

## Sexual Harassment on Males in Public Transport

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**Abstract**—Although sexual harassments of women in public transport have been studied over the years which were considered as an issue related to power, men are also targets of sexual harassments in public transport although there are limited studies which have focused on their experiences. To address this gap the researcher has attempted to answer the question “How do men get harassed in Public transportation? And how do men react in these instances”, through an exploratory study. The main objectives of this study were to understand the nature of sexual harassment men face in public transportation and to identify the reactions of men to sexual harassments they faced in public transportation. Researcher has used qualitative method in this study conducting in-depth semi structured interviews of 15 male respondents of age between 20 to 25 to explore and explain their experiences and responses to sexual harassments in public transport. In this exploratory study the researcher discovered that the men are also victims of sexual harassment in public transport although the general perception of sexual harassment in public transport always refers to women. Furthermore harassers of sexual harassments on men were mainly males, as well as some female, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. The men appear to have faced physical, verbal and implied sexual harassments. Men’s reactions to the sexual harassments were sometimes assertive and sometimes non-assertive where they have received less assistance of others when they have faced sexual harassments in public transport.

**Key words** – Harassers, Men, Public transport, Sexual harassments

### I. INTRODUCTION

“Sexual harassments has been framed as an issue which interferes with human rights in that victims are experiencing extremely hectic and damaging physical and psychological effects” [6]. Majority of researches on sexual harassment have been done on women, [4] where it is mainly considered as an issue related to power [1]. Max Webber defines power as an ability of an individual or a group of getting things done in spite of any resistance [3].

Recent studies have suggested that male sexual harassment too is an important problem [1] that needs deeper understanding

and attention. Still, very little studies on sexual harassment in the public transport exist in Sri Lanka and even the limited studies are mainly on women being harassed in the public transport. Despite the fact that in most of the cases men are the harassers while women are the victims even in public transportation, there is evidence to show that the men too can be victims of sexual harassment in public transport [1].

The researcher has realized through preliminary discussions that sexual harassments on males are not generalized in Sri Lankan context due to their masculinity and male dominated culture.

Hence, in an attempt to bridge this knowledge gap, this study explored the following research problems:

“How do men get harassed in Public transportation? And how do men react to these instances?”

The significance of this study is by identifying the forms or the nature and reactions of male victims when they face sexual harassment in public transportation, more awareness about this hidden issue can be created, leading to action being taken to address the issue. Hence, by identifying the outcomes of sexual harassments on males in public transport, more significance can be given to the issue as a concealed social problem that needs more awareness, advocacy and intervention of various stakeholders.

### II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main objectives of the study is to understand the nature of sexual harassments men have faced in public transport, identifying the types of harassment, perpetrators, frequency of harassment and reactions. As this study is based on human feelings and ideas qualitative method has been used to obtain more realistic feelings of men on sexual harassments they have faced on public transport that cannot be captured through numerical data. Further the sensitive nature of the phenomenon also leads this study to a qualitative approach. It also provided an opportunity for interviewees to express their true feelings in their own words, languages in relation to the objectives of the study.

Sample population of this study was male passengers who use public transport, mainly buses and trains for their daily travelling purposes. Since this is an exploratory study

and the number of previous researches is very low, the researcher has selected 15 men between age 20 – 25 who are students of government universities and private institutes, employees from different industry sectors as well as from different geographical locations and cultures within the island as the sample.

Data collection method of the study was in depth semi structured interviews. In the first part of questions on the semi structured interviews researcher has included questions to collect the demographic data which would be useful in the analysis. In depth interviews are referred as a qualitative research technique which involves conducting intensive individual interviews to explore the opinion of individuals where the number of respondents is few [2].

Collected data was analyzed using coding method. Then the list of codes has been applied to the data collected through interviews. Pre-set codes of the study are shown in the Fig. 1

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Types of harassment</li> <li>2. Nature of the harasser</li> <li>3. Reaction</li> <li>4. Feelings of the victim</li> </ol> |
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Fig. 1: Pre-set codes

When analyzing and reading data following emergent codes were came up as shown in the Fig.2

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Travel mode</li> <li>2. Distance</li> <li>3. Time of travel</li> <li>4. Environment</li> <li>5. Others reactions</li> <li>6. How often they face harassments in public transport</li> </ol> |
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Fig.2: Emergent codes

### III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

#### *Natures of sexual harassments men faced in public transport*

The respondents used public transport for their daily traveling needs. The study showed that the majority of the respondents have experienced sexual harassments in public transport or at least they have seen or heard of it.

Amal (Age 23, Undergraduate) noted, “He was a man who carried a big bag and both of us were seated. After few minutes I felt that he was touching my legs and putting his hand under his big bag (which he had on his lap).”

The study showed that sexual harassments occurred more during crowded times in the mornings and in evenings. According to the literature, sexual harassment takes place during crowded times [7]. However, there were instances where respondents have experienced sexual harassment during night in relatively isolated buses, when the other passengers were either sleeping or when the lights were dimmed. All this indicate that men get harassed, when the act cannot be easily observed by others.

These respondents were harassed verbally implicitly and mostly physically which includes unwanted touching, staring, jacking (rubbing secret body parts on other person’s body), pinching, falling asleep on the shoulders of others. Verbal sexual harassments that have been identified in the study were sexual jokes, unwelcome comments and requests.

Madhawa (Age 24, Undergraduate) noted,

“That day I was traveling to Colombo from Kandy by bus. A beautiful girl came and sat next to me. Then she started talking about her and I also talked with her. After sometime, she requested me to touch a private place in her body.”

Implicit sexual harassments the respondents have faced were indecent exposures, signs, follow and unnecessary distractions.

While most respondents stated that it was a rare occurrence, some respondents have faced sexual harassments frequently. According to the study not only women but also men experience sexual harassment and there were no differences in the manner of which men and women get harassed sexually in public transport. Although the concept of power and sex is strongly linked with men in general perception [5], an interesting finding of the study was that women, gay, bisexual and transgender communities also identified as offenders of sexual harassments on men.

The harassers appeared to be mostly middle aged people whose appearances were varied with some being well dressed and others not. The respondents also appear to think that the women who harass were divorcees, and prostitutes. Respondents also stated how gay and transgender people act as girls while trying to get their attention.

Ramesh (Age 23, Undergraduate) expresses

“Their appearance is like girls. They have polished their nails and carrying hand bags with them. They are like saloon boys.”

Same person described about bisexual person,

“I think he was a bisexual person. They are not like gay people. They look so strange and dangerous. They tend to harass both women and men.”

*Reactions to the sexual harassments men faced in the public transport.*

Respondents react assertively and non-assertively and suffer emotionally. Assertive reactions that have been identified were hitting, frowning and verbally retaliating against the harasser.

Thameera (Age 24, IT sector employee) noted,

“He was staring at me. So I asked do you know me.”

Mahesh (Age 24, Undergraduate) described,

“This is not my experience. One day I have seen that one boy shouting at a man who tried to harass him in a bus.”

Non-assertive reactions of the respondents are to avoid, walk away, or react passively and tolerance without reacting negatively. The emotional responses that were identified in the study were disappointment, distraction, nervousness, feeling insulted, confusion, and sadness. Most frequent reaction was to move away and avoid the situation. Another interesting finding of this study was that these male victims have also tolerated some of these harassments, especially when the perpetrator was a woman. Even the victims wanted to respond, they have deliberately avoided the situations as they are having the fear of getting scolded by the harassers.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study showed that there is a prevalence of sexual harassments on males in public transport. Harassers of sexual harassments of men were mainly males, with some

presence of female, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. The men appear to face physical, verbal and implied sexual harassments. Although they have experienced, seen or heard of sexual harassments, the frequency of being sexually harassed is low. Men's reactions to the sexual harassments were sometimes assertive and sometimes non-assertive. Men also received less assistance of others when they faced sexual harassments in public transport. Even the concept of power and sex highlights the supremacy of men in general the study reveals that there are instances where men get offended by women, transgender, gay and bisexual men.

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