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EVERYDAY HARASSMENT and WOMEN'S MOBILITY

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Abstract: *Public sexual harassment of women conducting their everyday lives is significantly underreported [1]. Such experiences are not only traumatic, but can have a long term effect on women's sense of worth and on their mobility patterns. The design of future transport systems provides an opportunity to address many aspects of mobility, from origin to destination and the factors influencing or limiting travel choices. Richer, more inclusive dialogues with transport users during planning and implementation may reduce current inequalities and create more inclusive accessible transport systems.*

Key Words: Transport and urban design, gender equality

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a long standing need to address the safety of women in public spaces. This is becoming more urgent in light of policies to increase the use of public and active forms of transport. Women consistently report feeing less safe during journeys due to factors such as personal safety, crime, street lighting [2].

Some initiatives addressing overall citizen safety have been introduced, such as the need for well-lit areas (see 'defensible space' [3] and '(Designing Out Crime' [4 and 5] and accessibility toolkits are available to help planners [6]. Despite this public sexual harassment targetted at women, including on public transport [7 and 8] is still a problem. This may be a consequence of a systems error in which the needs of women are often ignored by planning policies fail to take into account '…that women and men use public space very differently and have different concerns about how it meets their needs'.. [9]

This paper presents results from a small UK study into public sexual harassment of women and the effect on their mobility and self-esteem. It then discusses the need for a cultural shift in terms of raising awareness of what is acceptable/unacceptable public behaviour, and the need for designers/planners to consider practical and cultural inclusive design.

2. PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT

According to UN Women [10] '…sexual harassment [of women] in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it.' This is worrying as it is a well recognised problem across the world [11]. According to [12] studies show that between 70% -100% of women surveyed reported incidents of public sexual harassment. Poland, Croatia and Turkey have rates as high as 85% [13], in Egypt 25% and in a 2,000-person US survey rates were at 65% [14]. In addition, Gallup data from 143 countries in 2011 show that in Italy, France, Australia and the U.S., men are considerably more likely than women to say they feel safe walking alone at night in their communities [15].

Public sexual harassment is defined by [16] as having the following characteristics: the targets are female; the harassers are male; the harassers are unacquainted with their targets;

the encounter is face to face; the forum is a public one; the content of the speech, if any, is not intended as public discourse. Thus, remarks can be aimed at individuals, though they may overheard, and are objectively degrading, objectifying, humiliating and frequently threatening in nature.

One reasons why this issue may not be taken seriously is cultural acceptance: many people, particularly men, regard such behaviour as harmless flirtation [17]. But as Langelan [18] states, it is not only 'ineffective, but consistently counterproductive; women react with disgust, not desire, with fear, not fascination' Adopting a feminist, approach, [19] argues that men are 'blind' to the pain women suffer, neither seeing it or understanding its consequences.

The prevalence of sexual harassment on public transport has also been documented: in 2002 71% of 200 Bejing women were 'used to being sexually harassed' [20]. In 2004 64% (of 632) Tokyo women who travelled during the rush-hour, said they were groped while commuting [21]. In 2009 the Centre for Equity and Inclusion surveyed 630 women in New Delhi and Old Delhi, India and found that 95% of women said their mobility was restricted because of fear of male sexual harassment. Another 82% identified the bus as the most unsafe mode of public transportation because of male harassers [22]. That this fear is very real is reflected in the case of female student Jyoti Singh, who was raped and subsequently died from her injuries after boarding a New Delhi bus with a male friend in 2013[23]. In the UK, a YouGov poll of 1047 people was carried out for End Violence Against Women [24] which found that almost twice as many women in London as men said they did not feel safe using London public transport at any time and 55% reported unwanted sexual attention on public transport

3. METHODOLOGY
The aim of the study was to explore women's experiences of public sexual harassment in the preceding 12 months a medium sized UK city. A mixed methods approach was used comprising an online survey [25] and telephone interviews. The survey link was promoted through a variety of online networks. 270 responses were received from women, and 193 completed surveys were included in the analysis. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with 16 participants. 45% of respondents were 17-39 years of age. Just over 90% lived, worked or were attending educational institutions in the city.

4. RESULTS
60% (118) of the sample had experienced some form of public sexual harassment during the previous 12 months: 40% had received unwanted sexual comments, 33% had been wolf whistled, 12% groped and 20% had experienced some other form of harassment Over half ignored the incidents, 14% challenged it directly, and in just over 3% someone else intervened. In terms of location, the majority of incidents occurred on the street, on public transport and outside bars. When asked how safe they felt on public transport or in the public realm, 4% stated that they felt 'very safe'; 51% indicated that they felt 'fairly safe', 36% 'not very safe' and 9% 'not safe at all'. The rest of the paper focuses on the 72% of incidents which took place on public transport (13%) or on the street (59%). Incidents included:
- Unwanted physical contact (sexual and physical assault, hair stroking of children, bottom slapping, being pelted with bottles/eggs, forced into cars).

- Nonverbal behaviours including exposure of genitals, and sexual gestures, being followed (on foot and in cars) and having movements blocked or copied
- Unwanted verbal behaviour including being sworn at by pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, wolf whistles, being subjected to crude, sexual and patronising comments, propositions and being forced to engage in unwanted (sexual) conversation

The location of the incidents included all public spaces: '*hundreds of incidents, too many to articulate, this is the reality of day to day life*'. The length of incidents varied – from one-off unwanted sexual comments and wolf whistling to being followed home: '*Last year I was followed home from [a local nightclub], by a man who tried talking to me. If it weren't for a couple outside halls who knows what could have happened*'.

Respondents mostly tried to ignore the comments, mainly out of fear of reprisals or escalations. For example*, I ignore it because I worry that if I challenge it the situation may escalate, especially if I have my children with me and fear for their safety. It also depends if there are other people around…If it is at night…then I do feel too afraid to challenge.*

If they did complain, they suffered from a victim-blaming culture where they were routinely seen as 'at fault' for the harassment, typically focused on their clothing and alchohol consumption. They were also that is was just a joke, or 'banter' and were accused of lacking a sense of humour. Also frustrating was non-intervention from the public, perhaps because harassment went unrecognised or a reluctance to become involved.

Women admitted feeling unsafe when they were alone, especially at dusk or night time, near groups of men, in public spaces and car parks, in taxis, in deserted precincts, in underpasses and poorly lit areas. The impact on mobility patterns is clear. '*I would not travel on a bus after 6pm*'; '*…commonplace for me to bolster my safety by not going to lonely places, by using public transport at night rather than return to a car park*'. This is confirmed by focus groups conducted as part of METPEX [26] in which women reported that they routinely put a great deal of thought and planning when deciding whether to go out after dark by risk assessing how they would get to and from a destination: if the risk assessment showed a high danger level in their door to door journey (deserted streets, bus stops, transport stations/lack of transport staff/badly lit car parks) they did not go out.

5. DISCUSSION
The need for attitudes of the public and law enforcers to change was clear, including the need for better education on the meaning of citizenship, zero tolerance, more stringent policing and enforcement and better treatment of victims,:

> '*Until society's attitudes change I don't think there's anything that can be done to make us feel safe. I'm getting really tired of being told as a woman it's not safe for me to walk alone especially at night: why not tell men it's not okay to treat us the way they do? It angers me that society has the ability to make women feel like victims just because of our gender*'.

The results accord with other studies pointing to barriers towards female mobility, which may be significantly underreported to authorities and town planners either because the events in themselves are seen as too trivial, too common or reporting is too problematic with little chance of success. Thus it is difficult to separate public sexual harassment of women from gender mobility issues and this points to an existing gender disparity in

transport planning [27] which impacts on female mobility patterns. This is despite the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty (2007) which requires public authorities to remove gender discrimination in planning/delivery of services [28]. [28] found that many local authorities had not taken on board the the legislation, although there were some examples of good practice. In South Yorkshire a community safety audit enabled women and designers to undertake a 'walkabout' around the city. The result was written into planning briefs and this process is now embedded in all new developments. This 'walkabout' shows that authorities and transport planners can map the whole journey, rather than a particular mode of transport.

Therefore, while it is contended elsewhere that the experiences of the longest journey have the greatest effect on perceived quality [29] the evidence here may support a contrary view - that there is a threshold level at which experiences may be so unpleasant, even on short parts of a journey, that they not only bias perception but change mobility patterns. Thus, designing for the whole journey is necessary, as reflected by a UK Door to Door Strategy :

> *'If we want people to make different travel choices, we must think more clearly about their whole journey, how each part of it connects, and how we can better integrate those parts.' [30]*

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that all public transport operators undertake a review of existing services, using the Gender Equality Duty as a baseline, and include a review of waiting areas in terms of adequate lighting, seating and staffing; a reporting mechanism between providers and public transport operators; regular equality training for front line staff on handling and reporting incidents, the inclusion of a wide range of groups in public transport development; collaboration with criminal justice agencies and collection of data on high risk areas to inform appropriate interventions.

Table 1: Recommendations for removal of mobility barriers (plotted against sections in the H-S model of ergonomics [31]

Factors	Recommendations to remove mobility barriers	How this may be achieved
Personal issues		
Social and cultural factors	• Removal of 'lad culture' • Education which increases respect for all • Need to take public harassment (seriously)	• Safer streets, better lighting and sight lines, visible policing, ASBOs, zero tolerance of harassment • Positive role models • Citizenship training • Policing, training for offenders
Individual factors	Empowerment of female travelers	• Greater use of technology to support personal safety • Easier reporting systems • Increased opportunities to share experiences
Organisational issues		
Management factors	Gender mainstreaming representation of women in transport decision making/ consultation	• Increased representation of women on transport related committees • Increased use of participatory design and consultation with all system users
Infrastructu	• Zero tolerance zones	• National coverage/signage that disrespectful

re factors	• Redesign of transport routes and services	behaviour will not be tolerated • Increased use of accurate real time information
Contextual issues		
Task factors	• Joined up transport services to reduce waiting • Improvements in training of transport staff • Women only services or services where drivers have been authenticated • Mobility services e.g lift sharing	• Regular services with staff who have the authority and confidence to act on incidents • All taxi drivers/lift sharers should have criminal record checks • Secure apps to inform friends and relatives of travel choices
Design factors	• Street design • Lighting • Car parks and parking • Increased surveillance and police presence	• Improvements to public realm (e.g. removal of graffiti, rubbish) • Encourage use of streets by mixture of people throughout the day • Improved lighting to remove dark spots

7. CONCLUSIONS

A humane city should be one which facilitates, empowers and supports all its citizens.
It is not one which provides opportunities for or leads to inhumanity and suffering. This
paper has demonstrated that the very design of cities, transport and policing systems
may play a role in enabling the public sexual harassment of women. This and other
studies show that the impact of public sexual harassment affects women's mobility
patterns at planning, mode, time and route choice levels, leading to continued
'ghettozitation within the home' [16].

In order to tackle this global and seemingly intractable issue, cultural inclusive design also
is needed as well as practical inclusive design: and so an acknowledgement of the social
and cultural factors which underpin public sexual harassment of women is needed, followed
by a zero tolerance ethos and a greater awareness that public sexual harassment of women
is unacceptable, offensive and discriminatory behaviour.

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