremely crowded during peak hours which makes travel for

women extremely uncomfortable. Most stations become deserted after 10 pm, and feeder bus services connecting the Metro hubs to far-flung residential places are either patchy or non-existent. Therefore even if the environment inside the metros are safe, the access to the metro system is very limited and restricted.

### **ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE NEED FOR GENDER-SPECIFIC POLICIES AROUND DMRC**

The Delhi Metro remains inaccessible to women because of reasons that are both under and beyond the control of the DMRC. As compared to other modes of transportation controlled by government authorities, the DMRC has implemented surveillance and security measures inside the metro stations and trains. However the access to the metro itself still remains a hurdle. Women find it difficult to reach metro stations as those small distances must be covered either in *rickshaws*, taxis or on foot. These modes of travel are extremely unsafe during late hours.

A survey and a set of interviews were conducted on women who frequently use the metro to travel in Delhi. The objective of the interview was to understand and analyse the nature and source of problems faced by women, including factors affecting the severity of the problems and influence people's mentality when it came to engaging with gender sensitive issues. There were three broad conclusions of these surveys. The first is that women are either mildly or extremely dissatisfied by the condition of public spaces that are needed to access public transportation. The second is that there is a preference or a desire for 'women's only *autorickshaws*' when it comes to commuting to and from metro stations. Thirdly, women prefer using the metro over taxis for long journeys because being around more women in the women's compartment of a metro train or station provides them with a sense of safety and security. It was concluded in the survey that although auto rickshaw drivers and cab drivers make their best efforts to make women feel comfortable, many of their actions cause extreme discomfort to women without that necessarily being their intention. This clearly shows a need of sensitizing these drivers on issues of gender and harassment since progressive effort can be clearly seen on their part. However, most of the women interviewed were skeptical about sharing cabs or other methods of road transportation with strangers because of the fear of harassment and violence. These experiences are also contingent on the time of travel. During mornings and other rush hours, problematic behavior is less prevalent because of there being a greater chance of such behavior being called out and punished. However, during late hours problems are aggravated to a level where women have unanimously agreed on the fact that time is a decisive factor that severely restricts women from accessing the metro.

## **SURVEYING GLOBAL TRENDS IN GENDER-SENSITIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT MECHANISMS**

There have been studies and surveys across the globe regarding the idea of gender sensitivity and women's safety in public transportation. And all of these surveys have brought in light similar conclusions, which is that access to public transport for women is not as free as it should be but is contingent on externalities such as timings. These externalities actively deter women from using public transportation and accessing public spaces. The conclusions are common to countries across the world be it Ho Chi Minh City, Cape Town, Dublin, Mexico City and Winnipeg (Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Report, UN Women, October, 2017).

However many of these countries have taken active steps to curb this phenomenon and culture that actively excludes women from accessing public spaces. One of the first developing nations to recognize this was Ecuador in its city Quito. An initial study in 2011 found that 68 percent of women had experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces over the previous year, and pinpointed gaps in legislation and policy on prevention and response. This led to the formulation of a targeted comprehensive programme. Evidence from the study conducted provided the much needed support and validity to the actions of the government. The city amended a local ordinance to strengthen action against sexual harassment in public spaces. Stoppages of trains have been updated and revamped to meet with international safety criteria. More than 600 employees are being trained on the subject of gender sensitivity and dealing with sexual harassment. Similar key legislations on the basis of research and data collection have also been passed in places like Manila (Philippines) and Guatemala City (Guatemala). The effectiveness of these legislations is also dependent on the fact that they emerged out of grassroot movements. This makes organic change, along with legal and constitutional change a more realistic target to achieve.

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea has adopted another method, which is only based on grassroot level change and education. 80% of vendors in markets there are women. They have taken the onus upon themselves to make the market, which is one of the most crowded public places, safer. This not only includes redesigning the market structure but also includes sensitivity programmes for the local populus. This has led to a gradual decrease in the crimes committed against women, not just in the market but across Port Moresby. Similar initiatives have been taken by women in Kigali, Rwanda. Be it grassroot driven outreach and education programmes in less developed countries like Egypt or state initiatives and high-end technology backed security programmes by countries like Japan, it has been seen across the world that when a society gains cognizance of such a widespread and systemic problem and makes genuine efforts to improve the system, the

end result is largely positive and public spaces do become more conducive and sensitive to women and gender related issues.

### **CONCLUSION: EXPANDING THE HORIZONS OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

As stated in the first section of this paper, almost all barriers to women that deny them access to public spaces are a result of psychological conditioning of members of a society, and its subsequent impacts on individual behavior which shapes sociological perceptions and actions. Therefore the most effective way to deal with these problems which are not just related to public transportation but public spaces in general is to create a change in the mentality of individual members of the society, especially those of whom who are not victims themselves. This is to say that it is imperative to change the mindset of men and make them sensitive to this issue in order to affect long term and organic change. This is the reason why grassroot programmes are considered as the best way to affect sociological change.

There have already been multiple instances where programmes have been extremely successful in making spaces safer, even in countries which suffer from crippling problems of gender insensitivity and sexual harassment. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, policymakers are working to identify safety risks in ten of its largest slums. Local authorities are partnering with women and girls in their communities to use their mobile phones to map safety risks such as defective infrastructure, obscured walking routes, and deficient lighting. By improving infrastructure, including transportation services, the city can better ensure the safety and wellbeing of its vulnerable populations. The city of Vienna, Austria has been a pioneer in its efforts to make urban planning more gender-inclusive. Improvements range from additional installed lighting and safer underground car parking to more sport-specific public parks and an innovative apartment complex — “Women-Work-City” — built to cater to the unique needs of working women by providing services and shops all in one place. Empowering women as leaders of urban research and local governance via community social audits, like a recent audit by the Social Justice Coalition on access to sanitation in Khayelitsha, South Africa, have shown to be powerful tools. They better inform gender-based strategies through data and experience, while simultaneously acknowledging and promoting women’s voices in policy decisions.

Despite the effectiveness of these changes, they are still inadequate given the systemic and universal nature of patriarchy. However, providing support and encouraging grassroot programmes and putting pressure on governments to enact and implement legislative changes shows a lot of promise in terms of making things more just and humane.

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## **Appendix 1**

How often do you use the metro?

1. This is my first time
2. 1-2 times a week
3. 3-4 times a week
4. Everyday

What mode of transportation do you use to and from the metro station?

1. Auto/Rickshaws
2. Bus
3. Personal Transport
4. Cabs
5. Walking

How far is your place of work/college/house from the metro station?

1. Less than 7 minutes
2. 7-15 minutes
3. 15-25 minutes
4. More than 25 minutes

How safe do you feel in the metro?

1. Extremely safe
2. Moderately safe
3. Not very safe
4. Clearly Unsafe

If there was a woman’s only auto to and from the metro during rush hour, would you feel safe?

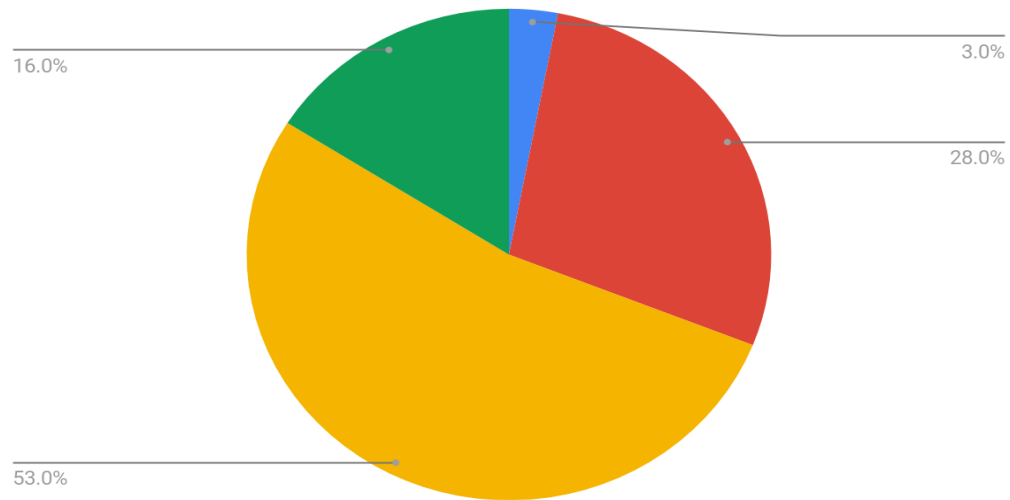
1. Yes
2. No



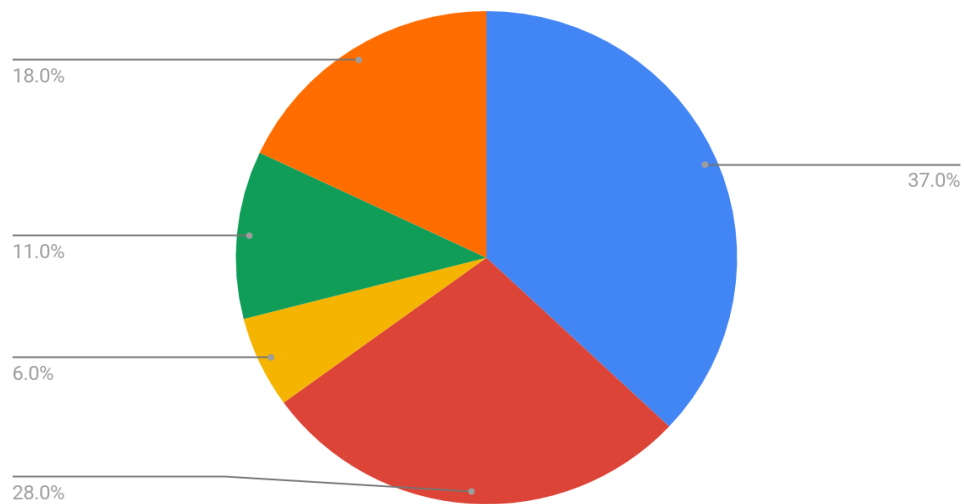
Appendix 2

1.

Frequency of usage

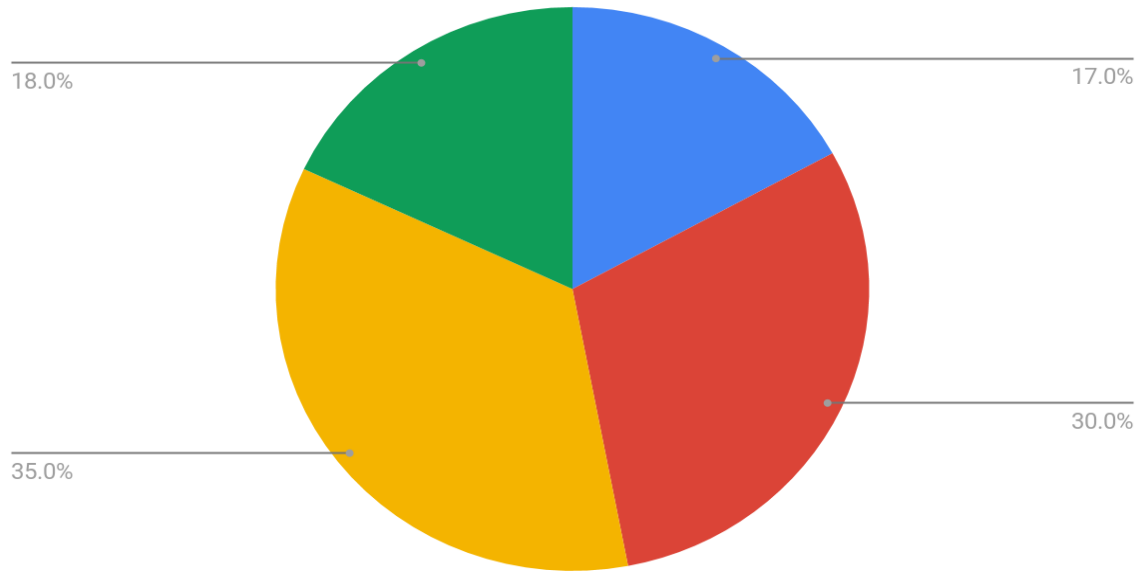


Mode of Transportation Used



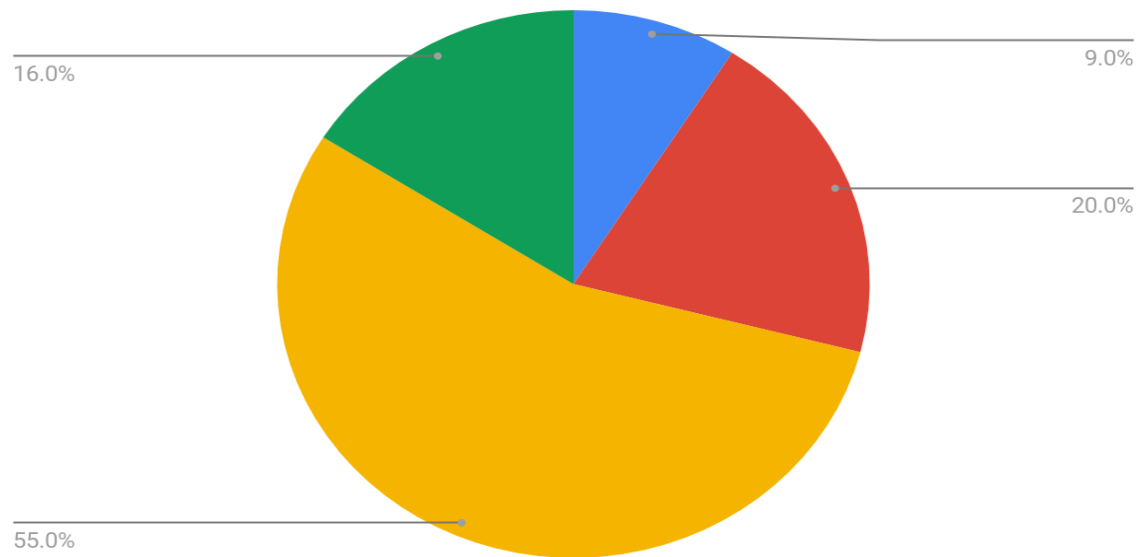
2.

Distance of location from metro station



3.

Level of safety Felt

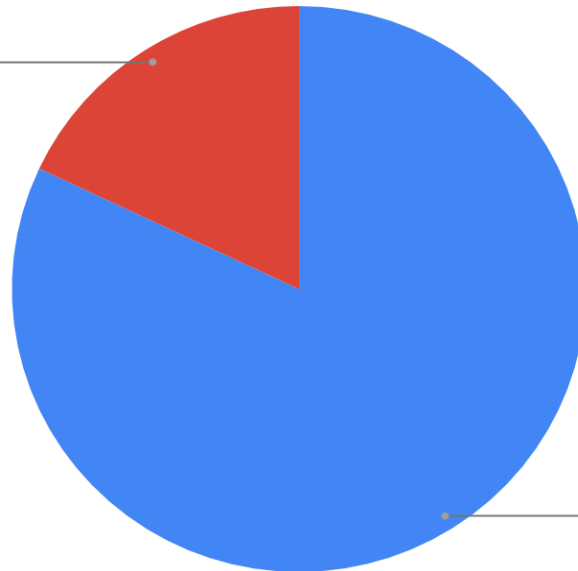


4.

5.

Points scored

No  
18.0%



Yes  
82.0%