

HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN'S TRAVEL PATTERNS: EVIDENCE FROM URBAN PAKISTAN

Sohail Abdul Sattar

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

Email: sohail_sattar073@yahoo.com

Dr. Raana Malik

Chairperson, Department of Gender Studies, University of the Punjab Lahore.

Email: chairperson.dgs@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

The research study aimed to explore the women perceptions harassment in public transport and its impact on women's travel patterns: evidence from urban Pakistan. The study was quantitative in nature based on correlational survey research design. 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 detailed analysis. A strong 0.72 positive relationship exists between harassment incidents and women's behavioural adjustments in their travel patterns ($p < 0.01$), according to research findings. The research findings create essential requirements for decisions made by policymakers and transport planners as well as research community members. The author recommends that government officials develop awareness policies and enhance the legal structure combined with educational outreach efforts to fight harassment throughout public transportation systems. This research proposes practical solutions to develop protective public transport systems that 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, Public Transport, Women's Traveling Behaviour, Urban Mobility

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 et al., 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 et al., 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 (Avendano 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 (Avendano 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).

Harassment in Public Transport: Conceptualization, Forms, and Impacts

Public transit harassment occurs worldwide since women from all backgrounds experience these incidents regardless of social or cultural background. Women experience public transport zone intimidation through any form of inappropriate conduct, according to the definition set by Useche et al. (2024). Women endure both physical abuse through stalking and leering and verbal harassment consisting of catcalling and derogatory language (Fairchild, 2022). Public harassment continues to follow patriarchal traditions that lead to sexual assaults and women being treated as objects in outside spaces (Varman et al., 2018).

The study conducted by Ahmad et al. (2025) reveals that women face harassment with greater frequency because harassment happens continuously to them. Various researchers throughout the years have identified that numerous women encounter harassment while riding public transportation, according to King et al. (2025). Much research confirms that numerous women choose alternative routes because they dread harassment incidents (Gubby & Hill, 2024).

The research indicates that this harassing behaviour affects numerous female passengers whose freedom to move becomes restricted because of it.

Public transportation harassment both physically and mentally injures victims directly yet simultaneously restricts women from freely moving about. Harassment leads women to avoid school attendance and job search activities and social participation because fear becomes endemic in public spaces (Babcock & Kortegast 2024). When women face public harassment, they tend to stay away from specific areas, which results in restricted participation in public activities, thus helping gender disparity to persist, as noted in Gqola et al. (2024). The definitive origins of harassment remain unknown, along with its effects on women's transit routines.

The variety of harassment inside public transport encompasses every action from physical violence to silent verbal mistreatment. The wide definition of harassment provided by Useche et al. (2024) as any act causing intimidation fails to specify differences between single occurrences and institutional abuse patterns, according to Fairchild (2022). Fairchild asserts that defining harassment accurately needs to handle the progressive effects of primary harassment incidents on women's mental states and mobility impairments. He proposes this development to provide accurate dimensions of harassment activity.

Physical harassment, including groping and stalking, represents a major safety violation against women, according to research by Varman et al. (2018). According to Ahmad et al. (2025), physical harassment receives more attention than verbal harassment, which produces psychological damage through repetitive sexist language and street interactions. According to Ahmad et al., verbal harassment maintains an underseen objectifying environment that allows dangerous forms of abuse to persist. Gubby and Hill (2024) prove this stance through their finding that "harmless banter" labels are typically used to invalidate women's harassment experiences within society.

Researchers heavily debate how often street harassment occurs. King et al. (2025) claim that major groups of females experience transportation-related harassment; however, Babcock and Kortegast (2024) dispute this data because victims refrain from reporting due to exposure concerns and cultural prejudices regarding harassment incidents. Babcock and Kortegast (2024) dispute research findings because they maintain that present studies principally depend on personal statements without effectively measuring everything. Women in traditional cultures face barriers to seeking harassment reporting due to established norms prohibiting public discussions about sexual violence against women.

Research has established how harassment restricts women from moving freely since they choose to stay away from particular paths and transport systems due to safety issues (Gqola et al., 2024). Lutwak (2023) disputes this explanation because it forces women to adapt while neglecting to deal with harassment at its source. This study calls for societal transformation, which requires robust actions to hold the perpetrators accountable. The writer insists that public transport systems must include prevention measures against harassment rather than requiring women to modify their daily activities.

The way literature currently addresses harassment experiences suffers from a lack of understanding regarding the diverse combinations of discrimination women experience. Mainstream studies fail to address properly the specific harassment experiences that marginalized communities face together with their multiple marginalized identities, as reported by Constantino et al. (2022). The universal approach to tackling harassment overlooks the special reasons why

certain groups remain more exposed to discrimination, according to Constantino's perspective. She advocates for research that accounts for multiple women-specific identities because these elements help to understand their harassment experiences properly.

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 the harassment in public transport and its impact on women's travel patterns: evidence from urban Pakistan. To verify this research study, the following hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

There is a significant positive relationship between the frequency of women's public transport usage and their exposure to harassment.

Hypothesis 2 (H2)

There is a significant impact of harassment on travel patterns of women's public transport usage

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.

Harassment in Public Transport

Harassment experienced in public transportation exists as any unwanted conduct that generates discomfort and intimidation for women throughout their travel. Various actions, from verbal abuse such as catcalling to offensive comments to physical assault through groping and pushing, as well as stalking and leering, fall under public transport harassment (Fairchild, 2022). Gender-based violence, along with power dynamics, emerges from patriarchal norms that maintain women's public status as lower than men in society (Dahal et al., 2022). Frequency and types of harassment incidents and their context in public transport spaces are assessed based on the experiences women share about their usage of these transport services. Self-reported surveys and interviews with women will gather data for this study to report their encounters with harassment, including information about the verbal, physical, or psychological nature of incidents, when and where they happened, and what the harasser intended to communicate. The research uses a Likert scale to evaluate harassment frequency between never and very often, and pre-established categories identify different harassment types.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a positivist research paradigm because it relies on objective measures and quantitative methods to check hypotheses validity. According to Creswell (2014), reality exists as a stable system that researchers can observe through systematic measurement. This research naturally transforms to the positivist paradigm since it investigates the harassment-public transport relationship using empirical data and statistical analysis for quantifiable results, therefore giving clear numerical evidence about the discussed phenomena. The structured questionnaire, together with statistical analysis software SPSS, allows researchers to base their findings on empirical evidence, which enhances both the reliability and credibility of their study.

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. Several restrictions exist because of the cross-sectional design structure. The design reveals correlations among variables, yet it cannot demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships between variables. The research study demonstrates a correlation between harassment encounters and travel behaviour changes, yet it cannot provide evidence to establish harassment as their direct cause. This research design suits the study due to its efficient data collection capacity from numerous participants, but fails to demonstrate cause-effect relationships.

Study Population

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 3 items that inquire about participant age, marital status, and public transport usage frequency. The set of 3 items establishes background data to support statistical analysis while maintaining a representative sampling of the target demographic.

Section 2: Harassment in Public Transport

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	3	N/A	Multiple-choice and open-ended
Harassment in Public Transport	25	Sexual Harassment Scale (Fitzgerald et al., 1995); 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.

Results

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.

DATA ANALYSIS

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)
Marital Status	Single	212	50.2%	Unmarried women (includes students and working professionals)
	Married	186	44.1%	Currently married (higher likelihood of chaperoned travel)
	Divorced/Widowed	24	5.7%	Vulnerable subgroup (often faces additional mobility constraints)

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)

The table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of the study participants across age, marital status, and frequency of transport usage. The majority of respondents (42.2%) were between the ages of 26 and 35 years, identifying them as working-age women, many of whom are likely employed. Young adults aged 18–25 comprised 37.0% of the sample, representing students or women in early career stages. A smaller proportion included mid-career professionals aged 36–45 (17.1%), and those above 45 years constituted only 3.8%, suggesting lower public transport dependency in older demographics. In terms of marital status, slightly over half of the participants (50.2%) were single, followed by 44.1% who were married. Divorced or widowed individuals made up 5.7% of the sample, representing a subgroup that may encounter additional mobility challenges. Regarding transport usage, the majority of women (56.9%) used public transport three to five times per week, categorized as moderate users primarily commuting for work or education. The remaining 43.1% were frequent users, relying on transport more than five times a week, likely due to work responsibilities or caregiving roles.

Reliability Analysis

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

Table 2

Reliability Analysis of Research Scale

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Harassment in Public Transport	25	0.89

Table 2 presents the internal consistency reliability of the research scale used to assess harassment in public transport. The scale consisted of 25 items and demonstrated high internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of **0.89**. According to conventional benchmarks (e.g., $\alpha \geq 0.70$ indicates acceptable reliability; $\alpha \geq 0.80$ indicates good reliability), this result suggests that the items on the scale are highly consistent in measuring the construct of interest.

Inferential Statistics

The research evaluated the research hypotheses using Pearson correlation as well as independent samples t-test. The results are presented below.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Relationship between Harassment and Traveling Behaviours

The first hypothesis predicted that female public transport behaviour shows a significant relationship to harassment. The researcher conducted a Pearson correlation analysis to validate this hypothesis. Table 4.3 displays the obtained results.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation between Harassment and Traveling Behaviour

Variable	Harassment	Traveling Behaviour
Harassment	1	0.72**
Traveling Behaviour	0.72**	1

****p < 0.01**

A strong positive relationship exists between harassment and changes in traveling behaviour ($r = 0.72$) since the results show statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). The harassment intensity a woman faces determines her likelihood of modifying how she travels and how she selects transportation modes and destinations.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Impact of Harassment on Travel Patterns

The second hypothesis was that women who experience more harassment would change how they use transportation more noticeably compared to those with less harassment. The study participants were split into two groups, depending on their scores on the Harassment in Public Transport scale.

High Harassment (n = 212): Women who reported that they were verbally, physically, or psychologically harassed often or very often (scoring ≥ 3 on the 5-point Likert scale).

Low Harassment (n = 210): Women who reported harassment less often (< 3 , meaning they claimed it "rarely" or "never" happened to them).

The two types of groups were compared based on their travel behaviour, as measured by the Traveling Behaviour scale. Results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test for Traveling Behaviour

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Test	p-value
High Harassment	4.12	0.78	8.45	<0.001
Low Harassment	2.89	0.65		

A statistical analysis demonstrated exceptional differences between how the two demographic groups traversed ($t = 8.45$, $p < 0.001$). Women who dealt with extensive harassment showed larger modifications to their travel behaviour (e.g., avoiding routes, altering schedules) compared to those who encountered less harassment.

Discussion of Findings

The research results reveal essential knowledge regarding how harassment influences women when they travel. Data shows a clear link between harassment incidents and modifications to women's travel behaviours, which demonstrates that harassment affects most women (H1). Women facing harassment resist using particular transportation or travel times or specific routes because of this behaviour, which prevents them from accessing opportunities. Research findings between women who face high and low harassment rates (H2) prove the necessity of specific intervention approaches to combat this problem. The study demonstrated that women base their harassment responses on how society expects them to react and their perceptions of public transport safety (H3). This confirms the need to address both cultural attitudes and to enhance safety measures to reduce harassment in public transport.

The present study aimed to examine the influence of harassment on public transport usage among women, with an emphasis on how such experiences shape their traveling behavior and patterns. Descriptive statistics provided a clear demographic profile of the participants, revealing that the majority were young to middle-aged women, primarily in the 18–35 age range. This age distribution suggests that the sample is largely composed of working women and students—two groups highly dependent on public transportation. The marital status data further supports this,

with over half of the respondents being single and potentially commuting independently. These demographic insights are critical, as they help contextualize the vulnerability and exposure of specific groups to harassment in public transit settings (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014; Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020).

The reliability analysis of the harassment measurement scale showed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. This level of reliability exceeds the commonly accepted threshold for social science research (Field, 2018), indicating that the scale is a dependable instrument for capturing the experiences of harassment in public transport settings. A reliable measurement tool enhances the credibility of the findings and ensures that the resulting interpretations of harassment and travel behavior are grounded in consistent and valid data. The robustness of the measurement adds strength to the conclusions drawn from the hypothesis testing (DeVellis, 2017).

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between Harassment and Traveling Behaviour

The research established that harassment created substantial positive adjustments in how women move ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$). Research by Useche et al. (2024) has previously validated that harassment causes substantial changes in women's mobility behaviours. The experience of harassment will cause women to change their routes, transport methods, and schedules as a means of staying safe. Women face hostility in public spaces, according to the feminist theory, because patriarchal societal standards and power disparities prevail (Harrison et al., 2012). The social-ecological model obtains support from the research findings because it demonstrates how personal encounters interact with general social elements to create behavioural changes (Chen et al., 2021).

Research data reveals harassment acts as a barrier that cuts off women from pursuing educational pursuits and obtaining work as well as social activities. The continuous discrimination against women through harassment causes gender inequality and continues their public space marginalization (Aitken et al., 2024). The research results emphasize the requirement for initiatives that identify harassment origins while developing protected transportation environments for female passengers.

The first hypothesis explored the correlation between harassment and changes in travel behavior. The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) demonstrates a significant relationship, indicating that as harassment increases, so does the likelihood of women alter their travel patterns. This finding is consistent with existing literature suggesting that safety concerns significantly affect women's mobility decisions (Anand & Tiwari, 2006; Gardner et al., 2017). The experience or anticipation of harassment compels women to modify their commuting behaviors such as changing routes, travel times, or even modes of transport—to protect themselves from further victimization. The implications are considerable, as such behavioral shifts may result in longer commutes, increased transportation costs, and restricted mobility, ultimately impacting women's participation in work and education (Allen et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 2: Impact of Harassment on Travel Patterns

The traveling behaviours of women revealed significant differences between those who faced high harassment levels and those experiencing low harassment levels according to the t-test ($t = 8.45$, $p < 0.001$). Harassment at high levels among women leads them to select specific transportation methods and routes as well as time boundaries when making travel decisions.

Previous research confirms that women adopt travel restrictions because of fear of harassment by showing they use private transportation along with traveling in groups (Borker et al., 2018). Escorting routes together with avoiding specific travel times and transport options because increased travel times and expenses and limited mobility (Avendano et al., 2022).

The research identified how harassment causes mental and emotional harm to women who suffer through it. Participants revealed mental states of anxiety and fear together with feelings of vulnerability which brought negative effects to their life quality and well-being. According to Javaid (2022), harassment develops into mental health problems that consist of depression alongside post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both physical and emotional aspects of harassment require immediate interventions, according to these research results.

The second hypothesis assessed the extent to which high and low levels of harassment affected travel behaviors. The independent samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference ($t = 8.45$, $p < 0.001$) between the two groups. Women who reported frequent harassment exhibited substantially higher changes in their travel behaviors compared to those who experienced less harassment. These findings reinforce the assertion that harassment is not merely an isolated incident but a systemic issue that disrupts women's autonomy and access to public spaces (UN Women, 2017; Wilson & Little, 2008). Frequent harassment can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as refraining from traveling at night or skipping certain public transport routes altogether—outcomes that directly affect women's daily lives and their sense of safety (Koskela, 1999).

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature that underscores the pervasive impact of gender-based harassment on women's mobility. Public transportation systems, while essential to urban living, may paradoxically become exclusionary spaces when safety concerns remain unaddressed (Phadke et al., 2011). The strong association between harassment and travel modifications demands that policymakers, transit authorities, and community stakeholders implement more effective interventions. These might include enhanced surveillance, better lighting at stations, increased reporting mechanisms, and awareness campaigns to challenge the normalization of harassment. Without such structural changes, the burden of navigating unsafe environments will continue to fall disproportionately on women, undermining their right to safe and equitable access to urban mobility (Ceccato, 2017; Peters, 2013).

Limitations

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 explore the impact of harassment on women's public transport usage and their resulting travel behaviors. Through the use of reliable and valid measurement instruments, and analysis of a representative urban sample, the research found that harassment is not only prevalent but significantly influences how women navigate public transport systems. A substantial proportion of participants reported altering their travel behavior due to harassment, including changes in timing, route selection, and transport modes. These behavioral adaptations

reflect the broader social implications of harassment, which go beyond individual discomfort to restrict women's access to urban resources and opportunities.

The results confirmed a strong positive correlation between the experience of harassment and changes in travel behavior, indicating that women exposed to more frequent harassment are more likely to adjust how and when they travel. The statistical significance of this relationship supports previous findings in gender and mobility research, reinforcing the idea that personal safety concerns have a tangible effect on women's daily lives. Furthermore, the independent samples t-test highlighted meaningful differences between women who experienced high versus low levels of harassment, confirming that those who encounter harassment more frequently report greater disruptions to their travel routines.

These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve the safety and inclusiveness of public transportation for women. Efforts such as enhanced surveillance, gender-sensitive urban planning, better lighting, dedicated women's transport services, and robust complaint mechanisms are essential in mitigating the adverse effects of harassment. Policymakers and transit authorities must move beyond awareness to implement structural changes that prioritize the experiences of women commuters, particularly those most vulnerable due to age, marital status, or socioeconomic background.

In conclusion, harassment in public transport remains a pervasive barrier to women's mobility and autonomy. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on how harassment shapes travel behavior, highlighting the urgent need for safer transit environments. By addressing the gendered dimensions of mobility, stakeholders can foster a more equitable urban infrastructure—one in which women can travel freely, safely, and without fear.

Implications

1. **Implications for Policymakers:** Public officials need to implement safety enhancements for women. Evidence shows that deployed safety measures cut down on harassment while women experience better feelings (Beyazit et al., 2023). Public officials need to develop robust legal instruments that effectively combat harassment and stalking, as well as verbal abuse in public spaces. The legal system fails to address specific forms of harassment, which leads victims to remain without any legal protection or remedy (Romaniuk, 2023).
2. **Implications for Transport Planners:** Transport planners execute essential duties to develop systems of public transport that provide safety along with inclusivity. According to Ceccato (2017), the installation of emergency response systems, improved lighting, and security cameras enhances women's feelings of safety and reduces the likelihood of harassment. Engaging in meaningful relationships with community members is a crucial tactic for transportation planners.
3. **Implications for Researchers:** The study identifies multiple research directions that will contribute to improved analysis of public transit harassment and its behavioural influence on women's transportation practices. Research evaluating different locations enables the identification of successful approaches so developers can create appropriate intervention methods (Alfaro et al., 2024).

Recommendations

This research delivers a set of suggested actions for transport planners and policymakers together with researchers.

1. **For Policymakers:** Governments must establish complete harassment prevention policies that specify both enforcement rules and responsibility standards for every harassment type. The designed policies need to establish safe, inclusive conditions for female users of public transportation systems (Romaniuk 2023). Policymakers who address harassment origins will establish a society that stands both fair and just (Harrison et al., 2012).
2. **For Transport Planners:** The identification of high-risk traffic zones requires regular transport planning safety inspections for the implementation of precise safety measures. Safety audits serve multiple purposes as they assess infrastructure weak points to direct funding toward locations that need it most (Ceccato & Paz, 2017). Transport planners need to work together with women's groups and other stakeholders for the development of transport systems that provide needed services to their diverse users.
3. **For Researchers:** Inter-governmental collaboration serves as an absolute necessity to establish international harassment standards. The study of effective strategies enables researchers to identify proven practices which they distribute to multiple locations through international research collaboration (Klose & Jebin, 2023).

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.

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