

Public Transport: 94pc women harassed

Finds Brac research on women's safety on roads

Staff Correspondent

WOMEN'S SAFETY OUTDOORS

26%

are harassed on streets

81.6%

complained of staring/leering

20.5%

stopped using public transport

45.4%

started wearing hijab to avoid stalking

A whopping 94 percent women surveyed have complained of harassment in public transport at a time when more and more women are stepping out of social and familial boundaries to get education and join the job market.

If all engaged in the transport sector are not trained to be gender sensitive and women not encouraged to shun the culture of silence, a lack of free movement would stifle women empowerment, speakers said yesterday at the presentation of a research by Brac at the Jatiya Press Club.

The research titled, “Safe road for women: Reducing sexual harassment and road crash in Bangladesh” was conducted between April and June last year under the road safety programme of gender justice and diversity initiative, Brac. The study was conducted with the help of Brac University.

The research found that a majority of the perpetrators who harass women in public transports and on the streets are in the age group of 41-60. Sixty six percent women spoke of experiencing harassment by men of the group.

A lack of the implementation of law and surveillance and overcrowded public vehicles are among the issues contributing to the scenario.

Four hundred and fifteen men and women in Dhaka (urban), Gazipur (peri-urban) and Birulia (rural) of Savar above the age of 15 were interviewed in the study. Female students of school, college and university, and homemakers who travel in public transport along with children to and from school were in the majority.

The research brought up different kinds of verbal and physical harassment that women go through in their daily commute -- 74 percent -- and while walking on the streets -- 26 percent. Bus, tempo, rickshaw and auto-rickshaw were deemed to be unsafe more or less.

Obscene or abusive languages, catcalls, whistling were among the ways of harassing them. Nearly 45 percent women said they had been subjected to sexual comments on clothing, anatomy and their looks.

Women also complained of deliberate touching, shoving/elbowing and patting on buttocks.

A majority of the women said they had walked away from the scene after experiencing harassment and felt humiliated. Such experiences sometimes leave a long-time impact on the psyche of the victims, as suggested in the study report.

Boys and girls usually grow up in the country with a social wall built segregating them. As a result, they don't get the opportunity to create a respectful understating of each other under the supervision of teachers and advisors and so fail to share thoughts and emotions with each other with respect, researchers said in the report.

The very perception of men with patriarchal mindset that women are taking up the public space meant for them is the root cause of the harassment of women, said Habibur Rahman, programme head of gender justice and diversity initiative of Brac.

Work should be done at the policy level and to create awareness to change the scenario, he added.

Hosne Ara Begum, programme coordinator of gender justice and diversity initiative, Brac, and Kabita Chowdhury, research associate of Brac University, presented the research outcome.

It was also learnt during the research that women fell victim to road crashes when they hurried to get down from buses or other vehicles following harassment or in fear of harassment.

Careless driving, poor road condition, footpaths being occupied and women having to get down from running vehicles were also cited as reasons for road accidents.