

## Study: 94% women victims of sexual harassment in public transport

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Around 94% women commuting in public transport in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical and other forms, a study has said.

The findings of the study titled “Roads free from sexual harassment and crash for women” were disclosed at a program at the National Press Club in Dhaka on Tuesday, said a statement issued by Brac.

The study, conducted by development organization Brac, identified males belonging to relatively older age group of 41 to 60 years as the major perpetrators who are responsible for 66% of such incidents.

The study also mentioned factors, including lax implementation of law, excessive crowd in buses and weak or no monitoring (such as absence of closed-circuit cameras) as the major causes behind the sexual harassment on roads and public transport, especially in buses.

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

The research was conducted during a three-month period between April and June, 2017 where a total of 415 women participated in Gazipur, Dhaka and Birulia of Savar upazila in Dhaka district.

According to the research, 35% respondents using public transport said they faced sexual harassment from males belonging to the age group of 19 to 35 years while 59% faced such harassment from the males who are 26 to 40 years old.

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The forms of sexual harassment experienced by the respondents include deliberate touching of victim’s body parts like chest, pinching, standing too close to the victim and pushing, touching victim’s hair, putting hand on their shoulder, and touching private parts of the victim.

When asked about their response to such harassments, 81% women said they kept silent while 79% said they moved away from the place of harassment.

According to the study, the present education system in which male and female children attend institutions separately restricts the scope for learning gender equality lessons as well as building the attitude and habit of treating both the sexes equally and with respect.

To help children develop such an attitude, adequate training and counselling of teachers and counsellors are essential, the study noted.

Prof Syed Saad Andaleeb said the pervasive nature of sexual harassment on roads and transport calls for a much larger study that will reflect the nationwide scenario in this regard.

Speakers at the event also observed that although commendable progress has been made in Bangladesh in terms of women’s education and professional engagement, the feeling of insecurity among women is pervasive.

To address the existing issues, they demanded stricter implementation of laws apart from the initiatives to raise public awareness.

Earlier in February, passengers' welfare platform Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity published a report which stated that at least 21 women were either raped or gang-raped on public transportation across Bangladesh in the last 13 months.