

GENDERED SPACES AND UNEQUAL JOURNEYS: UNDERSTANDING HOW HARASSMENT SHAPES WOMEN'S ACCESS TO URBAN MOBILITY IN PAKISTAN

Sohail Abdul Sattar

Assistant Registrar Department of Gender Studies, University of the Punjab Lahore.

Email: sohail_sattar073@yahoo.com

Dr. Abir Hassan Naqvi

Assistant Professor, Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab Lahore.

Email: abirhassan.ier@pu.edu.pk

Neha Fareed

M. Phil Scholar, Institute of Administrative Sciences, University of the Punjab Lahore.

Abstract

The research investigates how harassment in public transit spaces affects female behaviour during their trips through a detailed examination of harassment frequencies and manifestations alongside the responses women exhibit. Public transport harassment occurs widely enough to block female mobility and slash their education and employment possibilities, thus continuing societal gender disparities. This research study evaluates gendered spaces and unequal journeys: understanding how harassment shapes women's access to urban mobility in Pakistan. A total of 422 female public transport regular users from urban environments participated in the research through a quantitative data collection approach with open-ended questions. The research relies on feminist theory together with the social-ecological model as theoretical foundations for harassment as a gendered phenomenon that limits women's mobility. The gender-based analysis of patriarchal norms, together with power asymmetries, produces hostile public environments for women according to the feminist approach alongside the social-ecological model that explores how individual social systems affect behavioural patterns. The research established societal norms and safety perceptions as major elements that determine this relationship because female users with unsafe public transportation perceptions tend to avoid public transport. Male-only compartments and strengthened security protocols established through gender-sensitive policies actively lower both harassment occurrences and their effects on women's freedom to travel. The author recommends that government officials develop gender-aware policies and research teams need to execute long-running studies and undertake cultural assessment research to assess intervention performance for developing comprehensive knowledge regarding harassment consequences for women navigating freely. Empirical data about harassment effects on female travel patterns becomes part of the knowledge about gender-based violence within urban environments through this study. This research proposes practical solutions to develop protective public transport systems that strengthen gender equality and allow women to be completely safe when using public transportation and open urban areas. When stakeholders take steps to root out harassment, they can work toward establishing a society based on accountability and respect.

Keywords: Harassment in Public Transport, Safety Perceptions, Urban Mobility, Gender Inequality

INTRODUCTION

The current research examines harassment incidents at public transport sites and their influence on women's decision patterns for transportation. The study focuses on identifying the type of harassment that affects women in transportation areas and how these incidents affect their movement choices while studying their travel routines and general conduct. Evaluation of societal norms and personal safety perceptions, together with specific coping strategies, reveals how women react to harassment incidents in public transportation areas.

Women's harassment in public areas, specifically in public transport, has gained heightened attention because society now understands how this form of violence affects female mobility and autonomy (Aitken, Guerrero and Sagaris, 2024). Millions of people depend on public transport as it is essential to daily life. Women face fear and discomfort alongside vulnerability because harassment occurs frequently during their use of public transportation (Useche, Colomer, Alonso and Faus, 2024). Several types of harassment occur in public transportation when people subject women to verbal abuse, physical assault, stalking behaviours, and unwanted attention, which create hostile conditions for female users (Huma & Khurram, 2024).

The last ten years have brought a rising scholarly focus on evaluating how harassment influences female travel choices (Useche et al., 2024). Research shows that female physical safety suffers from harassment, which produces psychological and emotional implications, causing women to adjust their travel behaviour by avoiding particular paths and travel modes at certain times (Kacharo et al., 2022). When women experience fear of harassment, they become restricted from basic education and employment opportunities, thus perpetuating gender inequalities that exist within cities (Pereira & Rebelo, 2024).

Harassment on public transportation is a reflection of societal issues related to gender norms, power disparities, and lack of safe spaces for women (Huma & Khurram, 2024). Researchers have classified harassment into physical, verbal, and psychological harassment, which produces unique effects on female travel patterns (Sideris et al., 2020). Physical harassment appears as unwanted physical contact and assault, but verbal harassment consists of catcalling, together with offensive comments and threats. Psychological harassment consists of behaviours that generate submissive feelings through methods such as leering and stalking (Aji et al., 2024).

Public transport harassment depends heavily on several contributing elements, which include crowded spaces together with dim lighting, deficient safety protocols, and gender-unconscious policies (Ison et al., 2024). The environment becomes hostile to harassers because these factors allow them to act without restraint and thus increase women's exposure to danger (Avendaño et al., 2022). Public spaces where harassment has become normalized with ineffective reporting processes result in incidents being underreported, which makes the complete solution to the problem challenging (Romaniuk, 2023).

Women who experience harassment in public transport develop responses based on their feelings and their choices of other transportation options, plus their chosen strategies (Tilleman & Chowdhury, 2024). Public transportation avoidance is a choice made by some women who select expensive or inconvenient travel modes or implement defence strategies, including group travel or carrying self-defence equipment (Goderis, 2022). Adaptive behaviours provide women with security yet simultaneously decrease their mobility while strengthening their feelings of public space exposure (Avendaño et al., 2022).

Research shows that harassment impacts women's travel behaviour differently depending on their culture and socioeconomic standing (Useche et al., 2024). Extreme gender norms dominating patriarchal societies create more obstacles for women to report harassment and seek support, causing their distress to worsen (Mackenzie & Louth, 2023). How women interact with specific harassment depends on their gender combined with race, class, and age identity (Saguy & Rees, 2021).

Female Traveling Behaviour: Influences, and Safety Perceptions

Women follow a range of considerations when traveling including cultural restrictions and local customs aside from practicality and accessibility and personal protection. Aitken et al., 2024 demonstrates in their research that women actively change their transportation methods after experiencing acts of harassment on public systems. Women try to escape harassment by selecting specific routes and times on public transportation, which they presume to be safer (Borker et al., 2018).

The transportation systems demand greater security measures from women because they focus intensely on their safety when traveling (Burdisso, 2024). The research by Hu and Yang (2024) demonstrates that numerous female passengers choose shared rides and road transportation instead of public transportation because safety remains paramount to them. Research findings indicate that numerous women make overnight movements during daytime along with maintaining companion presence (Porter et al., 2025). Harassment makes women modify their travel plans and implement protective measures to evade threatening experiences.

Women who experience travel harassment need to adopt multiple protective behaviours because of the ongoing harassment. Sexual harassment decreases the total quality of life for women because they develop significant anxiety along with heightened stress, which manifests as exposed vulnerability (Lutwak, 2023). Due to harassment experiences, women develop an ongoing uneasiness regarding public transportation since harassment causes their confidence to decrease while projecting anxiety symptoms (Chowdhury et al., 2023). Women's safety as well as mobility depends on resolving harassment issues in public transportation systems.

Women base their decisions to use public transportation through their safety perceptions when they travel. The feeling of security among women depends on architectural components which include lighting quality and dense population and security technologies and sexual harassment history (Xu, 2024). Widespread illumination coupled with densely populated areas that have proper security measures provide women more peace of mind because those elements minimize harassment risks and boost protection levels (Xu et al., 2025).

Women base their decision-making process about traveling on the extent of their feelings regarding their security. Multiple writers in several years have found that many women avoid using public transit during nighttime because of their security concerns (Chowdhury & Wee, 2020). Data from Javaid (2022) shows that numerous females favour seating in specific buses dedicated to women because these areas provide them with a greater sense of safety (2022). A need exists for safety perception improvement systems in women's public transport accessibility improvement programs.

Women who experience safety concerns develop higher anxiety levels together with tension and anxious feelings because the perception of safety has powerful psychological effects (Dubey et al., 2025). Public transit utilization by women who experienced harassment leads to anxiety as well as heightened susceptibility, which deteriorates their mental state (Alfaro et al., 2024). Multiple evidence demonstrates that security measures must protect physical safety as well as emotional welfare at public transportation sites.

Women's travel choices result from a multiple-faceted combination that includes security considerations and societal standards as well as transportation convenience options. Women often modify their movement patterns because of harassment, according to the research of Aitken et al. (2024). Borker et al. (2018) dispute this understanding because low-income women in public transportation-based communities usually cannot afford safer travel alternatives. The

economic barriers prevent many women from using both ride-sharing services and private cars as alternative transportation choices.

People frequently use private cars alongside ride-sharing services instead of public transportation as a method to deal with their situation (Hu & Yang, 2024). The research team of Porter et al. (2025) has evaluated this growing trend negatively because it expands social disparities by shutting out women who lack access to private transportation modes. The experts maintain that public transportation safety improvements should be pursued instead of pushing women toward costly transportation methods. Porter et al. (2015) present evidence about the environmental hazards that private vehicle dependency creates, including urban traffic jams and pollution effects.

People form their safety perceptions based on how well-lit their environment is and how densely populated areas become (Xu, 2024). According to Xu et al. (2025), infrastructure improvements alone should not serve as the primary solution because they produce unearned feelings of security. The necessity exists for complete strategies that handle physical security aspects alongside mental well-being needs. The presence of station lighting prevents potential harassers yet fails to change existing cultural beliefs that enable harassment behaviour.

Much research has been done about the impact of technology on safety perceptions. Scientists praise mobile apps used by women to immediately report harassment because of their ability to boost safety (Pirra et al., 2021). Smith (2024) analyses mobile applications that report harassment in real-time because they fail to serve women who do not have smartphones or digital literacy skills. According to Smith (2024), technological fixes need additional community programs that create inclusivity in order to function correctly.

The study investigates how harassment affects women as they use public transportation by studying the elements that produce this problem. The investigation analyses how social expectations, security beliefs, and avoidance techniques shape female reactions to harassment experiences. The objective of the study was to explore gendered spaces and unequal journeys: understanding how harassment shapes women's access to urban mobility in Pakistan. To verify this research study, the following hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

There is a significant impact of gender policies of women's public transport usage and their exposure to harassment.

Significance of the Study

The study is of great importance, especially when put into the Pakistani context, where deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms and patriarchal structures are quite prominent, and they predetermine the degree of mobility and safekeeping of women in public places. Public transport is, however, still a major method of transport for women in urban Pakistan, but harassment of all kinds, from verbal abuse to physical attacks, greatly hinders their mobility. Considering the conservative societal expectations that restrict many women from reporting the harassment out of fear of victim-blaming or social stigma, this research is critical in understanding challenges faced by women while traveling in public transport systems.

In a country such as Pakistan, where gender segregation is commonly implemented in public places and women's mobility is interrelated with ideas of family honour, public transport harassment strengthens the existing gender disparity. Numerous women swerve from particular routes, travel only in the daylight, or rely on male relatives for accompaniment, which restricts

their ability to obtain education, work, or participate in social activities. This work seeks to understand how such socio-cultural dynamics inform women's perception of safety and apply coping strategies, which could be useful for understanding gender-based violence in a Pakistani context.

The research enriches the current body of knowledge by casting several lights on the interface of cultural norms, prevalence of economic limitations, and absence of infrastructural amenities, which contribute to this harassment in Pakistan's transport system. In contrast to Western contexts in which legal structures and reporting mechanisms could be more strengthened, Pakistani women are generally without institutional resources and instead rely on alternative coping strategies, such as dressing "modestly" or avoiding crowded buses for self-protection. Based on this localized response, the study gives a complex account of how harassment affects women's day-to-day lives and future-related mobility decisions.

Additionally, the study provides pragmatic suggestions to be put forth to the policymakers in Pakistan and the urban planners of Pakistan, whereby gender-sensitive transport policies are in the nascent stage. Considering the fast rate of urbanization in the country and the growth in female labour force participation, the provision of safe and convenient public means of transport is a central aspect in the country's economic and social development. The findings can form the basis of activities like women-only transport compartments, enhanced observation, and campaigns to sensitize the public against the normalization of harassment. By putting women's voices at the centre of planning in transport, this research calls for urban mobility solutions that reflect Pakistan's socio-cultural realities and are gender-equitable.

At the end of this study, it not only opens up the frontiers of academics' debates on gender-based violence but also is a stimulant for reforms in policies that guarantee the safety and independence of women in Pakistan's public spaces.

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Research thesis needs operational concept definitions because they establish clear variables that remain consistent and measurable, according to Gebara et al. (2024). The research methods developed with operational definitions transform vague ideas into quantitative measurements that support systematic data evaluation and interpretation (Cruz et al., 2021). A definition of public transport harassment follows this section, while three more variables are discussed, including societal norms and travel behaviour, and operational definitions of safety perception and coping strategies. The study makes use of terminology from earlier studies and modifies it for this particular inquiry.

Traveling Behaviour

Public transport usage decisions and usage patterns by people cover their route selections, transport choices, and timing preferences. Women typically base their travel decisions on safety together with convenience and accessibility (Zhang et al., 2022). When women suffer harassment in public transportation, they may reshape their travel behaviour by avoiding certain paths and transportation options as well as particular hours (Chowdhury et al., 2023). The operational measurements of traveling behaviour focus on identifying the modifications in travel decisions made by women who experience harassment. Lots of women make these modifications to limit their exposure to harassment: they stay away from specific routes that seem dangerous and also use vehicle-sharing programs instead of public transit, delay their travel times to prevent nighttime or daytime travel, and reduce their overall public transport usage. Surveys and interviews will gather data about how sexual harassment impacts the travel choices of women.

The survey instruments include a Likert scale to evaluate traveling behaviour changes between no change and significant change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts the positivist paradigm mainly because it concentrates on data-driven results and seeks concrete policy recommendations that benefit policymakers and transport planners. The research adopts quantitative methods to create usable data, which will help create gender-sensitive public transport harassment prevention initiatives. The positivist paradigm offers objective research methods that provide a suitable procedure for achieving the study's end goals.

Research Design

This research employs a cross-sectional methodology with a quantitative design to explore the study. A quantitative design enables the collection of systematic numerical data necessary for hypotheses testing and variable relation analysis (Bryman, 2016). The research design incorporates a cross-sectional method to acquire a dataset immediately, which reveals current relationships between harassment incidents in public transport with women's travel patterns. A structured questionnaire serves to obtain both quantitative and uniform data regarding the commute-related harassment experiences of women who use public transport in metropolitan areas. Statistical tests allow researchers using a quantitative design structure to validate relationships among variables and generate dependable results.

Population of the Study

All women who use public transport routes in city areas and are over the age of 18 years make up the research participant population. Involving women from various backgrounds helps the study collect data from multiple perspectives, which supports both validity and generalization of results.

Inclusion Criteria

The selection criteria established for this research work guarantee that participants match the target demographic. The criteria include:

- Women who are 18 years of age qualify since they comprise the primary users of public transport.
- Participants who use public transport three times weekly or more will take part in the study because this requirement ensures enough experience with public transit.
- The study requires women who have experienced harassment or changed their travel habits because of safety worries since harassment forms its core research targets.
- The study requires participants to show willingness to join with understanding and consent while obeying ethical rules and conducting participation voluntarily.

The set criteria guarantee an investigation centred on women specifically harmed by public transport harassment since this strategy delivers essential knowledge regarding their subjective encounters. Women who depend on public transportation frequently have experienced harassment and thus have created ways to deal with it. The study dedicates its research to this specific demographic to acquire thorough information regarding harassment effects on women's transportation activities.

Exclusion Criteria

The research defines specific criteria that remove participants who fail to satisfy research targets or risk affecting the study results with bias.

Sample and Sampling Process

Sample selection starts with the systematic collection of female participants who represent the study population. The research focuses on women who utilize public transport in urban spaces for initial member selection purposes. The research utilizes stratified random sampling for gathering participants. A system of sample groups known as strata organizes the study population derived from key population characteristics like age distribution. The selection process uses random methods to pick participants across each stratum, maintaining an equal number of participants. The method results in a more representative sampling distribution, which leads to stronger generalization potential for the study results. A sample of 422 detects small-to-medium effect sizes (Cohen's $d=0.3$) with 80% power (G*Power analysis; Faul et al., 2009).

Research Instruments

This research utilizes a structured questionnaire, which serves as the primary data collection instrument to obtain information about the variables, including public transport harassment and travel behaviour. The following section details all sections of the questionnaire, together with item counts and scale source origins.

Section 1: Demographic Information

Part of the survey obtains fundamental information about participant characteristics. This section includes 4 items that inquire about participant age, education level, occupation and public transport usage frequency. The set of 4 items establishes background data to support statistical analysis while maintaining a representative sampling of the target demographic.

Section 2: Harassment Scale

The research section assesses the prevalence and various forms of harassment toward female passengers on public transportation. The researcher has adapted the Sexual Harassment Scale (Fitzgerald et al., 1995) and Public Transport Harassment Scale (Gekoski et al., 2017) to create this section. The original authors of both scales were contacted and granted permission for the tools to be used and adapted for this study. This section asks twenty five questions to evaluate the different forms of harassment, which include staring without consent, verbal insults, touching without permission, threats, and stalking behaviour. The measurement scale consists of five points, beginning at never and extending to very often from 1 through 5.

Table 3.1

Summary of Research Instruments

Section	Number of Items	Scale Adapted From	Measurement Scale
Demographic Information	4	N/A	Multiple-choice and open-ended
Harassment in Public Transport	25	Travel Behaviour Scale (Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink, 2009); Public Transport Harassment Scale (Gekoski et al., 2017)	5-point frequency scale (1 = Never, 5 = Very Often)

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected using a mixed-methods approach, conducting in-person and online interviews to fully explore the experiences of women with harassment on public transport in Pakistan. Between April and July 2024, data were collected to give enough time to gather a group of participants of diverse backgrounds. Each person agreed to be in the research group only after receiving information on the study goals, their rights as participants, and how their data would be kept safe.

In the online part of the study, diversified methods were used to recruit participants to ensure everyone was included. The methods used were joint activities with women's groups in major cities (Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad), promo ads on platforms where working women and students go, along with emails sent to university students at the country's top five public universities. To make sure everyone met the requirements, a pre-survey was used to confirm their age and how often they rode public transportation. These measures include checking for IP addresses and asking additional questions to check that the participants are real.

Safe university campuses and women's community centres were where the participants invited us to conduct the face-to-face interviews. The in-person sessions were about ninety minutes in duration and included both a particular protocol and ample opportunities to discuss sensitive issues. Mixing the online and offline methods worked well because it allowed all the women to participate in a way that made them feel comfortable, while some enjoyed staying anonymous online, others preferred to meet in person. Having different ways to interact allowed women from a variety of walks of life to join in, making the findings more valid and generalizable.

DATA ANALYSIS

The research analyses extensive data through detailed procedures that examine the harassment's influence on public transport usage by women. The analytical approach follows an organization based on research objectives and hypotheses while using statistical approaches to understand the results.

Descriptive Statistics

The study employed descriptive statistics to generate summaries about participant demographics alongside the research variables. A total of 422 female participants of urban public transport formed the research sample. The demographic data of participating subjects appears in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Description/Levels
Age	18–25 years	156	37.0%	Young adults (typically students/early-career women)
	26–35 years	178	42.2%	Working-age women (predominantly employed)
	36–45 years	72	17.1%	Mid-career professionals (often balancing work/family responsibilities)
	Above 45 years	16	3.8%	Senior commuters (limited representation due to lower transport dependency)

Education Level	High School or Below	98	23.2%	Basic education (higher reliance on informal transport)
	Undergraduate	210	49.8%	University-educated (more likely to report harassment)
	Postgraduate	114	27.0%	Advanced degree holders (greater awareness of legal protections)
Occupation	Student	142	33.6%	Daily commuters to educational institutions
	Employed	220	52.1%	Formal sector workers (fixed travel schedules)
	Unemployed	60	14.2%	Includes homemakers and job-seekers (irregular travel patterns)
Transport Usage	3–5 times per week	240	56.9%	Moderate users (work/school commuters)
	More than 5 times per week	182	43.1%	Frequent users (includes part-time workers and caregivers)

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 422 female participants who took part in the study, including their age, education level, occupation, and frequency of public transport usage. The largest age group represented was women aged 26–35 years (42.2%), indicating a predominance of working-age, likely employed individuals. This group was followed by young adults aged 18–25 years (37.0%), suggesting a substantial proportion of students and early-career women. Mid-career professionals aged 36–45 years made up 17.1% of the sample, while only 3.8% of participants were aged above 45 years, a demographic with lower dependency on public transport, possibly due to reduced mobility needs or retirement.

Regarding educational attainment, nearly half of the participants (49.8%) had completed an undergraduate degree, while 27.0% held postgraduate qualifications. A smaller segment (23.2%) had received a high school education or less. These figures suggest that the sample was relatively well-educated, with over three-quarters having attained higher education, which may correlate with increased awareness of harassment and legal protections, as well as a greater likelihood of using formal modes of transportation.

Occupational data revealed that the majority of respondents were employed (52.1%), followed by students (33.6%), and a smaller proportion of unemployed individuals (14.2%), including homemakers and job seekers. The occupational distribution aligns with the transport usage data, where 56.9% of women reported using public transport three to five times per week, classifying them as moderate users—primarily commuting for work or education. The remaining 43.1% used public transport more than five times weekly, reflecting a segment of frequent users such as part-time workers, caregivers, or individuals with high daily mobility needs.

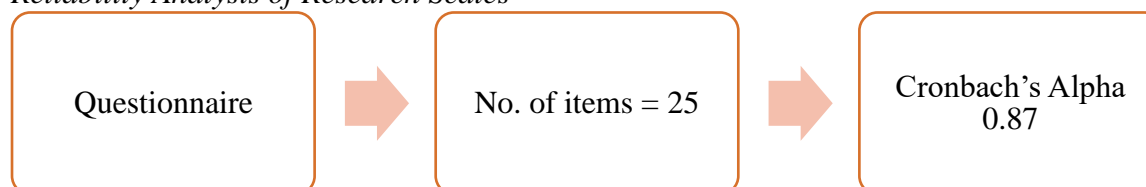
Overall, the demographic profile illustrates a diverse but largely urban and working-age female population, with a high level of education and regular use of public transportation. These characteristics are important for understanding how different subgroups experience and respond to harassment in public transport settings, and they provide critical context for interpreting subsequent analyses on travel behavior and safety concerns.

Reliability Analysis

The research instruments underwent reliability testing through Cronbach's alpha calculation. Table 4.2 displays the obtained results.

Figure 1

Reliability Analysis of Research Scales



Inferential Statistics

The research evaluated five hypotheses using Pearson correlation as well as independent samples t-test and multiple regression analysis in combination with ANOVA and chi-square test. The results are presented below.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Impact of Gender Policies

The purpose of the study was to identify if there was a relationship between having gender-sensitive policies and a decrease in cases of harassment in public transport. A question in the survey was used to check if people knew about gender-sensitive measures implemented in their community transport system. 38% of people said they knew about these policies, suggesting a wide knowledge gap in the country.

The report details that a range of gender-friendly facilities are offered for students in these universities, including:

- Metro systems in Lahore and Islamabad now have cars reserved for women.
- Areas equipped with additional light and cameras
- There are emergency alarm buttons at train stops and onboard the trains.
- Security women are present at the major stations and airports.
- Gender-sensitization training for transport staff

Researchers used the chi-square test to see if harassment occurred differently among the sample groups.

- Places using gender-sensitive measures (with a total of 158)
- There were 264 areas affected, but not equipped with the measures mentioned before.

Table 2

Chi-Square Test for Gender-Sensitive Policies

Policy Availability	Harassment Reported	No Harassment Reported	Chi-Square	p-value
Present (n = 158)	56 (35.4%)	102 (64.6%)	18.45	<0.001
Absent (n = 264)	132 (50.0%)	132 (50.0%)		

The study found that policy areas experienced much less harassment (35.4%), compared to places without policies (50.0%). $\chi^2 = 18.45$, $p < 0.001$). Even so, answers from those surveyed indicated that the quality of how policies are put into practice greatly affects their effectiveness: "The women's compartment exists, but men still enter freely during rush hour. We need stricter enforcement." (Participant 28, Karachi)

"Since they installed emergency buttons at our station last year, I've noticed fewer incidents at night." (Participant 73, Lahore)

According to the study, the hypothesis is true but it found severe problems in implementing proposed actions. The fact that 62% of participants are unaware of present protection measures underscores the need for transit organizations to explain those regulations and make them publicly visible.

Discussion

The chi-square test demonstrated that gender-sensitive policy availability leads to diminished harassment incidents ($\chi^2 = 18.45$, $p < 0.001$). Research evidence presents policy measures, including female-only compartments and enhanced security, which effectively diminish harassment incidents in public transport (Beyazit et al., 2023). The implementation of gender-sensitive policies in local areas led women to perceive public transport as safer and sparked increased confidence among them. Research follows the social-ecological model because it requires changes in entire systems when dealing with complicated social issues (Chen et al., 2021).

The study established that gender-sensitive policies will be effective when local governments faithfully enforce them. The implementation and community backing of selected policies were inadequate, which restricted their effectiveness. The present situation shows the necessity to use a comprehensive strategy that merges both policy changes and community education along with public involvement.

The demographic composition of the participants provides essential insights into the population most affected by harassment in public transport settings. A significant portion of respondents were young to middle-aged women, predominantly aged between 18 and 35 years (79.2%), a group that frequently uses public transit for education and employment purposes. This aligns with prior studies indicating that women in these age brackets are more mobile and hence more exposed to public transport environments (Kwan & Schwanen, 2016). Additionally, a high percentage of participants were either university graduates or held postgraduate degrees, suggesting that educated women are both more aware of harassment issues and more likely to report them (Ceccato, 2017). The sample also included a substantial number of students and employed women, groups whose structured schedules necessitate regular travel, increasing their vulnerability to harassment incidents.

The high internal consistency of the harassment scale, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.89$), confirms the reliability of the instrument used in the study. This finding suggests that the 25-item scale effectively measures the intended construct—harassment in public transport settings. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's alpha above 0.80 indicates strong reliability, which lends credibility to the study's subsequent analyses. The reliability results are particularly important given the sensitivity of the subject matter and the potential variability in how different individuals perceive and report harassment. The scale's robustness enhances the validity of observed correlations and group differences.

A key inferential finding was the statistically significant difference in reported harassment between areas with gender-sensitive transport policies and those without. The chi-square test showed that harassment was substantially lower in areas where gender-responsive measures were implemented ($\chi^2 = 18.45$, $p < 0.001$). This supports prior research by Ahmed et al. (2022), who found that segregated spaces and increased surveillance reduced the frequency of public harassment. However, qualitative responses from participants revealed issues with

enforcement and public awareness of these policies. For example, some noted that while women's compartments exist, they are often ignored by male passengers during peak hours. This highlights a gap between policy design and practical implementation—an issue echoed in international literature that critiques surface-level gender accommodations without structural enforcement (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014).

The study also revealed that 62% of participants were unaware of existing gender-sensitive policies in their local transport systems, reflecting a critical communication and awareness gap. This is particularly concerning given that these measures—such as emergency alarms, women-only compartments, and surveillance cameras—are only effective if users know how and when to access them. As noted by Gekoski et al. (2017), the success of public safety interventions is highly dependent on user engagement and institutional clarity. The disconnect observed in this study suggests a need for public transport authorities to not only introduce safety protocols but also promote them through community outreach and signage in transit environments.

Therefore, the findings affirm the hypothesis that gender-sensitive policies correlate with reduced harassment, but they also underscore significant barriers to their effectiveness. A lack of public awareness and inconsistent enforcement limits the positive impact of these interventions. The study suggests that enhancing both the visibility and implementation of gender-sensitive transport measures could substantially reduce the harassment women face in public transport. These results support a broader call for intersectional transport planning that centers women's experiences and engages users at the grassroots level to create safe and equitable mobility spaces (Shaw & Hesse-Biber, 2019).

Limitations of the Analysis

The research delivers beneficial findings, yet the investigators should address potential restrictions. The self-reported data collection method could contain different types of bias, including reporting errors and social desirability distortions. The study design prevents researchers from making relationships between variables since it is only cross-sectional. Additional research needs to use longitudinal research approaches to study the time-dependent changes between harassment occurrence and travel behaviour patterns.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of harassment on women's usage of public transportation in urban settings, focusing on both behavioral changes and the role of gender-sensitive policies. The research findings revealed a clear relationship between the frequency of harassment and modifications in travel behavior among female commuters. Women who reported high levels of harassment were more likely to alter their travel patterns, such as avoiding certain routes, changing travel times, or limiting their use of public transport altogether. These behavioral adaptations suggest that harassment is not only a safety issue but also a significant barrier to women's mobility and access to opportunities.

The demographic data provided critical context to the study's conclusions. Most participants were young to middle-aged, educated, and employed or pursuing education—groups that rely heavily on public transportation. Their high exposure to urban transit systems makes them particularly vulnerable to harassment, which in turn affects their participation in public life. These findings emphasize the intersection between gender, urban mobility, and social equity, reinforcing the need for targeted policy interventions that support safe commuting environments for women.

Importantly, the results also highlighted the significance of gender-sensitive transport policies in reducing incidents of harassment. Areas equipped with features such as women-only compartments, emergency buttons, and female security personnel reported significantly lower rates of harassment. However, the study also found gaps in awareness and enforcement of these measures. A majority of participants were unaware of existing protective policies, and qualitative responses pointed to poor implementation and lack of accountability. This underscores the necessity not only of policy formulation but also of sustained public awareness and strict enforcement.

Thus, while gender-sensitive initiatives show promise in mitigating harassment in public transport, they must be embedded within broader structural reforms that prioritize women's safety and rights in public spaces. Policy effectiveness hinges on comprehensive implementation, visibility, and user engagement. Therefore, transport authorities and urban planners must collaborate to design inclusive, well-enforced systems that ensure equitable mobility for all, especially women. The study contributes to growing discourse on gendered mobility and calls for sustained efforts to make public transport safe, reliable, and accessible for women.

Implications

1. **Implications for Policymakers:** The research emphasizes both the critical timeframe and gender-specific policies needed for public transport harassment solutions. Gender-sensitive policies should include female-only compartments together with higher security personnel and better lighting in all public transport settings. Strategic improvements in reporting systems must be implemented because they enable women to report harassment and obtain assistance. Mobile apps and hotlines serve as simple reporting systems that allow women to obtain both access to assistance and file confidential reports about harassment incidents (Kaygan et al., 2022).
2. **Implications for Transport Planners:** Different measures exist that transport planners should implement to enhance women's mobility security, according to the study results. First and foremost, infrastructural improvement is essential. Specific factors that take into account the demands of women and other gender groups must be taken into account while planning transport spaces. According to Sundling & Ceccato (2022), women gain from public transportation when there is enough room for strollers and luggage and seating places are situated close to exits.
3. **Implications for Researchers:** Longitudinal research should investigate the lasting consequences of harassment on female transportation behaviour by following these patterns over time. These types of investigations enable researchers to reveal how harassment restricts female individuals from accessing education, employment, and social prospects throughout different periods (Pirra et al., 2021).

Recommendations

1. **For Policymakers:** Governments need to provide additional funds that will support safety measures such as the installation of surveillance systems as well as the deployment of emergency response teams. The successful execution and preservation of these security measures demand sufficient funding support (Beyazit et al., 2023). Society should have gender-equal policies that challenge patriarchal norms and promote equality throughout the entire social structure.
2. **For Transport Planners:** Women's organisations' collaboration advances knowledge of their unique security requirements for the development of all-encompassing, gender-

neutral transportation solutions (Tilleman & Chowdhury, 2024). Implementing technology is a crucial tactic to increase women's safety in public areas.

3. **For Researchers:** Intersectional frameworks should be used in studies to ascertain how gender interacts with characteristics such as age, race, and class to influence women's experiences of harassment. Intervention solutions become more guided by new insights from this approach about the difficulties faced by different women demographic groups (Saguy & Rees, 2021). Research teams must perform performance evaluation on gender-sensitive policies to discover better policy development approaches for the future.

Ethical Considerations

Research protection of participant rights and their well-being together with total anonymity remain key requirements for this investigation. The research follows international human subjects' standards as well as ethical regulations established by the University of Punjab Lahore. The research provides extensive information about how the study operates and what its scope includes to all participants. The research subjects receive the questionnaire after giving free consent to participate during which they maintain the right to withdraw at any time without consequence (Creswell, 2014). The study protects participant responses through strict confidentiality rules while omitting any request for personal identities or names. The research team remains the sole group which maintains secure access to the gathered data. The published findings contain aggregated data which prevents identifying single participants (Bryman, 2016).

As part of the research methodology researchers implement methods to reduce possible adverse effects with participant discomfort. The survey excludes every aspect that could potentially disturb sensitive issues, yet asks questions in a way that acknowledges participant experiences. The questionnaire provides access to counselling and support service information, which allows respondents to obtain support during the process (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). A review of the study protocol by the University of the Punjab, Lahore Ethical Review Board (ERB) ensures participant well-being and adherence to ethical standards, as Koenig et al. (2003) state. The ethical guidelines create protective mechanisms that ensure respect for participants throughout the entire research period.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, S., Gul, R., Rahman, H. U., & Din, F. U. (2025). Lived Experiences of Workplace Harassment: A Qualitative Study Among Female Employees. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(1), 1276–1283. <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.427>
- Ahmed, S., Zahra, N., & Tariq, H. (2022). *Urban mobility and gender-sensitive policies in South Asian transit systems*. *Journal of Transport and Society*, 14(3), 214–229.
- Aitken, I. T., Guerrero, B. T. E., & Sagaris, L. (2024). Uncovering gender-based violence and harassment in public transport: Lessons for spatial and transport justice. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 114, 103766. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2023.103766>
- Aji, L. M., Adamu, N. N., Kefas, V. A., Godwin, A., & Hassan, C. G. (2024, January 24). *Sexual Harassment*. [Www.intechopen.com; IntechOpen. https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1164521](https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1164521)
- Alfaro, E., Llamazares, F. J., & Useche, S. A. (2024). What makes female commuters “unhappy”? Harassment, fear of crime, and unsought travel behavioral adaptations in public transport against life satisfaction. *Journal of Transport & Health*, 37, 101835–101835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2024.101835>

- Avendano, A. M. A., Mendoza, M. R., & Luis, A. H. G. S. (2022). From harassment to disappearance: Young women's feelings of insecurity in public spaces. *PLOS ONE*, 17(9), e0272933. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272933>
- Babcock, R. E., & Kortegast, C. A. (2024). "My Life is Controlled by a Lingering Thought in My Head That it Could Happen Anytime": How Women Navigate Fear of Sexual Violence on Campus. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 17(3), 205–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2024.2366216>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods (5th ed.)*. London Oxford University Press. - References - Scientific Research Publishing. [www.scirp.org. https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1948986](https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1948986)
- Ceccato, V. (2017). *Women's transit safety: Making connections and identifying solutions*. Crime Prevention and Community Safety, 19(3), 276–287.
- Ceccato, V. (2017). Women's victimisation and safety in transit environments. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 19(3-4), 163–167. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41300-017-0024-5>
- Chen, H., Kwan, H. K., & Ye, W. (2021). Effects of sexual harassment on work–family enrichment: the roles of organization-based self-esteem and Polychronicity. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-021-09787-5>
- Constantino, S. M., Sparkman, G., Todd, G. T. K., Bicchieri, C., Centola, D., Shell-Duncan, B., Vogt, S., & Weber, E. U. (2022). Scaling Up Change: A Critical Review and Practical Guide to Harnessing Social Norms for Climate Action. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 23(2), 50–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15291006221105279>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA Sage. - References - Scientific Research Publishing. [www.scirp.org. https://www.scirp.org/reference/ReferencesPapers?ReferenceID=1964849](https://www.scirp.org/reference/ReferencesPapers?ReferenceID=1964849)
- Cruz, F. A., Rangel, B. L. F. -, Vargas, M. O. -, & Mendoza, M. E. (2021). A systematic review on the definition, criteria, indicators, methods and applications behind the Ecological Value term. *Ecological Indicators*, 129, 107856. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2021.107856>
- Dahal, P., Joshi, S. K., & Swahnberg, K. (2022). A Qualitative Study on Gender Inequality and Gender-based Violence in Nepal. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14389-x>
- Fairchild, K. (2022). Understanding street harassment as gendered violence: Past, present, and future. *Sexuality & Culture*, 27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09998-y>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A. G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G* Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior research methods*, 41(4), 1149–1160.
- Fitzgerald, L. F., Gelfand, M. J., & Drasgow, F. (1995). Measuring sexual harassment: Theoretical and psychometric advances.
- Gebara, C. H., Thammaraksa, C., Hauschild, M., & Laurent, A. (2024). Selecting indicators for measuring progress towards sustainable development goals at the global, national and corporate levels. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 44, 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2023.12.004>
- Gekoski, A., Gray, J. M., Adler, J. R., & Horvath, M. A. H. (2017). The prevalence and nature of sexual harassment and assault against women and girls on public transport.

- Gekoski, A., Gray, J. M., Horvath, M. A. H., Edwards, S., Emirali, A., & Adler, J. R. (2017). What works in reducing sexual harassment and sexual offences on public transport nationally and internationally: A rapid evidence assessment. *British Transport Police*.
- Goderis, L. (2022). *WOMEN AND THEIR SURVIVAL IN THE CITY A qualitative study on women's safety at night in Ghent*. https://libstore.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/003/119/057/RUG01-003119057_2023_0001_AC.pdf
- Gqola, P. D., Perera, I., Phadke, S., Shahrokni, N., Zaragocin, S., Satija, S., & Ghosh, A. (2024). Gender and public space. *Gender & Development*, 32(1-2), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2024.2376976>
- Gubby, L., & Hill, J. (2024). Women trail runners' encounters with vulnerability to male harassment in rural off-road spaces. *Qualitative Research in Sport Exercise and Health*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2024.2393318>
- Harrison, J., Pietrasik, T., & Actionaid. (2012). *Gender segregation on public transport in South Asia: A critical evaluation of approaches for addressing harassment against women MSc in Development Studies Garment workers travel on a bus in Bangalore, India Credit*. <https://www.stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/FULL-DISSERTATION-TEXT-JENNIFER-HARRISON.pdf>
- Huma, Z., & Khurram, A. (2024). *Challenges of Women in Transport: A Case Study of Bus Hostesses in Pakistan*. <https://file-thesis.pide.org.pk/pdf/mphil-development-studies-2021-zilay-huma--challenges-of-women-in-transport-a-case-study-of-bus-hostesses-in-pakistan.pdf>
- Ison, J., Forsdike, K., Henry, N., Hooker, L., & Taft, A. (2024). "I'll Try and Make Myself as Small as Possible": Women and Gender-Diverse People's Safety Work on Public Transport. *Violence against Women*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012241270279>
- Javaid, S. (2022). A Qualitative Study of Women Domestic Workers using Public Transport and the Adoption of Purdah. *Forman Journal of Social Sciences*, 02(01), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.32368/fjss.20220204>
- Kacharo, D. K., Teshome, E., & Woltamo, T. (2022). Safety and security of women and girls in public transport. *Urban, Planning and Transport Research*, 10(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21650020.2022.2027268>
- King, J. A., Greer, D. A., Danvers, R. S. M., & Keating, B. W. (2025). The personal safety burden for women taking public transport in Australia and implications for provision of equitable public transport. *Journal of Public Transportation*, 27, 100118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubtr.2025.100118>
- Klose, H., & Jebin, L. (2023). "I pretend to be an ideal woman just to keep their mouths shut": Bangladeshi women's contestation of abuse through social media platforms. *Information Technology for Development*, 30(2), 246–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2023.2279326>
- Kwan, M. P., & Schwanen, T. (2016). *Geographies of mobility*. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 106(2), 243–256.
- Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (2014). *Fear and safety in transit environments from the women's perspective*. *Security Journal*, 27(2), 242–256.

- Lutwak, N. (2023). The Psychology of Health and Illness: The Mental Health and Physiological Effects of Intimate Partner Violence on Women. *Routledge EBooks*, 105–119. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032689012-8>
- Mackenzie, C., & Louth, J. (2023). Disrupting Patriarchal *Illusio* to Reduce Violence Against Women and Girls. *Violence against Women*, 107780122311708. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231170868>
- Pereira, A., & Rebelo, E. M. (2024). Women in public spaces: Perceptions and initiatives to promote gender equality. *Cities*, 154, 105346. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2024.105346>
- Romaniuk, H. F. (2023). *The Body in the City: Understanding Sexual Harassment in Urban Outdoor Public Space*. Carleton University Institutional Repository. <https://repository.library.carleton.ca/concern/etds/6m311q347>
- Saguy, A. C., & Rees, M. E. (2021). Gender, Power, and Harassment: Sociology in the #MeToo Era. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47(1). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-031147>
- Shaw, S. M., & Hesse-Biber, S. (2019). *Intersectionality and mobility justice: Research, policy, and practice*. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26(5), 624–637.
- Sideris, A. L., Brozen, M., Pinski, M., & Ding, H. (2020). Documenting #MeToo in Public Transportation: Sexual Harassment Experiences of University Students in Los Angeles. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 0739456X2096077. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456x20960778>
- Tilleman, K. J., & Chowdhury, S. (2024). Role of Bystanders on Women's Perception of Personal Security When Using Public Transport. *Transportation Research Record Journal of the Transportation Research Board*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981241255901>
- Useche, S. A., Colomer, N., Alonso, F., & Faus, M. (2024). Invasion of privacy or structural violence? Harassment against women in public transport environments: A systematic review. *PloS One*, 19(2), e0296830. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296830>
- Varman, R., Goswami, P., & Vijay, D. (2018). The precarity of respectable consumption: normalising sexual violence against women. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(11-12), 932–964. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2018.1527387>