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Study lays bare sexual abuse of women in public transport

Staff Reporter



About 94% of women commuting in public transport in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical or other forms, according to a study by BRAC. A somewhat surprising revelation of the study is that males belonging to relatively older age group of 41–60 years have been identified as the major perpetrators, accounting for 66% of such incidents. The study blamed lax implementation of laws, excessive crowd in buses, and weak or zero monitoring, such as absence of close circuit cameras, as the major causes behind sexual harassment on roads and in public transport, especially in buses.

The findings of the study titled “Sexual harassment and accident free transport for women” was presented to the media at the National Press Club in the capital yesterday. BRAC carried out the research in assistance from BRAC University.

Prof. Syed Saad Andaleeb, Prof. Simeen Mahmud, Fahmida Saadia Rahman and Kabita Chowdhury conducted the research.

Hasne Ara Begum, coordinator of GJ&D programme, and Kabita Chowdhury, research associate of the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development under BRAC University, presented the keynote paper on the research findings. Prof. Syed Saad Andaleeb and Ahmed Najmul Hussain, director of the BRAC Road Safety Programme, were among those who spoke at the event.

GJ&D programme coordinator Nishath Sultana moderated the event.

BRAC organised the press event on the occasion of International Women's Day to be celebrated on March 8 and in alignment with its broader objective of promoting the agenda of creating safe public space and facilitating safe mobility for women.

In his welcome speech, Hussain said: "BRAC is working in 100 schools along the Gazipur-Tangail highway to raise awareness about sexual harassment on road and public transport. Students and teachers will be informed on the issues of road safety and sexual harassment risk on the roads; they will be trained to raise their capacity to prevent such incidents".

The research was conducted between April and June 2017. A total of 415 women participated as respondents in its quantitative and qualitative stages. In terms of demographics, the study covered women from low and lower-middle income backgrounds in urban, semi-urban and rural areas, who commute by public transport and on foot to go to their workplaces and other destinations. The geographical areas covered in the research are Gazipur, Dhaka and Birulia of Savar upazila in Dhaka district.

According to the research, 35 per cent of the respondents using public transport said they had faced sexual harassment from males belonging to the age group of 19–35 years. Around 59% of respondents had faced such harassment from males who were 26–40 years old.

The forms of sexual harassment experienced by the respondents included deliberate touching of the victims' bodies, pinching, standing too close to the victims and pushing, touching the hair of the victims, putting hand on their shoulders, and touching their private parts.