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## **Studying Public Transport in Lahore: An Analysis of Harassment of Women Passengers**

### **ABSTRACT**

*While commuting through public transport (busses, wagons, rikshaws, and chingchis), women's verbal, physical and psychological abuse in public spaces is though pervasive but often invisible in nature. In recent years, the need to address this gender issue has increased because of growing education and employment trend among urban women, along with increased urbanization, which necessitate females to travel far-flung areas for colleges/universities and employment purposes. The victims are low-middle and poor class women. While using public transport, apart from an obstruction in academic and professional accomplishments, such harassment also creates physical and emotional injuries. Driven by insufficient information on this subject; this study is a delicate attempt to understand the magnitude of different shapes of harassments and abuses against women, while traveling through public transport in the metropolitan city of Lahore. For the purpose of this study, the survey questionnaire (205 respondents) and two focus group discussions (20 participants each) between the age of 14 to 50, from middle and low-middle families in Lahore is conducted. Apart, the interviews with 5 traffic wardens in Lahore are designed, to understand the viewpoint of traffic police about the growing number of street and transport harassment incidents.*

**Keywords:** Public, Transport, Lahore, Women, Harassment

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## **Gender, Mobility and Public Space**

In recent years, the economic pressures and rapid urbanization in developing societies like Pakistan has altered the lives, where both male and female are conditioned for their respective roles. This trend increased women's induction in education and workforce, where they are compelled to operate, interact, and deal with men, outside the home. Such interactions, in patriarchal set-ups often leads to various anomalies for females, especially for those who commute through public transport. In Pakistan, this aspect is not well-researched. The dominant factor behind such incidents is that in societies like Pakistan, the public places are traditionally perceived as the male sphere. While endorsing this point of view, professors of anthropology explain the universality of this phenomenon, "From early times until today and in societies throughout the world, women have been associated with and even restricted to the private space of the dwelling whereas men have had freer rein to frequent public spaces" (Franck & Paxson, 1989, p. 122). Thus, the mentioned perception becomes a major reason behind the harassment of women commuters in a city like Lahore, where mostly the lower and lower-middle-class women utilize public transport for different purposes. It is stated that "to a large extent, mobility of women is associated with their participation in life outside the home and is a strong indicator of their freedom to access important places and spheres otherwise restricted and outside their reach or control" (Sather & Kazi, 2000, p. 102). The subject of women's mobility is further complicated because of over-crowded and poorly managed public transport system. Here, women are more vulnerable to 'indecent' comments 'chauvinistic' gestures, and at times 'unwelcomed' and 'unpleasant' physical contact. These inappropriate encounters and their physiological reasons are not addressed in gender-related literature.

This concern of Pakistani women commuters in public transport has been highlighted differently by a sociology professor as she writes in her unpublished work, "women's spaces are not respected as an intrinsic part of public life – be it for economic or other reasons – and that therefore women's spaces in the public always have to be defended against male monopolization" (Firdoos, 2007, p. 30). It is important to point out that the maltreatment of women in the public environment is neither new nor an issue of one particular society or even a city, as many writers have discussed this problem with the perspective of socio-culturally diverse societies.<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> For details see, Valentine, 1992, p.26; Whitzman, 1992, p. 170; Monqid, 2012, p. 110; Ilahi, 2009, p. 66-67; Tara, 2011, p. 71-74; Dillon & Bakaya, 2014, p. 9-10; Abdelmonem, 2015, p. 23-41.

Pakistan, whenever a woman victim of street harassment complaints to law-enforcement agencies, they face skepticism, thus the chastity of the complainant itself comes under question. This is the main reason for a lower percentage of reported cases.

### **Positioning Pakistani Women in Public Transport**

The challenges Pakistani women confront while commuting through public transport are increasing day by day, leaving a negative impact on their performance at the workplace, psychological health, family relations, and even on socialization patterns. According to The Women, Peace and Security Index 2017-18, 49% of women consider themselves unsafe in their communities (HRCP, 2018, p. 178). It is generally believed that the actual number of abuse, violence, and harassment incidents, both in the private and public environment are higher than the reported. This is mainly because of the shame stigma, along with many other socio-cultural handicaps (fear of revenge, insensitive police investigation, lengthy and complex legal requirements, low conviction rate).

An interesting small sampled quantitative study of 230 regular commuters of public transport in Karachi showed that 85% of working women, 82 % of students, and 67 % of homemakers face harassment while using public transport (ADB, 2014, p. 4). These alarming percentages though cover only the women commuters of one metropolitan city (Karachi), nevertheless, it indicates a serious and less debated issue, affecting women's mobility.

While talking about the different types of women harassments in the public environment, the three Professors of Psychology, in their co-authored work on public harassment of Pakistani women have developed the following three scales:

Table 1  
Three Scales of Public Harassment

| Physical Sexual Harassment                         | Verbal Sexual Harassment   | Nonverbal Sexual Harassment                         |
|--|--|---|
| - Touched your hand while giving you something.    | - Passed unwanted comments on your appearance.                                     | - Stared at you with dirty looks.                   |
| - Stood close to you in a crowded place.           | - Said unwanted sexually oriented things to you.                                   | - Not let you pass by                               |
| - Collided with you while passing by.              | - Offered you an unwanted lift in a vehicle.                                       | - Followed you in the street.                       |
| - Tried to have body touch with you while sitting. | - Threatened to spread rumors about you if you did not fulfill his sexual demands. | - Whistled while looking at you.                    |
| - Tried to kiss you against your will.             | - Threatened to harm you physically if you did not fulfil his sexual demands.      | - Hummed filthy songs in your presence.             |
| - Tried to rape you.                               |  | - Tried to give you an unwanted card or gift.       |
|  |  | - Tried to give you a love letter you did not want. |
|  |  | - Tried to undress himself in front of you.         |

Reference: Anwar, F., Österman, K., & Björkqvist, K. (2019). Three types of sexual harassment of females in public places in Pakistan. *Çağdaş Tıp Dergisi*, 9(1), 67.

The mentioned scale though does not exclusively deal with commuters' problems in Pakistan but it is relevant for all those, who travel by public transport. It portrays a clear picture of those actions and gestures, which create insecurity and fear for those women, who operate in the outside environment (especially when unaccompanied by any male member of the family), under one reason or another. Nevertheless, all these responses are not easily measurable, thus many of them remain un-registered. Another reason for a less debate on these gender bias public behaviors is the fear of defamation a woman victim feels in the family and society, in case if she registers such incidents. It can be assumed that there are various dynamics of public harassment. First, the offender and victim are strangers. Second, because the environment is public, thus it provides various opportunities for the perpetrator to escape, and the victim to ignore the harassment, as a routine activity. Such maltreatment has a strong bearing on the minds of the victim. Keeping in mind the already conducted studies in this area, this study

is a delicate attempt to gauge the different types of harassment women of Lahore confront, while commuting through public transport. While conducting this study, it is hypothesized that various types of gender-biased comments, gestures, and actions, women commuters encounter in their daily routine. For which, they might have a dealing mechanism so that they could create a safe environment around themselves and access the public spaces with relative comfort and ease.

The metropolitan city of Lahore is an inhabitant of 11.13 million people (SPDC, 2018, p. 23). As a capital city of one of the largest provinces in terms of population, Lahore is considered to be a hub of social, economic, and political activities. This profile of the city makes it vibrant, where male and female population commute in routine, for different purposes either on a private or public vehicle. According to a collaborative study report of *Women's Development Department, Punjab, UN Women Pakistan and Aurat Foundation*, on women safety at Lahore public transport:

About 82 percent of women commuters faced harassment at bus stops. Only 18 percent of women respondents said they had not been subject to harassment at bus stops.... The most frequently reported types of sexual harassment are staring whistling, and singing. Members of the youngest adult age group (20-29 years) were most likely to experience physical touching (Aurat Foundation Report, 2018, p. 47-49).

This study on women harassment at public transport in Lahore itself show that women safety in the public environment is a serious problem, especially for those, who are pursuing their academic or/and professional life. Keeping in view the sensitivity of this problem in patriarchal socio-cultural set-up and limited research on this aspect, the objective of this paper is to narrate the understanding, approaches, and dealing strategies of public transport women commuters in the city of Lahore. The already conducted studies only dealt with the magnitude of this problem from the perspective of policymaking. However, this study would be a unique attempt to highlight the problem within a socio-cultural paradigm, and second, it would try to highlight the inner feelings and emotions of women victims of public harassment. The forthcoming segments of this paper will incorporate the structure of public transport in Lahore, the responses of a survey, focused group discussions, and interviews from women commuters and traffic police. For this, different themes are developed.

## **Public Transport Structure at Lahore**

In Lahore, there are different public transports, either government or semi-government operates. For example, **Speedo**, which has different routes covering the residential areas like *Thokkar, Maulana Shaukat Ali Road, Canal*

Road, Model Town, Metro (operates between Gajumata and Shahdra), and LTC (covers all of Lahore city). In these buses, exclusive spaces are allocated to female passengers. The routes are identified through specific numbers allotted to each route. Apart from this, **rikshaw, wagons, coasters, chinkchis** are operative as part of public transport. In these later mentioned four kinds of transports, males and females sit together as there is no partition or allocation of seats for female passengers. These all mentioned ways to commute comes in the category of public transport but now there are also privately run companies like **Uber, Cream, Sevwl,** and **Airlift.**

**Participants:**

This research is based on survey questionnaire of 205 public transport women commuters between age 14 to 50, from middle and low-middle families in Lahore. The questionnaire had 19 close and 6 open-ended questions.

Apart from survey, two focus group discussions are conducted with 20 participants each. One group is between age 20 to 50 working women from low-middle income families, while the second is between age 14 to 25, from the same social class but enrolled in colleges and universities. For survey and group discussions, two institutions are selected; (Forman Christian College University Lahore and Government Islamia College Lahore.) The survey and group discussions are conducted in October 2019, in Urdu language. The total duration of discussion was between 20 to 30 minutes, audiotaped and subsequently transcribed.

Table 2  
Respondents Profile

| Age                 | 15-17                       | 18-25                       | 31-40     | 41-50                            |        |              |        |               |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|--------|--------------|--------|---------------|
|                     | 113                         | 70                          | 7         | 4                                |        |              |        |               |
| Education           | Below primary               | Primary                     | Secondary | Middle                           | Matric | Intermediate | B.A    | Post-Graduate |
|                     | 11                          | 1                           | 1         | 2                                | 146    | 26           | 14     | 3             |
| Frequency of travel | Daily (5-7) days in a week) | Often (1-4 Times in a Week) |           | Sometimes (2-4 times in a Month) |        |              | Others |               |
|                     | 132                         | 21                          |           | 28                               |        |              | 24     |               |

To understand the viewpoint of traffic police about the growing number of street and transport harassment, the interviews were conducted with 5 traffic wardens, posted at different locations of Lahore. Every discussion is audiotaped and subsequently transcribed.

After analyzing the similarities and dissimilarities between the two group discussions, results of survey questionnaires and interviews from traffic police, the following themes are designed.

**Meaning of Public Harassment:**

Although the definition of harassment ranges from psychological to physical, both in the private and public domain. However, when it comes to public harassment of female commuters in transport, multiple yet interesting meanings were shared by the respondents in an answer to an open-ended question; "How do you define harassment?".

The majority of respondents termed various actions as harassment like, 'staring', 'unwelcomed touch', 'cat-calling', 'teasing', 'inappropriate gestures', 'rubbing', 'blackmailing', 'bullying'. Apart from this, there were four respondents, who used, 'cyber-crime' and 'acid throwing', 'intimidating action or behavior', as acts of harassment. These responses highlight those actions and gestures, which cause harassment. Nevertheless, there were some interesting responses, which more comprehensively defined harassment like:

*"Taking away a person's right."*

*"Any sort of unwelcomed act, either physical or emotional."*

*"Men consider themselves superior to women and thus believe that they have a right to exploit them, which would go un-punished. Some men just harass women for the sake of fun and enjoyment."*

*"Harassment means to depress someone by giving her mental torcher or by physically exploiting her."*

*"Harassment can be defined as an incident that hurts a person's life, especially of females as it causes life-long insecurity and disturbance for them."*

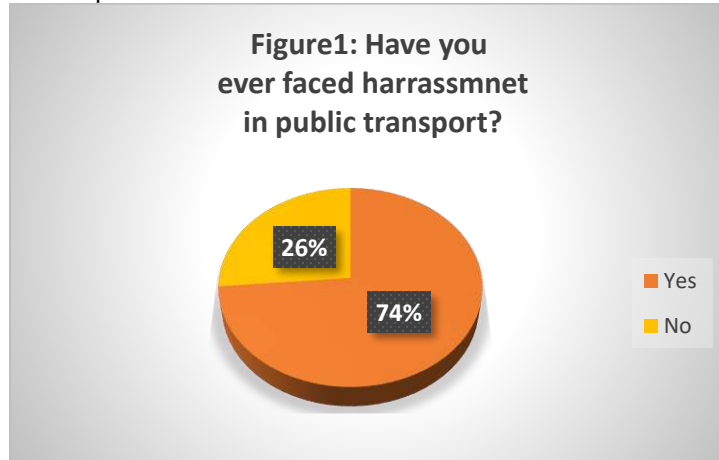
*"it's the worst thing a person could do. Harassment includes a person blocking your way or tries to touch you. It even includes black-mailing."*

These definitions do not only reflect those gestures and actions, which women consider offensive but they also represent the victim's feelings and its life-long impact. From these explanations, it can be derived that the most serious type of harassment among all is unwelcomed physical touch. This was further confirmed by a focus group discussion with Group A, where a respondent shared, "Though all types of harassment should be punishable, the most offensive and disgusting is the physical touch." (Group-A)

**Presence of Public Harassment:**

The harassment of women commuters in public transport is wide-spread but yet less debated problem. Though such cases at times cause physical and psychological trauma for victims, but its conviction rate is significantly low as

in the majority of cases, it is difficult to trace and register such incidents. The survey below shows that 75% of respondents share that they face harassment in public transport.



Here it is interesting to note that as a first response to this question, those who said they have not been harassed, they even selected various types of harassment in the next question, which means a significant number of respondents are uncomfortable in sharing such incidents. There are many reasons for such responses; the most obvious is that as victims, they do not want their identities to be revealed. Table 4, points out various types of harassment with percentages and rank.

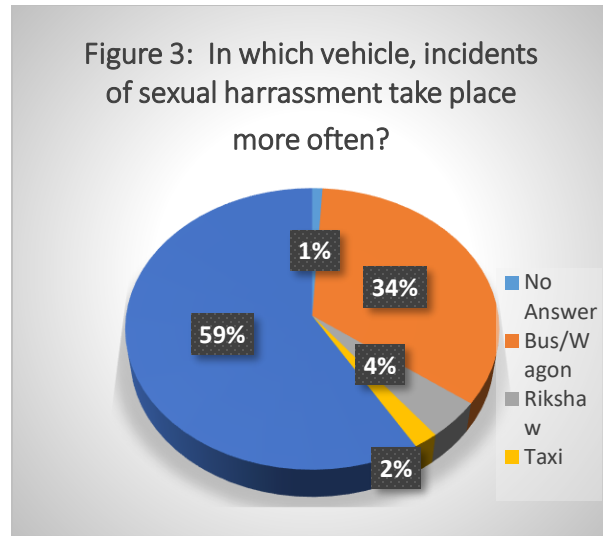
Table 3  
What Type of Harassment You Faced?

| Types of Harassment                 | No  | %   | Rank |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|------|
| Starring                            | 108 | 52  | 1    |
| Hooting(Kissing noises & whistling) | 48  | 23  | 2    |
| Stalking/Following                  | 38  | 18  | 3    |
| Pinching                            | 14  | 6.8 | 4    |
| Blocking the Way                    | 13  | 6.3 | 5    |
| Rubbing                             | 10  | 4   | 6    |
| Sexual Comment                      | 8   | 3   | 7    |



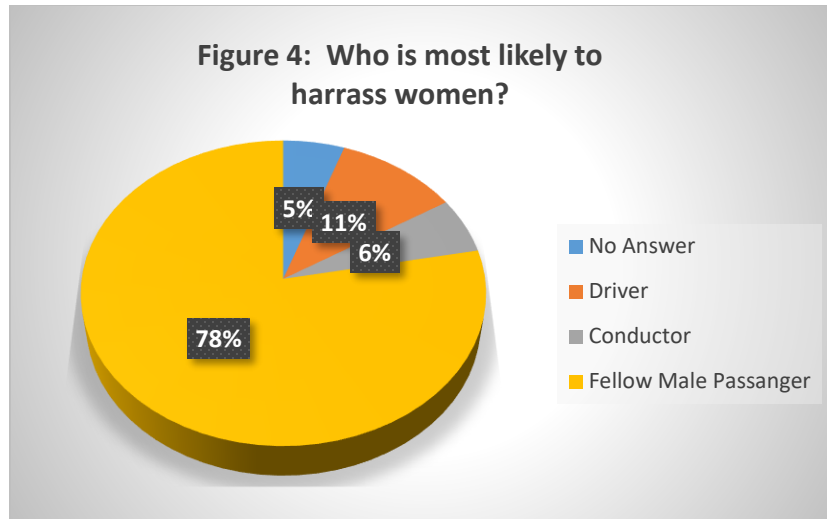
In this table, the most experienced harassment act for women commuters is starring as 52 % selected this option, followed by hooting with 23 %, stalking/following with 18 %, pinching with 6.8%, blocking the way with 6.3%, rubbing with 4%, sexual comment with 3%. There were 69 respondents out of 205, who selected more than one option, which further shows the gravity of this issue. The most alarming part is that the frequency of harassment remained quite high as displayed in figure 2.





Different types can be created, based on frequency of harassment. For example, some were harassed fewer than the others. Altogether, 77% of the total surveyed have been harassed. Those, who have been harassed occasionally are 49%, while those who experienced it once are 14%. The same percentage is observed for those, who are harassed frequently. The repetition of such kind of act itself shows that women, who use public transport are often subject to different types of chauvinist attitude and actions. In response to the question that in which public vehicle, the incidents of harassment most often take place; figure 3 shows, 59% named *Chingchi*, followed by Bus/Wagon which comes to 34%, while in *Rikshaw* and *Taxi* frequency of harassment is low, with 4% and 2% respectively.

Similarly, in response to a question that “who is more likely to harass you”, figure 4 below shows that women travelers face harassment mostly by the fellow male passengers, followed by drivers which come to 11%, and conductor at 6%.



In the group discussion, which would be extensively quoted in the next heading, the respondents shared that during the walk on roads and while going towards their transport or destination, they mostly face harassment in the shape of comments and at times physical touch. Mostly, the bike riders attempt such type of harassment as it is easy for them to escape after passing comments or physically teasing.

In a group discussion, two respondents shared that the senior citizens are more likely to harass women in public as they expressed:

*“aged men harass more than younger men” (Group B)*

*“once a little girl was taking slides in a park, while her family was sitting at little distance. I saw an old man touched the girl, while sitting beside her. The girl screamed for help.” (Group B)*

**Narratives of Harassment at Public Places:**

The detailed incidents of harassment were shared by different women commuters in two group discussions. One of the respondents shared:

*“I was going to attend a wedding reception, with a friend. A boy first starred at me and then while walking away, passed a comment, ‘Bari sohni lagdi pai ay’” (Group-A)*

*“I was traveling with my husband on a motorbike, when a guy on his bike start driving close to us and stared at me. I told my husband. He turned back and cursed the harasser.” (Group-A) <sup>2</sup>*

From these narratives and survey results of Table 4, it can be derived that the most commonly harassing gesture is starring. Secondly, crowded places are most conducive for such incidents. In such situations, the identification of a harasser becomes difficult. In another group discussion, a girl shared an incident of physical harassment as follows:

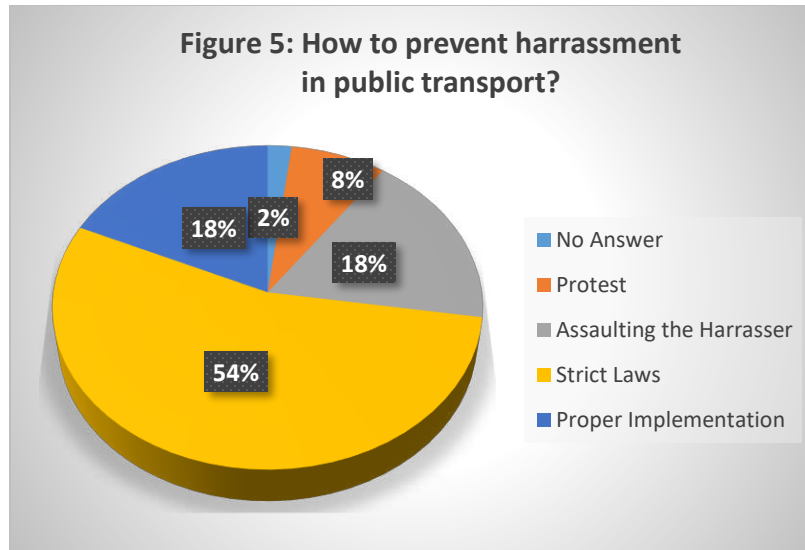
*I was at Fortress Stadium with my mom and siblings. We hired a rickshaw to drive us home. The rickshaw guy was fixing something in his automobile so he asked us to sit in the Rikshaw. While I was waiting, the rickshaw driver touched me. At first, I didn't pay much heed as I thought it was by mistake but then he repeated. I resented along with my family and he was forced to flee in the crowd. (Group B)*

### **Responses towards Public Harassment**

From group discussions and survey questionnaires, it is noticed that women do have different reactions towards such incidents as one of the respondents said, *“I would slap him on the face”* (Group A). When they were asked, how to prevent such incidents, results in figures below depicts, 54% believed that strict punishment can help to reduce such incidents. 18% of respondents each selected proper implementation of the law and assaulting the harasser options, while 8% preferred a simple protest.

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from transport, women feel harassment at public places including hospitals, sometimes in an unusual way. According to one respondent, *“once in a hospital queue, an old man wearing a green outfit was acting like a deaf but I personally noticed that he was touching women from behind but they were unable to figure out the culprit. That person mischievously would push his bag forward after touch, to give an impression that it was an accidental touched.”* (Group-A)



Nevertheless, from group discussions, I observed that the respondents were also scared because they thought that such protests could lead to an ugly situation, which women victims opt to avoid. This is the main reason for such unreported instances. While sharing this thought, one of the women commuter stated,

*“We are scared of fighting. To avoid any such condition in public, we prefer to be quiet. We do not want our families to be indulged in quarrels because of us. Therefore, we do not share with our families.”*

while talking about an incident of physical harassment, another respondent expressed the same fear:

*“While traveling on a bus, a man touched my mother-in-law on her back. I noticed she opted to remain silent. After arriving at home, she shared about the incident. When we inquired that why you remained silent at that time, she said, it might have caused a fight between my sons and the harasser. So to avoid such confrontation, I preferred to avoid.” (Group-A)*

These responses demonstrate that one of the main reasons for such unreported incidents is the fear of quarrel which might turn in to violence.

### **Societal and Familial Reactions**

The group discussions and survey questionnaire responses associate the low reporting of harassment incidents, because of the fear of ‘shame’ in families and society. This was evident in the answer of an open-ended survey question,

“In your opinion, what are the reasons for not reporting harassment incidents?”. The multiple reasons were repeated by most of the respondents like *‘fear of losing respect and honor in society’, ‘defamation’, ‘the non-cooperative attitude of law enforcement agencies’, and ‘social pressure’*. Few respondents also categorically mentioned that such type of reporting causes *“family embarrassment as girls of such repute do not get good proposals. So it affects their future life.”* Here it is important to note that the element of *‘family honor’, and ‘shame’* is crucial for middle and low-middle class female commuters to the level that they prefer to bear the pain, instead of reporting the incident.

This approach towards such incidents is also because of the gender bias attitude of law enforcement agencies, who instead of supporting a victim, visualize the whole situation from a specific angle and often consider the victim responsible. Apart, the sensational reporting of print, electronic, and especially social media further persuade victim for silence. While pointing out towards weak implementation of law and insensitivity of law-enforcement agencies, some responses in the survey are as follows:

*“police start looking at a woman victim as a culprit. They ask questions that make her uncomfortable and blame the victim for her misery and harassment.”*

*“There is no assurance of justice, as the reporting institutions are corrupt themselves.”*

*“police instead of helping the victim, create disturbance and problems for them.”*

Similar but a detailed response over this question was provided by a respondent in a group discussion as she shared:

*“I accompanied my daughter, while commuting to college in a rickshaw. I noticed that someone is following us. Initially, I ignored but when it happened for two consecutive days, I informed the traffic police. The first question they asked, ‘do we know him?’ This made me think that they are trying to find out that either I or my daughter are responsible for such an incident or not? This becomes the main reason of over-looking such instances by women victims as they are aware that if they complain, they will be judged.” (Group-A)*

While explaining the fear of being defamed through media reporting, the respondents shared:

*“Family of victim prefers to maintain silence as the police do not cooperate and often ask for a bribe. Whenever such incidents take place, they ask for your picture and make it a piece of breaking news on television channels. Therefore, the victim and her family because of the fear of defamation, prefer to be quiet.”*

*“People don’t want to publicize their pain on social media as such incidents are insensitively discussed.”*

Apart from the sensational media reporting and insensitive investigation of the police, there are other factors mentioned by respondents, which discourage victims from reporting, as they shared:

*“It is because of the fear that women often do not report incidents. In some cases, they are blackmailed for defamation. However, women should not surrender in front of such negativities and bravely adopt a legal passage. People mostly are reluctant because of their family's honor and reputation.”*

*“women do not get support in this matter from anyone”*

*“In our society, majority of women believe, it is better to ignore than to cry out because they have a fear that they might end up making fun of their own selves.”*

*“Fear of judgment, trauma of the incident, fear of happening it again, apprehension of not getting justice, and fear of people judgment, discourage them from reporting.”*

From these narratives, it can be derived that public harassment is a social stigma for women and they hardly receive support from the legal system, thus prefer to be quiet about such happenings. Interesting results were revealed in the response of a question, “With whom they would like to share their harassment experience?”

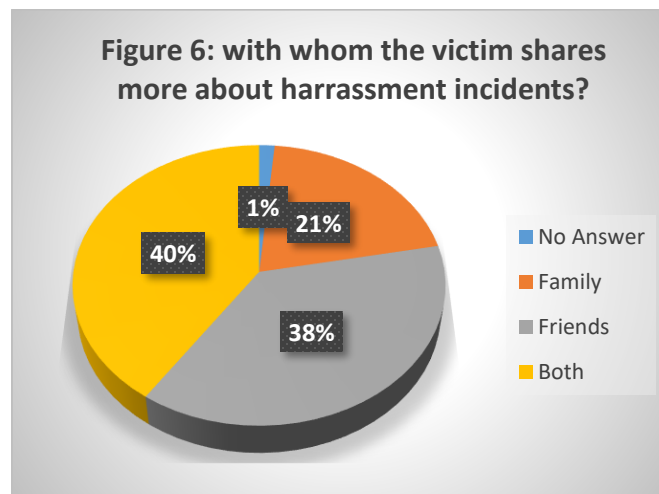
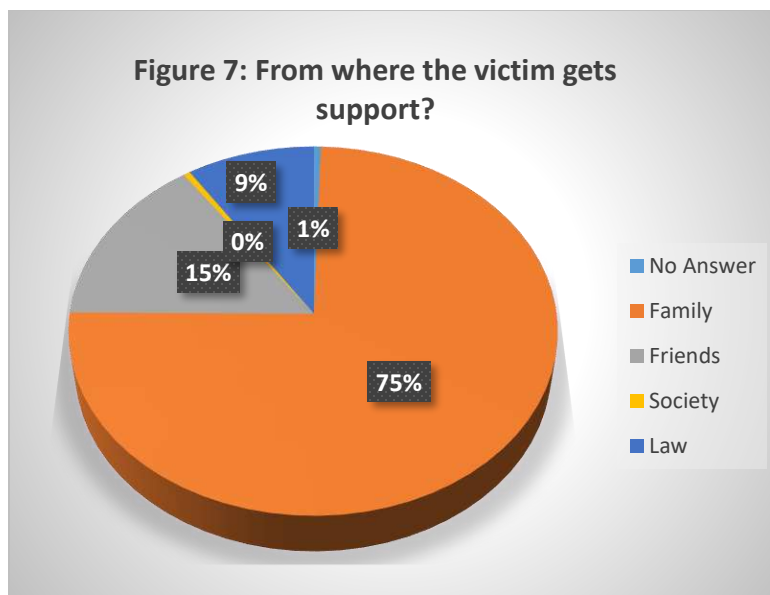


Figure 6 shows that respondents like to share about such incidents with their friends more frequently as 38% discuss with friends, while 21% share with family. It is maybe because the level of trust between friends at times is higher

than with family members. The answer of one respondent in an open-ended question of the same survey confirmed this as she shared that even families at times consider woman responsible for the public harassment, thus attempt to restrain her mobility as she shared, “We even have a fear to be restricted if we share such incidents with families as they will stop us from working or traveling.” This fear of restricting mobility compels them to maintain silence, pretending as nothing has happened.

### Dealing Strategies

The responses of female commuters of public transport exhibit that the majority of them do not believe in legal procedure, considering it slow and non-cooperative, which further increase their traumas. This trust deficit is displayed in responses as shown in figure 7.



The women commuters shared that they receive support in case of harassment mostly from their families as 75% selected this option, followed by friends with 15%. Only 9% believe that law provides them support in such situations, indicating distrust of women commuters in legal remedies. It is because of different complications attached with reporting, like delayed justice, insensitivity of investigative bodies, and non-cooperation of police



officers. However, during group discussions, it is observed that as a quick remedy, women commuters do contact the traffic wardens and police officers, deployed for traffic regulation or maintenance of law and order, at different locations in the city. While sharing such instance, one of the respondent in a group discussion stated:

*“I know a woman, who regularly commute for employment. She noticed that she is being followed by a man daily. She reported to the police, who effectively dealt with him.” (Group-A)*

Another respondent during a group discussion expressed:

*It happened with me that once a rickshaw driver start following me and asked if I want to go. I replied, ‘No’. He insisted. I reported to the traffic warden, who later found that the driver had no license. (Group B)*

A point should be noted that harassment is an unwelcomed act, so it should not be mixed with mutually agreed gestures and actions. While sharing experience, traffic wardens discussed that women do contact them when they feel being chased and harassed in the public domain, especially while going towards or commuting through public transport. One of the traffic police officers shared:

*“I remember once I was on duty at Jail road, where I received a complaint from a woman about harassment. She called 15(police) to register her complaint, which through wireless was transferred to me. She was being harassed by a male on a bus and she called police for help. I identified her location and then dealt with the situation and the problem was resolved.” (Traffic Warden, Kamran Haider).*

Another traffic warden, while sharing about similar incidents mentioned that such cases are not always genuine but if they are, we try our best to ensure security for female commuters, as he expressed:

*“Most of the cases are fake. Some girls come and lie just for the sake of fun. If the case is real, we fully cooperate to protect them.” (Traffic warden, Muhammad Saleem at Litton road Chauburji)*

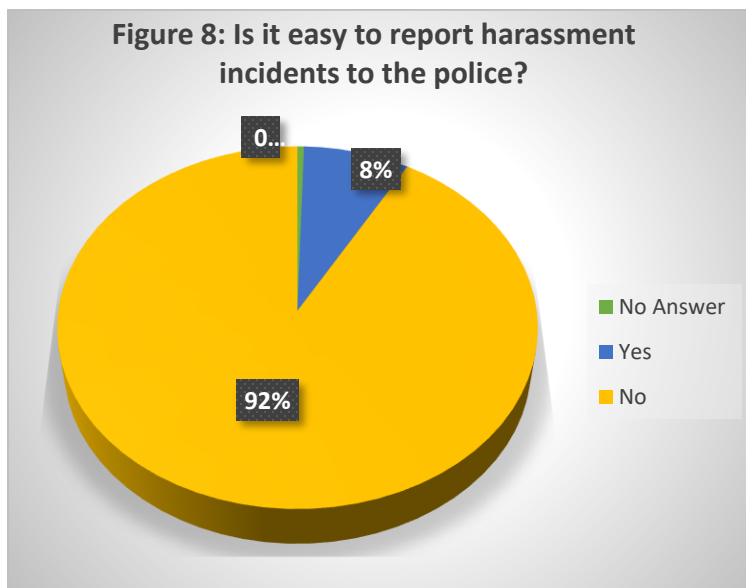
Near similar remarks were shared by another traffic warden, explaining in more detail:

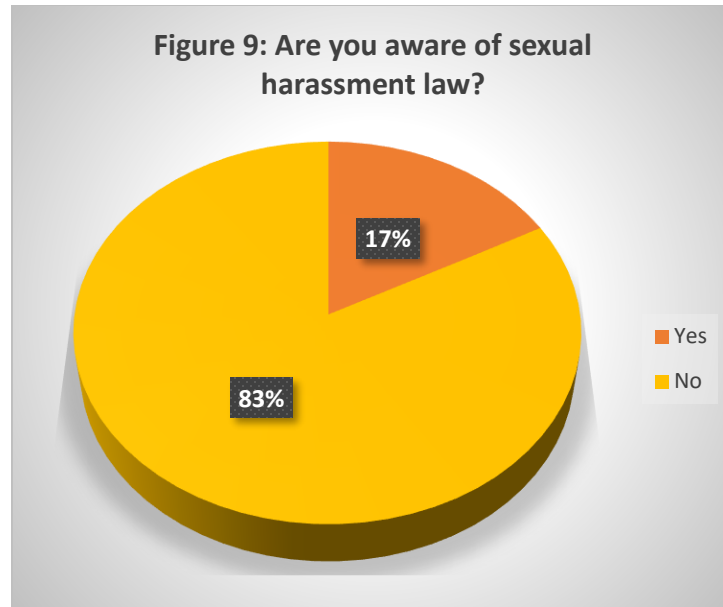
*“No, I have personally not witnessed any sexual harassment case till now but I have heard about such cases from my colleagues. If a warden is approached for any sexual harassment case, then he has to be involved in the whole process. At times, youngsters take thrills by teasing or catcalling women, which should be discouraged. They should respect them. Primarily, it is the responsibility of the police to deal with such cases. But if we observe any of such incident, we make sure that the person is penalized.”* (Traffic Warden, Muhammad Saleem; Major Shabbir Shaheed road)

From the above statements, we can understand that the public harassment is a widespread problem. In some cases, women travelers contact police or traffic wardens for help but majority of such instances go unnoticed, thus remain unaddressed.

This notion is further endorsed by a respondent in a group discussion as she stated, *“police take a lot of time in providing justice but traffic wardens or the patrolling police officers are in a better position to provide a quick relief”* (Group A).

Figure 8 explains that only 8% consider that harassment incidents are easy to report to the police, while a large majority of 92% find it difficult.





Apart from socio-cultural stigma, complicated law, and insensitive investigation process; another less debated reason is women commuters ignorance about harassment law, as presented in figure 9. Even those who know such legislation, do not believe they will get justice, as one of the respondents in a group discussion expressed:

*“Do not talk about law. Nowadays, the law does not provide justice.”*

*“People who seek help from law, even they have to wait for a long time to get justice.”*

Apart from seeking help from legislation and law enforcement agencies, a respondent in a groups discussion, suggested another solution:

*“My brother always stressed that I should keep myself covered and wear an Abaya, which I did. Even then, I faced hooting and comments over my appearance. I confronted my brother that despite being in Abaya, men pass comments. My brother asked me to identify the guy? I replied that how many men I should identify, as such incidents are repetitive. After this, my family enrolled me in KARATE training. Now, I know all the self-defense techniques. I utilize them, when I face street harassment. Since then, this issue is resolved for me.” (Group B)*

This comment has pointed out an important perception of a larger section of society about women dressing in public. The majority of them both male and female believe that if women fully cover their bodies or are especially in *Hijab*, they are not harassed. This perception refutes the above statement. Near similar views are expressed by another respondent, who shared:

*“When a girl is in hijab, men are more curious about her looks as they think that she must be very beautiful that is why she has covered herself. So, they stalk and comment” (Group B)*

From these responses, it can be affirmed that the public harassment has precarious psychological and social reasons, which are hard to understand from a single lens.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistani society overtly expresses a patriarchal outlook, reflected in discriminatory attitudes, gestures, and actions that women confront in the private and public domain daily. From group discussions and survey responses, it can be derived that women commuters of Lahore face different types of harassment, ranging from psychological to physical. Their reliance on legislation and law enforcement agencies for remedy is limited in nature because of social stigma and the tedious process attached to such reporting. Evaluating these complications, most of the victims prefer to ignore it. It is important to mention that the public transport female commuters are not only the victim of public harassment but those women, who themselves drive their vehicles (car or bikes), often face male chauvinism. It was further confirmed by the response of an open-ended question, *“Are women driving Scotties, Bikes, and cars escape from harassment? If no, then why and in your opinion, what type of harassment they face?”*. In response to this question, all 205 respondents shared that those who themselves drive or ride vehicle, also face public harassment, as they are *‘starred’*, *‘followed’* and often bear *‘hooting’* as well. However, their harassment is different from the women commuters of public transport like:

*“They are photographed and videoed by males on road”*  
*“Male drivers and riders pass unpleasant comments, start racing and honking their horns unnecessarily at women drivers”*  
*“Some male bike riders throw their contact numbers in car, if the driver is a woman”*

These responses stress on some very significant aspects of Pakistani society. First, they do not consider women as equals, thus are not in the habit of their presence on roads in a capacity of drivers, as themselves. This is maybe because an equal number of women drivers or riders are not on road. Second, a chauvinist society hardly likes women to move as confidently as men do. Therefore, whenever they see women driving cars or riding bikes, they start racing or honking horns at them. The primary objective of such an attitude is to make them feel inferior and less empower as the public spheres are still considered a male domain, whereas a female position is socio-culturally perceived inside the home. Therefore, when she steps out and drives alone, she is labeled as an 'available entity', which confront with her traditionally perceived submissive and dependent impression. Thus, at times, they are characterized as 'bad woman'. Such impressions about women riders or drivers are summed up in a detailed response by one respondent as she mentioned:

*“Driving Scotties, bikes or cars does not change the societal perspective about gender because harassment is a result of male frustration, both literate and illiterate. Women on roads are harassed individually and collectively, mostly because they are considered independent, which often becomes indigestible for the offenders”.*

Important to note is that much has been debated above, about the responsibility of a society to curtail women harassment on roads, nevertheless, the most interesting points were raised by two respondents, about family's training of a male child, as they expressed:

*“Mothers should teach their sons to respect all women as their mothers, sisters, and daughters”.*

*“Change starts from home because if my husband or a son would harassment a woman, I will report to the police.”*

Another respondent adopted a more rational approach and concluded:  
*“if we teach our male family members, the difference between right and wrong, only then, public harassment of women can be controlled.” (Group B)*

Similar views were shared by another respondent as she said:

*“We should share our feelings about street harassment, with our cousins and brothers, so they could understand the gravity of the problem. It will*

make them realize that as a male member of society, they should be careful enough, while operating in a mixed environment.” (Group B)

These narrations show that female commuters believe that public harassment cannot be controlled through law and strict punishment alone, unless it is accompanied by a transformed mindset. It would only be possible, when boys at home and schools are trained through their mothers, other female relatives, and teachers about respect and care of the female gender in public.

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**Appendix:**

**Questionnaire**

The purpose of this study is to understand the harassment of women in public transport of Lahore.

**Section I: Questions related to socio-demographic characteristics of women who use public transport in Lahore, Pakistan.**

|                        |   |                 |   |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------------------------|---|-----------------|---|--------|-----------------|---|-------|-----------|---------------|--|-----------|--------|--|--------------|----|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Q1. Age                | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>18-25</td> <td>26-30</td> <td>31-40</td> <td>41-50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </table>   |                 |   |        | 18-25           | 26-30   | 31-40 | 41-50     | 1             | 2  | 3         | 4      | <table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                        | 18-25   | 26-30           | 31-40   | 41-50  |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1                      | 2   | 3               | 4   |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                        |   |                 |   |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Q2. Level of Education | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Below Primary</td> <td>Primary</td> <td>Secondary</td> <td>Middle</td> <td>Matric</td> <td>Intermediate</td> <td>BA</td> <td>Any Other</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td>6</td> <td>7</td> <td>8</td> </tr> </table> |                 |   |        |                 |   |       |           | Below Primary | Primary  | Secondary | Middle | Matric   | Intermediate | BA | Any Other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | <table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                        | Below Primary   | Primary         | Secondary   | Middle | Matric          | Intermediate  | BA    | Any Other |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1                      | 2   | 3               | 4   | 5      | 6               | 7   | 8     |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                        |   |                 |   |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Q3). Area of origin    | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Lahore</td> <td>Interior Punjab</td> <td>Outside Punjab (Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Islamabad, Azad Kashmir)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </table>  |                 |   | Lahore | Interior Punjab | Outside Punjab (Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Islamabad, Azad Kashmir) | 1     | 2         | 3             | <table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                        | Lahore  | Interior Punjab | Outside Punjab (Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Islamabad, Azad Kashmir) |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1                      | 2   | 3               |   |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                        |   |                 |   |        |                 |   |       |           |               |  |           |        |  |              |    |           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



|  |  |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Q4). Ethnicity</b></p>   | <p><b>Ans.</b></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="548 256 1131 382"> <tr> <td>Punjabi</td> <td>Pashtun</td> <td>Baloch</td> <td>Other</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </table>   | Punjabi                    | Pashtun                           | Baloch                     | Other                             | 1   | 2 | 3  | 4 | <table border="1" data-bbox="1156 222 1255 254"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>   |  |  |  |  |
| Punjabi  | Pashtun  | Baloch                     | Other                             |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1  | 2  | 3                          | 4                                 |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q5). How many hours in a week do you use the public transport?</b></p> | <table border="1" data-bbox="609 434 1071 556"> <tr> <td>2-8 hours</td> <td>8-10 hours</td> <td>10-14 hours</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </table>  | 2-8 hours                  | 8-10 hours                        | 10-14 hours                | 1                                 | 2   | 3 | <table border="1" data-bbox="1156 464 1255 495"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2-8 hours  | 8-10 hours   | 10-14 hours                |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1  | 2  | 3                          |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q6). Have you ever faced harassment in public transport?</b></p>       | <table border="1" data-bbox="630 739 1050 863"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>22</td> </tr> </table>   | Yes                        | No                                | 1                          | 22                                | <table border="1" data-bbox="1156 739 1222 770"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>  |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| Yes  | No   |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1  | 22   |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q7). Have you ever seen someone being harassed?</b></p>                | <table border="1" data-bbox="630 978 1050 1102"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>22</td> </tr> </table>  | Yes                        | No                                | 1                          | 22                                | <table border="1" data-bbox="1156 978 1222 1010"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| Yes  | No   |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1  | 22   |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q8). How to prevent harassment in public transport?</b></p>            | <p><b>Ans.</b></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="548 1251 1143 1436"> <tr> <td>Protest</td> <td>Assaulting the harasser</td> <td>A Parliamentary resolution</td> <td>Severe constitutional punishments</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </table> | Protest                    | Assaulting the harasser           | A Parliamentary resolution | Severe constitutional punishments | 1   | 2 | 3  | 4 | <table border="1" data-bbox="1156 1218 1255 1249"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |  |  |  |  |
| Protest  | Assaulting the harasser  | A Parliamentary resolution | Severe constitutional punishments |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1  | 2  | 3                          | 4                                 |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |                            |                                   |                            |                                   |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|---|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Q9). Who is responsible for the instance of sexual harassment?</b></p>                 | <p><b>Ans.</b></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="548 226 1040 352"> <tr> <td><b>Harasser</b></td> <td><b>Harassed</b></td> <td><b>Society</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>1</b></td> <td><b>2</b></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> | <b>Harasser</b> | <b>Harassed</b> | <b>Society</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b>   |  | <table border="1" data-bbox="1159 226 1219 260"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |  |  |
| <b>Harasser</b>  | <b>Harassed</b>   | <b>Society</b>  |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>1</b>   | <b>2</b>  |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q10). Have you ever travelled in a Pink bus?</b></p>                                   | <table border="1" data-bbox="548 539 969 665"> <tr> <td><b>Yes</b></td> <td><b>No</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>1</b></td> <td><b>2</b></td> </tr> </table>  | <b>Yes</b>      | <b>No</b>       | <b>1</b>       | <b>2</b> | <table border="1" data-bbox="1159 539 1219 573"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>   |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>1</b>   | <b>2</b>  |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q11). Do you think patriarchy is responsible for such incidents?</b></p>               | <table border="1" data-bbox="548 781 790 907"> <tr> <td><b>Yes</b></td> <td><b>No</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>1</b></td> <td><b>2</b></td> </tr> </table>  | <b>Yes</b>      | <b>No</b>       | <b>1</b>       | <b>2</b> | <table border="1" data-bbox="1159 781 1219 814"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>   |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>1</b>   | <b>2</b>  |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Q 12) Do you think religion has played any role in controlling such incidents?</b></p> | <table border="1" data-bbox="548 1033 790 1159"> <tr> <td><b>Yes</b></td> <td><b>No</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>1</b></td> <td><b>2</b></td> </tr> </table>  | <b>Yes</b>      | <b>No</b>       | <b>1</b>       | <b>2</b> | <table border="1" data-bbox="1159 1033 1219 1066"> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>1</b>   | <b>2</b>  |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |   |                 |                 |                |          |  |  |  |  |  |

| Section II: Questions pertaining to instances and scenarios of harassment of women in public transport |  |                       |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
|--|--|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|
| Q13). Is it easy to report harassment incidents to the police station?                                 | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> </tr> </table>   | Yes                   | No        | 1                     | 2        |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |   |  |  |   |
| Yes  | No   |                       |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| 1  | 2  |                       |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| Q14). With whom the victim shares about harassment incidents?  | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Family</td> <td>Friends</td> <td>Both</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>                                   | Family                | Friends   | Both                  | 1        | 2 |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| Family   | Friends  | Both                  |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| 1  | 2  |                       |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| Q 15) From where the victim get support?   | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Family</td> <td>Friends</td> <td>Society</td> <td>Law</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </table>       | Family                | Friends   | Society               | Law      | 1 | 2 | 3   | 4 |  |  |   |
| Family   | Friends  | Society               | Law       |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| 1  | 2  | 3                     | 4         |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| Q16). In which vehicle, incidents of sexual harassment take place more often?                          | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Bus/Wagon</td> <td>Rickshaw</td> <td>Taxi</td> <td>Chingchi</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </table> | Bus/Wagon             | Rickshaw  | Taxi                  | Chingchi | 1 | 2 | 3   | 4 |  |  | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bus/Wagon  | Rickshaw   | Taxi                  | Chingchi  |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| 1  | 2  | 3                     | 4         |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| Q17). Who is most likely to harass women in a wagon/bus?   | <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Driver</td> <td>Conductor</td> <td>Fellow Male Passenger</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </table>               | Driver                | Conductor | Fellow Male Passenger | 1        | 2 | 3 |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |  |   |
| Driver   | Conductor  | Fellow Male Passenger |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |
| 1  | 2  | 3                     |           |                       |          |   |   |   |   |  |  |   |

|   |            |           |  |  |
|---|------------|-----------|--|--|
| <b>Q18) Are you aware of Sexual Harassment Law?</b> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |  |  |
|   | <b>1</b>   | <b>2</b>  |  |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Q19) What do you know about sexual Harassment Law?</b>  |  |
| <b>Q20) In your opinion, what would be the percentage of those victims, who report such incidents?</b> |  |
| <b>Q 21) What are the reasons of not reporting harassment incidents</b>                                |  |
| <b>Q22). How do you define Harassment?<br/>Ans.</b>  |  |
| <b>Q22). What do you think of women who are driving Scooties and Bikes on roads?<br/>Ans.</b>          |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Q23). How the sexual harassment cases against women can be controlled and more secure women spaces in public can be created?</b></p> |  |
|--|--|

**Thank you for your Cooperation!**