



# DOES SHE TRAVEL SAFE?

Report on Sexual Harassment in Public Transportation in Sri Lanka



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# FOREWARD

## Report on Sexual Harassment in Public Transportation in Sri Lanka

This report was developed based on a study supported by UNFPA in 2015.

### Acknowledgments

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In 2015, UNFPA initiated Sri Lanka's first national survey on sexual harassment in public transport to understand the prevalence of this issue. Preliminary data revealed that 90% of the female respondents were affected by sexual harassment in public buses and trains at least once in their lifetime, thus highlighting the severity of the issue. UNFPA incorporated the summary findings into a policy brief, which was launched in 2017. This was succeeded by a number of public awareness and advocacy initiatives throughout the years of 2017 and 2018 under the themes: 'Does She Travel Safe?' and 'Don't Look Away.'

The country's law, as it currently stands, does not explicitly include sexual harassment in public transport as a punishable offense. UNFPA is continuously engaging with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation and the National Transport Commission in revising the National Transport Policy to include provisions aimed at addressing Sexual Harassment in Public Transport, particularly in buses and trains.

Evidence and data generated through UNFPA's study has thus served as a baseline for policy recommendations in drafting punitive laws that will seek to eliminate all forms of sexual harassment in public transport. I believe that efforts surrounding this initiative will continue to

educate the public on what constitutes as sexual harassment, as well the implications and repercussions on victims, perpetrators and society as a whole.

All forms of sexual harassment have an overall negative impact on both the physical and psychological well-being of victims and survivors. It is, therefore, imperative that effective policies are established to address gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

UNFPA, as the co-chair of the National Forum Against Gender-Based Violence and the Development Partners Gender Working Group, is pleased to facilitate a platform to strengthen the response to gender-based violence in Sri Lanka by providing policy advice and advocacy dialogues with key stakeholders, such as the government, NGOs, development partners, the UN gender mechanism and other established forums.

I sincerely hope that these efforts will ensure every woman's right to freedom, including the right to access public transportation, without any fear of harassment or intimidation.

**Ritsu Nacken**  
Representative, UNFPA Sri Lanka





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexual harassment in all forms violates basic human rights and contributes to a culture that discriminates women and girls, affecting them physically and psychologically, with implications to their social and economic well-being. Sexual harassment in public transportation has been recognized as a widespread issue in Sri Lanka and across the globe. Despite numerous organizations and rights groups working to address the issue, existing data does not capture its severity, thus posing a significant barrier towards a lasting solution. To bridge this gap, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) conducted a study to determine the nature and severity of harassment faced by women and girls accessing public transport in Sri Lanka.

The key objective of this study was to generate evidence for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the issue, thereby enabling the design of focused programmatic interventions. Data collection methods for the study included, stakeholder consultations, quantitative surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The sample

population of the survey consisted of 2,500 females between 15-35 years of age, representing all 25 administrative districts within the nine provinces of the country.

The survey findings revealed that 90% of women and girls have experienced sexual harassment in buses and trains in Sri Lanka at least once in their lifetime, while only 4% had reported such incidents to the police. The findings were further corroborated by the views expressed by participants at stakeholder consultations, identifying sexual harassment in public transport as a major concern. A key conclusion drawn from the study was that high congestion in buses and trains is a contributory factor towards the occurrence of sexual harassment in public transportation. This was made evident by 60% of the sample population indicating unpleasant experiences while travelling in congested buses or trains in Sri Lanka. Researchers also observed the correlation between incidents of sexual harassment, travel distance and travel time. According to informants, the most frequently affected category of victims were females who sat near males on long distance buses.

It is important to identify a holistic approach to address the issue of Sexual Harassment in Public Transport. Multi-sectoral coordination, within the transport, police, justice and social welfare sectors need to be further developed through strengthened partnerships. In this light, the mainstreaming of gender and awareness of gender-based violence among these stakeholders is immensely significant.

Government interventions to improve sustainable infrastructure that supports equality and empowerment of women and girls is also essential. The Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and other government institutions together with civil society organizations and UN agencies, must ensure that national policies and advocacy efforts are gender-sensitive and inclusive of public-safety infrastructure mechanisms. Moreover, alternative and innovative efforts promoted through the combination of technology and public participatory methods such as mobile applications are essential in generating sustainable solutions towards eliminating Sexual Harassment in Public Transport.





# OVERVIEW

Sexual harassment and assault in public transport is a common occurrence in almost all societies in the world. The types of harassment can vary from relatively mild to extremely serious in nature. These include, but are not confined to, lewd comments, catcalls, ogling/leering, innuendos, sexual invitations, threats, displaying pornography, staring, being followed or photographed, masturbation, unwanted sexual touching and rape (Shoukry, Hassan & Komsan, 2008).

This report defines sexual harassment broadly as any form of 'unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention'. Public transport is defined as: 'buses, trains and other forms of transport that are available to the public, charging set fares and running on fixed routes' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2011, p.1160). The study however, focuses only on buses and trains that are available for public transportation purposes.

Although men occasionally experience such harassment, the vast majority of victims are women and girls (Stringer, 2007). Therefore, the sample population

of this study conducted in Sri Lanka, constitutes of only women and girls aged 15-35 years of age.

From a legal and policy perspective, Sri Lanka has ratified key international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – 1981. The General Recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee states that Violence against Women is 'a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.' It further identifies aggressive acts against women as "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty...whether occurring in public or in private life." (CEDAW, 1981)

Additionally, Article 13, Clause 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for the freedom of movement of

every citizen: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.' In line with the international commitments, Article 12 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka states that 'No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any one of such grounds.' Article 14 further elaborates on the freedom of movement entitled to all citizens of the country.

The definitions highlight the legal framework within which the issue is framed. However, due to the normalization of such incidents, cases of sexual harassment in public transport are seldom reported or given due recognition within the context of a rights-based issue.

This research mainly focuses on identifying the magnitude and forms of sexual harassment in public transport and analyzing the factors influencing diverse types of harassment.



## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To understand the prevalence of sexual harassment in public transport affecting women and girls.
- To better understand the forms and influencing factors of sexual harassment in buses and trains in Sri Lanka.
- Develop insights to identify meaningful and sustainable solutions to the problem of sexual harassment in public transport from an operational, tactical and strategic perspective.
- To provide an understanding to policymakers on the need to take a gender-sensitive approach when planning, designing and operationalizing transport services.
- To create awareness on the issue of sexual harassment in public transport within the wider context of developing safer cities and enabling inclusive growth.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN SRI LANKA

The system of public transportation in Sri Lanka comprises of buses and trains. The bus and railway system facilitates the transportation needs of more than half (52%) of the island's population<sup>1</sup>. Public transport services are predominantly utilized for commuting from home to work or school and back. Buses are the principal mode of public transport, with the state-owned bus transportation, Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB), accounting to 8.2% of the total motorized transport<sup>2</sup> and private bus services providing for 38.2% of the demand<sup>3</sup>. While bus

transportation is required to deliver nearly 90% of the public transportation services, the limited number of buses in circulation fail to effectively meet this demand.

Ownership of public transportation buses in Sri Lanka (2017)<sup>4</sup>.



1 Sustainable Urban Transport Index, 2017  
 2 Sustainable Urban Transport Index, 2017  
 3 National Transport Commission, 2015  
 4 Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018

Inter-provincial private buses are regulated by the National Transport Commission while provincial road passenger transport authorities regulate intra-provincial private bus services.

Transportation by train accounts for 6% of total public transport in Sri Lanka<sup>5</sup>. The railway consists of an intercity network linking major population centres and commuter rails serving daily Colombo commuters. The government holds a monopoly in rail transport as no private entity still operates in this sector. The state-owned Sri Lanka Railway manages approximately 396 trains and maintains over 1,500 km of rail tracks interlacing the country<sup>6</sup>. Similar to bus transportation, the railway system is also unable to meet public demand.

It has been identified that due to the unsatisfactory level of public transportation services in Sri Lanka, there is an increasing shift towards the use of private transport, creating a significant upsurge in demand for private vehicles<sup>7</sup>. While a growing percentage of urban commuters rely on three-wheeler taxi services for transport, private commuting services cater to passengers requiring daily commuting to and from their home to their school or workplace.

At the national level, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation manages the overall public transport sector of the country. Considering the pressing need for improving the services of public transportation in Sri Lanka, several government initiatives are underway to expand the national road network, upgrade the railway and introduce a light rail system to cater to daily urban commuter flows.

5 Sri Lanka Railways, 2016  
 6 Sri Lanka Railways, 2016  
 7 National Transport Commission, 2015



# METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

The quantitative component of the **research was conducted in all 25 districts** of Sri Lanka, covering **all 9 provinces** of the country, with a sample population size of **2,500 women and girls** between the **ages of 15 to 35 years**.

Purposive sampling techniques were used for both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. The sample is from

a total population of 20,675,000 (Sri Lankan population as at the end of 2014) with 95% confidence interval and precision/error margin of  $\pm 2.00\%$  for proportion,  $p = 0.5$ .

The distribution of the sample selected for the questionnaire survey is included in Table 1.1. The study sites were bus stops, railway stations, offices and educational institutions in each district.

Table 1.1: Sampling distribution of the quantitative research

District	Population (in '000)	Proportion of Population	Sample Size (Number of Respondents)	Proportion of Sample
Colombo	2,343	11.3%	250	10%
Gampaha	2,328	11.3%	245	10%
Kalutara	1,236	6.0%	135	5%
Kandy	1,397	6.8%	150	6%
Matale	494	2.4%	65	3%
Nuwara Eliya	728	3.5%	90	4%
Galle	1,077	5.2%	115	5%
Matara	826	4.0%	95	4%
Hambantota	616	3.0%	75	3%
Jaffna	593	2.9%	75	3%
Kilinochchi	118	0.6%	50	2%
Mannar	102	0.5%	55	2%
Vavuniya	176	0.9%	55	2%
Mullaitivu	93	0.4%	50	2%
Batticaloa	534	2.6%	75	3%
Ampara	666	3.2%	80	3%
Trincomalee	389	1.9%	55	2%
Kurunegala	1,636	7.9%	155	6%
Puttalam	778	3.8%	90	4%
Anuradhapura	879	4.3%	100	4%
Polonnaruwa	412	2.0%	70	3%
Badulla	831	4.0%	95	4%
Monaragala	463	2.2%	55	2%
Ratnapura	1,110	5.4%	125	5%
Kegalle	850	4.1%	95	4%
Total	20,675	100%	2,500	100%



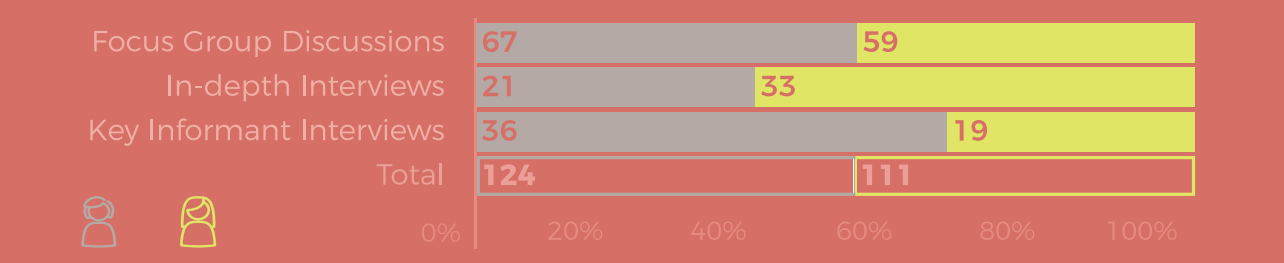
The questionnaire was structured with mainly close-ended questions in line with the objective of the study to include the following sections:

- Background information of the respondents (age, gender, location, education etc.)
- Details of public transport and its usage (frequency, mode of transport, travel time)
- Experiences of sexual harassment in public transport
- Typology of the sexual harassment
- Impact of harassment to the victim
- Frequency of the harassment
- Awareness of legal provisions available to seek solutions

- The relationship of the incidents with the type of transport system
- Possible interventions for long term redress

To further contextualize the issue, qualitative information was collected using Focus Group Discussions, In-depth Interviews and Key Informant Interviews in all nine provinces engaging both male and female respondents. The research was conducted in line with gender-sensitive research methodologies to ensure a balanced perspective of the issue. The total sample of participants representing the male and female populations selected for the qualitative research are shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Gender diversity of the participants of the qualitative research



The selected participants for the qualitative research represented the three main ethnicities in the country; Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. The total sample selected from each ethnicity is provided in Table 1.2. The distribution of the sample selected, including ethnic diversities from different districts and provinces, is included in Annexure 1.

Table 1.2: Ethnic diversity of the sample population of the qualitative research

Type	Sinhala		Tamil		Muslim		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Focus Group Discussions	111	88.1	12	9.5	3	2.4	126	100
In-depth Interviews	50	92.6	1	1.9	3	5.6	54	100
Key Informant Interviews	54	98.2	1	1.8	0	0.0	55	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>91.5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note: Age limit was not considered for the qualitative research (the objective of sample selection was to gather information from key stakeholders)*

## ETHICS

The confidentiality of the responses and anonymity of the respondents were maintained under any and all circumstances. Furthermore, the objectives and the impact of the study were clearly clarified while the informed consent of the relevant stakeholders was obtained throughout the research process. The freedom of the respondents to participate in the study was highly respected. Social, cultural and ethnic sensitivities of the stakeholders were respected and treated equally in the study.

## LIMITATIONS

The questionnaire survey focused only on females within the age group of 15-35 years, which excludes girls below the age of 15, for which different techniques and methodologies would have needed to be applied. Additionally, it does not take into account women over the age of 35; hence, it falls short of being inclusive of all females who use public transport. The study was also limited to buses and trains and did not take into account other popular methods such as three-wheelers and other cab/taxi services.

The views provided were subjective in nature and may not be the interpretation of the wider opinion of women and girls, as it also does not take into account the impact of intersectionalities. It must also be noted that a literature review was not conducted prior to the study to determine the scope of the subject, as there are limited studies conducted on the subject in comparison to the wider area of sexual and gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.



# KEY FINDINGS

## 01 PURPOSE OF USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The study indicated that the majority of respondents used public transport to reach their work places and educational institutions as shown in Figure 1.3. For leisure trips, the research highlighted that individuals tend to use their own transport means, or hired vehicles for group travel (e.g. pilgrimages).

This highlights the critical role that public transport services offer in terms of access to education and employment. The spatial mismatch within urban and semi urban structures and the lack of

opportunities and services at locations of the respondents clearly indicates the crucial role of public transportation as an enabling factor for economic opportunity and development. From a gender perspective, education and employment are key to achieving gender equality and reducing poverty among women and girls.

Figure 1.3: Purposes of using Public Transport in Sri Lanka

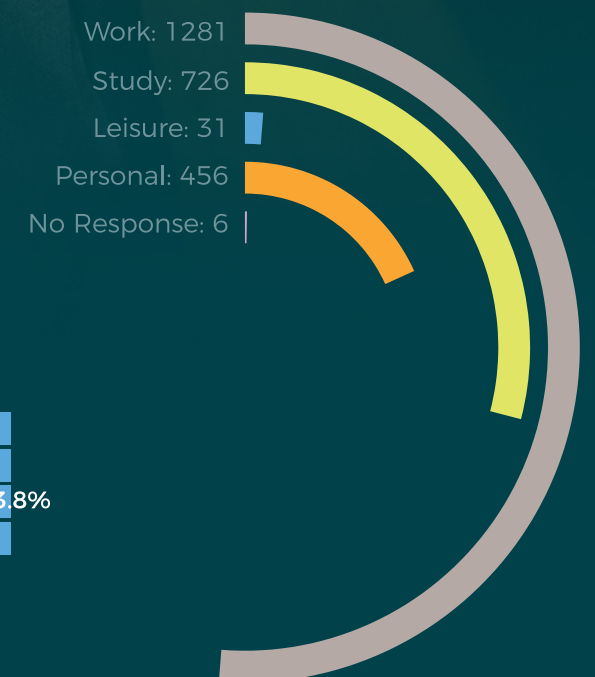
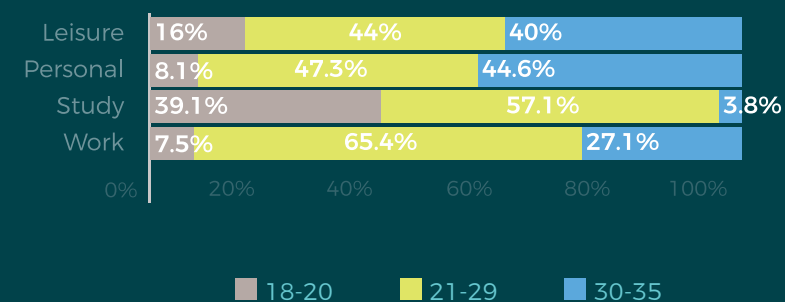


Figure 1.2: Purposes of Using Public Transport vs Age





Analysis of the correlation between age and purpose of travel reveal that the majority of commuters between the ages of 21 to 29 use public transportation to reach educational institutions (57%) and work places (65%).

The information collected from In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) further substantiated the observations of the questionnaire survey, as shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Purpose of using public transportation (In-Depth Interviews)

Province	No. of Respondents	Office		School		Other	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Sabaragamuwa	6	4	66.7	0	0.0	2	33.3
Central	7	2	28.6	2	28.6	4	57.1
North Western	6	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3
North Central	7	4	57.1	0	0.0	3	42.9
Southern	6	3	50.0	1	16.7	2	33.3
Northern	6	3	50.0	1	16.7	1	16.7
Eastern	6	5	83.3	0	0.0	1	16.7
Uva	6	4	66.7	1	16.7	1	16.7
Western	6	6	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	56	32		7		16	

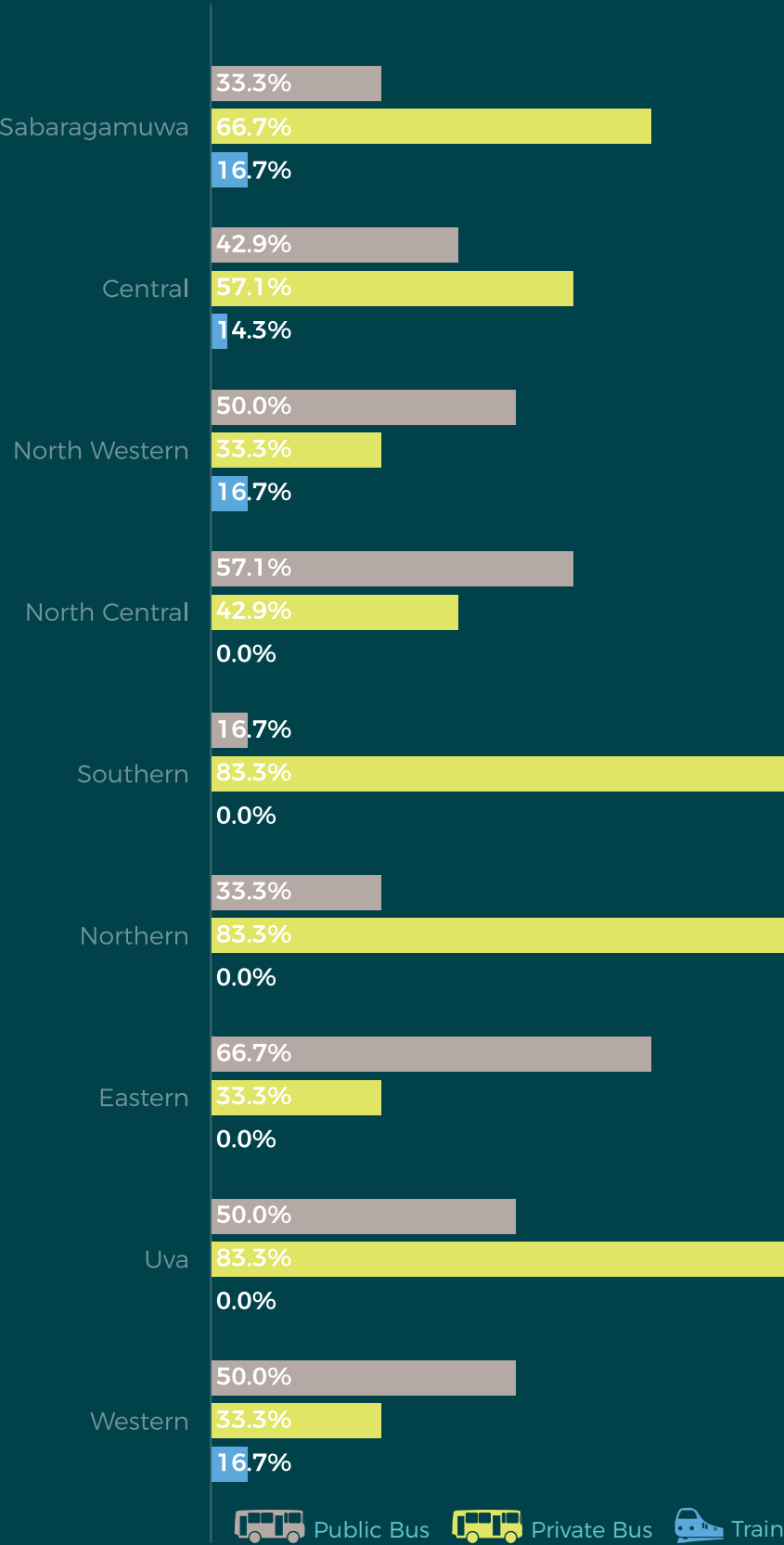
## 02 TYPES OF TRANSPORTATION USED

Only a limited percentage of respondents use trains for their regular travel. The most popular means of transportation was buses, of which privately-owned buses were marginally a more popular mode of transport than public buses.

Table 1.4: Modes of transport used by respondents

Mode	No. of responses
Private Bus	1,979
Public Bus	1,573
Train	440
Three-wheelers	167
Cabs	38
Private Staff and Van/Bus	43
Other	12

Figure 1.4: Types of Public Transportation used by respondents of the In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)



The following table illustrates that safety is one of the key aspects that female commuters look for when choosing their mode of transportation followed by efficient time use and cost-effectiveness.

Table 1.5

Ranking by Respondents				
1	2	3	4	5
Cost Effectiveness				
276	298	682	89	61
Comfort				
251	374	594	102	44
Safety				
1274	640	267	11	1
Time Saving				
421	610	548	96	42
Well-mannered Situation				
228	503	269	53	28



# 03 EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN BUSES AND TRAINS

The quantitative survey revealed that sexual harassment in public transport is a prevailing issue. The survey confirmed that 90% of the 2,500 female respondents had experienced an incident of sexual harassment in buses or trains at least once in their lifetime.

Table 1.6: Experiences of sexual harassment in buses and trains at least once in a lifetime

	No. of Respondents	
	No.	%
Yes	2,253	90.12
No	242	9.68
No response	5	0.2
Total	2,500	100

The issue was further verified through the qualitative research conducted in 9 provinces. The majority of participants mentioned that it is a significant issue. Although some participants were neutral in their responses, non of the respondents mentioned that it is not an issue.

# 04 TYPES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED

The study identified 35 different types of actions, which can be categorized as acts of sexual harassment ranging from physical contact to verbal and visual actions of sexual nature. The findings indicated that the majority of sexual harassment faced was physical in nature, as shown in Table 1.7.

It was further noted by some in the qualitative study that within the context of Sri Lankan public transportation, it is somewhat difficult to categorize certain acts as sexual harassment, mainly due to the physical constraints and difficulties when travelling in overcrowded buses and trains.

Table 1.7: Types of sexual harassment experienced

Types of Sexual Harassment	No. of Respondents	
	Frequency	%
Deliberate touching of any part of the body	1838	73.52
Unwanted crowding of personal space (e.g. excessive closeness)	1500	60
Improper seating etiquette (deliberately occupying more space than necessary for seating)	1312	52.48
Rubbing genitalia against another's body	1302	52.08
Asking for the contact number	1218	48.72
Trampling the foot deliberately	1211	48.44
Fixated gaze on body parts	1157	46.28
Suggestive/lascivious looks	1139	45.56
Attempts at conversation	1091	43.64
Throwing pieces of paper with contact numbers asking to contact them	1020	40.8
Bus conductor, when urging people to move forward places hand on shoulder/back etc. deliberately	875	35
Commenting on attire and body	846	33.84
Unwanted touching on the pretext of posing a question	734	29.36
Flirting	705	28.2
Hooting /whistling	682	27.28
Indecent exposure/exhibitionism (exposing genitalia)	619	24.76
Cracking distasteful/crude jokes	596	23.84
Unpleasant sounds / words	565	22.6
Pinching	514	20.56
Driver deliberately using brakes, making passengers lurch forward	506	20.24
Rude gestures of a sexual nature	505	20.2
Threats of a sexual nature	382	15.28
Simulating sexual acts	348	13.92
Showing sexually explicit photographs	344	13.76
Extending an invitation to partake in sexual activities	338	13.52
Verbal abuse due to gender and due to the rejection of romantic/sexual advances	305	12.2
Kissing sounds	281	11.24
Videoing/recording	278	11.12
Broadcasting sexually explicit material on the radio/ TV inside the bus/train	258	10.32
Other	144	5.76

The perception of the participants of the FGDs, IDIs and KIIs on the types of Sexual Harassment further validates the results of the quantitative survey.

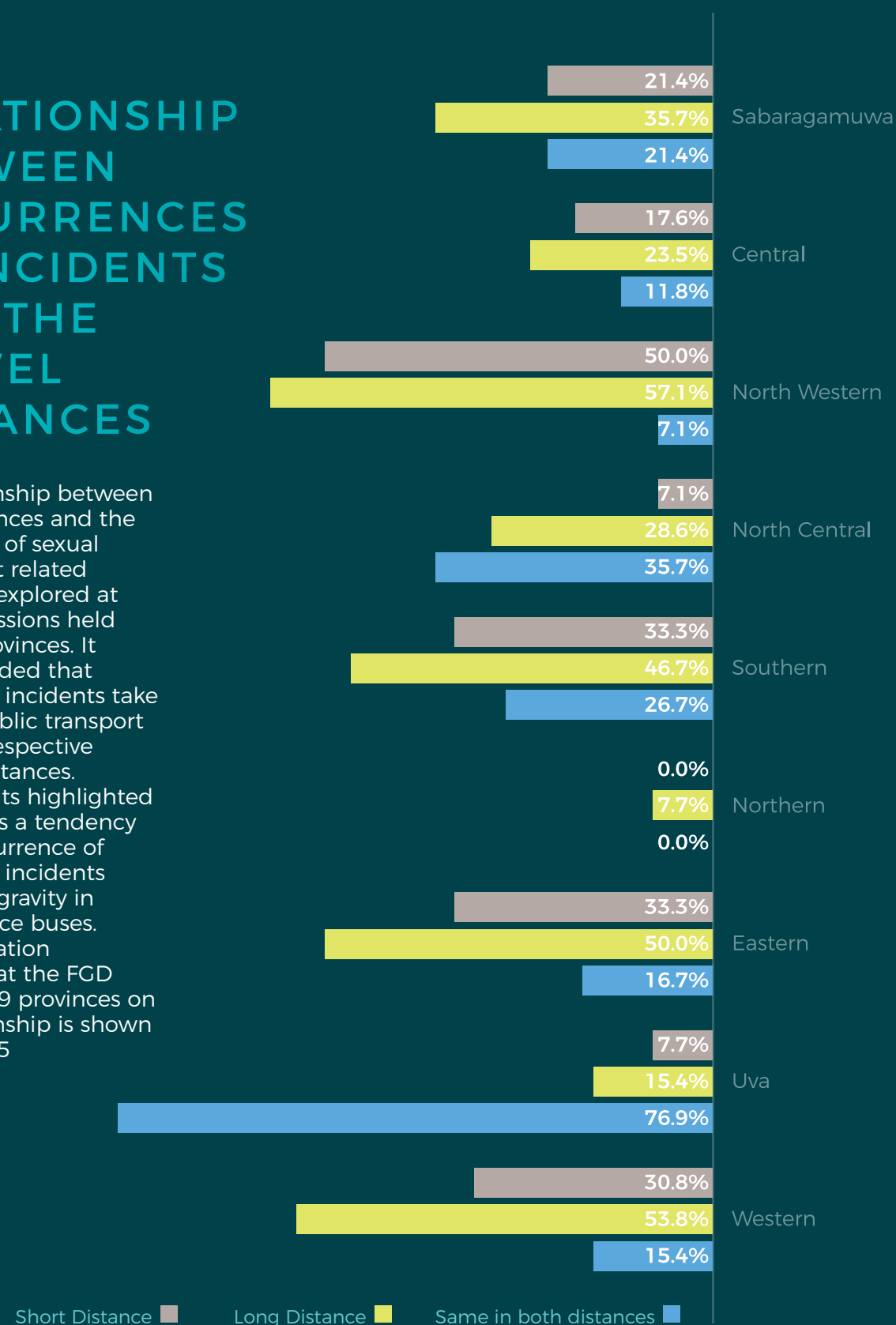


05

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OCCURRENCES OF INCIDENTS AND THE TRAVEL DISTANCES

The relationship between travel distances and the occurrence of sexual harassment related issues was explored at the FGD sessions held in the 9 provinces. It was concluded that unpleasant incidents take place in public transport systems irrespective of travel distances. Respondents highlighted that there is a tendency for the occurrence of unpleasant incidents with more gravity in long distance buses. The information generated at the FGD sessions in 9 provinces on this relationship is shown in Figure 1.5

Figure 1.5: Relationship between Occurrences of Incidents and the Travel Distances

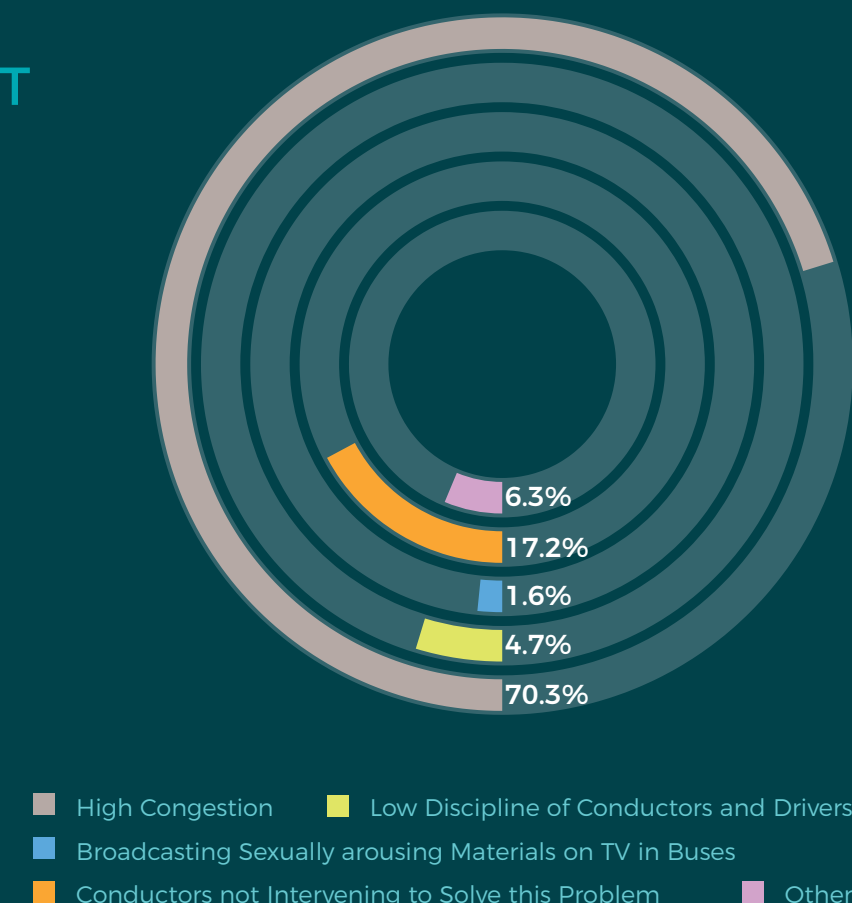


06

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The participants of the KIIs highlighted the lack of sufficient buses and trains during peak hours as a reason for incidents to take place as the shortage of buses and trains creates overcrowding. It was further noted that overcrowding increases a victim's vulnerability to sexual harassment. The qualitative research took into account tangible aspects that would influence incidents. It must be noted that other factors such as the attitudes and perceptions of men and boys; norms and values within the communities, effectiveness of policies and laws were not considered explicitly, although evidence suggests these are contributing factors to the prevalence of the issue.

Figure 1.6: Factors that influence the incidents of sexual harassment



“The number of incidents taking place is high in buses and trains when there is congestion. There are people who intentionally look for highly congested buses to sexually harass victims.”

(Development Officer, 35, Passara, Female)

“Incidents take place irrespective of the level of congestion in the bus or train. Sometimes strangers use different tactics to make a conversation even when there is a low level of congestion.”

(Development Officer, 32, Welimada, Male)

“My experience is that unnecessary touching and leaning has occurred in highly congested buses. Exposure of genitals has happened in less crowded buses.”

(Undergraduate, 23, Matale)



07

IMPACT OF  
SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT

The survey highlighted that the majority of victims subjected to sexual harassment stated the incident impacted their productivity at the workplace or education institution.

The information generated during the KII's further validated the assumption that sexual harassment in public transport creates a negative impact on a victim's social well-being. This is further highlighted in Figure 1.7.

Figure 1.7: Impact on Individuals and their Individual Performances

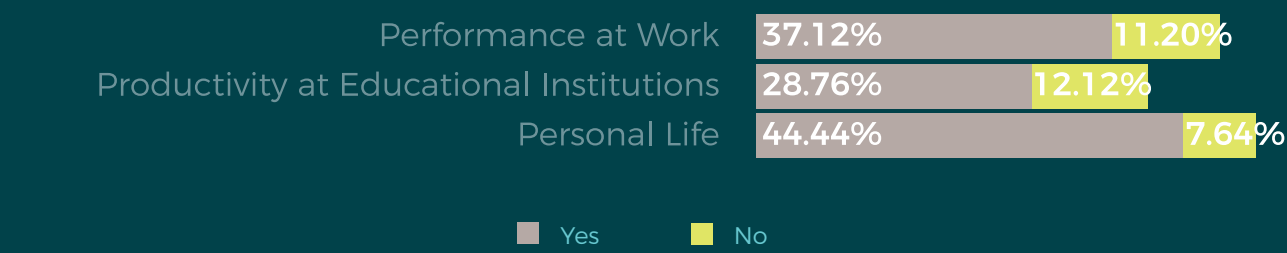


Table 1.8 highlights the emotions of the respondents when subjected to an incident of harassment. More than 75% of the respondents felt angry and more than 60% felt humiliated and embarrassed. The victimization, vulnerability and most often the helplessness of women and girls when subjected to incidents of harassment during their commute for day-to-day activities is highlighted through the data.

“  
On Saturday I was attending a tuition class. Before the bus started, a 15 year old boy sat next to me. He ejaculated on my frock and got off from the bus. There was nothing I could do and as soon as I went home, I threw the frock. At that age, I had no knowledge about these things and I did not tell anything to anybody. Today, I'm sharing what happened to me because so many school girls can get harassed in this manner.  
”

(Vice Principal, 35, North Western Province)

“  
My friend was travelling in a less crowded bus when a man had played a blue film in front of everyone.  
”

(Private-sector Employee, 23, Kegalle, Sabaragamuwa Province)

“  
Some boys who were travelling with their friends were talking about women's bodies in a sexually explicit manner in front of other female passengers.  
”

(Teacher, 34, Vavuniya, Northern Province)

Table 1.8: Emotions of respondent when subjected to sexual harassment

	No. of Respondents	
	Frequency	%
Feel humiliated/embarrassed	1711	68.44
Feel angry	1908	76.32
Feel degraded	1128	45.12
Feel scared	1224	48.96
Feel traumatized	1016	40.64
Enjoyable	12	0.48
Aroused	5	0.20
Loved	7	0.28
Like the attention	131	5.24
Other	3	0.12

“  
Some bus conductors in night buses switch off the lights after midnight, after which they go to sleeping female passengers and touch their private body parts. This happens in every bus which is scheduled to start traveling after 10.00 p.m.  
”

(Health Assistant, 30, Matale, Male)

“  
When a female cousin of mine was travelling from Colombo in a bus, a male passenger sat beside her and asked for her personal information such as her job, age, telephone number etc. while behaving in a forceful manner. This was a stressful and fearful experience for her.  
”

(Development Officer, 28, Kakunadaura, Male)

“  
As nurses, we have to work nights. After such sleepless nights we get into the bus feeling very tired and we try to find a vacant seat to get some rest. It is natural to get sleepy. One such a day, the person who sat beside me who was well-dressed and looked about 45 years old, was unnecessarily touching me. As I objected, he told me to travel by private vehicle. This incident made me very uncomfortable and anxious.  
”

(Nurse, 33, Kandy, Female)

“  
This happened to me as I was coming home after attending a tuition class. The person sitting beside me had a big traveling bag on his lap. I observed that he was doing something with his hand under the bag. Then I saw that he had opened the zip of his trousers and was exposing his genitalia. He was covering it from the bag and was showing it only to me. I suddenly stood up. Later when I was getting down from the bus, I informed the conductor about this incident and asked the conductor to teach him how to travel in a bus. This incident made me really angry and embarrassed. After this, I searched for further details about him. I got to know that he is a father of two children. I told my mother about the incident and the conductor was also informed because this person was regularly traveling in this bus.  
”

(Undergraduate, 23, Matale)



# 08

## FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENTS

The data collected through the questionnaire indicated that 12.15% of the sample population experienced harassment daily, while 16.4% experienced such incidents weekly and 25% monthly.

Table 1.9: Frequency of incidents of sexual harassment

	No. of Respondents	
	Frequency	%
Daily	317	12.68
Weekly	416	16.64
Monthly	647	25.88
7-8 times a year	418	16.72
4-5 times a year	337	13.48
1-2 times a year	290	11.6
No Response	75	3.0
Total	2500	100

# 09

## PERPETRATOR

The data collected from the quantitative survey (97.2%) indicated that, the perpetrator was a male and most often it was a co-passenger/s, the bus driver and/ or the conductor. Data further highlighted that the profile of the perpetrator was to be middle-aged.

Table 1.10: Approximate age of the perpetrator

Approximate Age	No. of Respondents	
	Frequency	%
Under 30	722	28.88
Middle aged	2062	82.48
Over 50	740	29.60

Table 1.11: Profile of perpetrator

	No. of Respondents	
	Frequency	%
The bus-conductor	581	23.24
The ticket checker in the train	89	3.56
The bus driver	155	6.20
Co-passenger	1991	79.64
Co-passengers	714	28.56
Mobile sellers/ beggars	279	11.16

# 10

## AWARENESS OF LEGAL AND PROTECTION MECHANISMS

In line with the international conventions and standards, Act 22 of Section 345 of the Penal code of Sri Lanka (1995) recognizes sexual harassment as a criminal offence:

“Whoever, by assault or use of criminal force, sexually harasses another person, or by the use of words or actions, causes sexual annoyance or harassment to such

other person, commits the offence of sexual harassment and shall on conviction be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years or with a fine or with both and may also be ordered to pay compensation of an amount determined by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed for the injuries caused to such person.”

Table 1.12 highlights the level of awareness on the laws governing sexual harassment in Sri Lanka. As reflected through the data, 51.5% of the respondents are aware of the laws whilst 46.1% of the respondents are not aware of the laws governing sexual harassment in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, when it comes to the penalty for the crime of sexual harassment, only 35.2% of the respondents are aware of the penalty whilst the remaining 60.1% were unaware.

Table 1.12: Awareness of Laws Governing Sexual Harassment in Sri Lanka

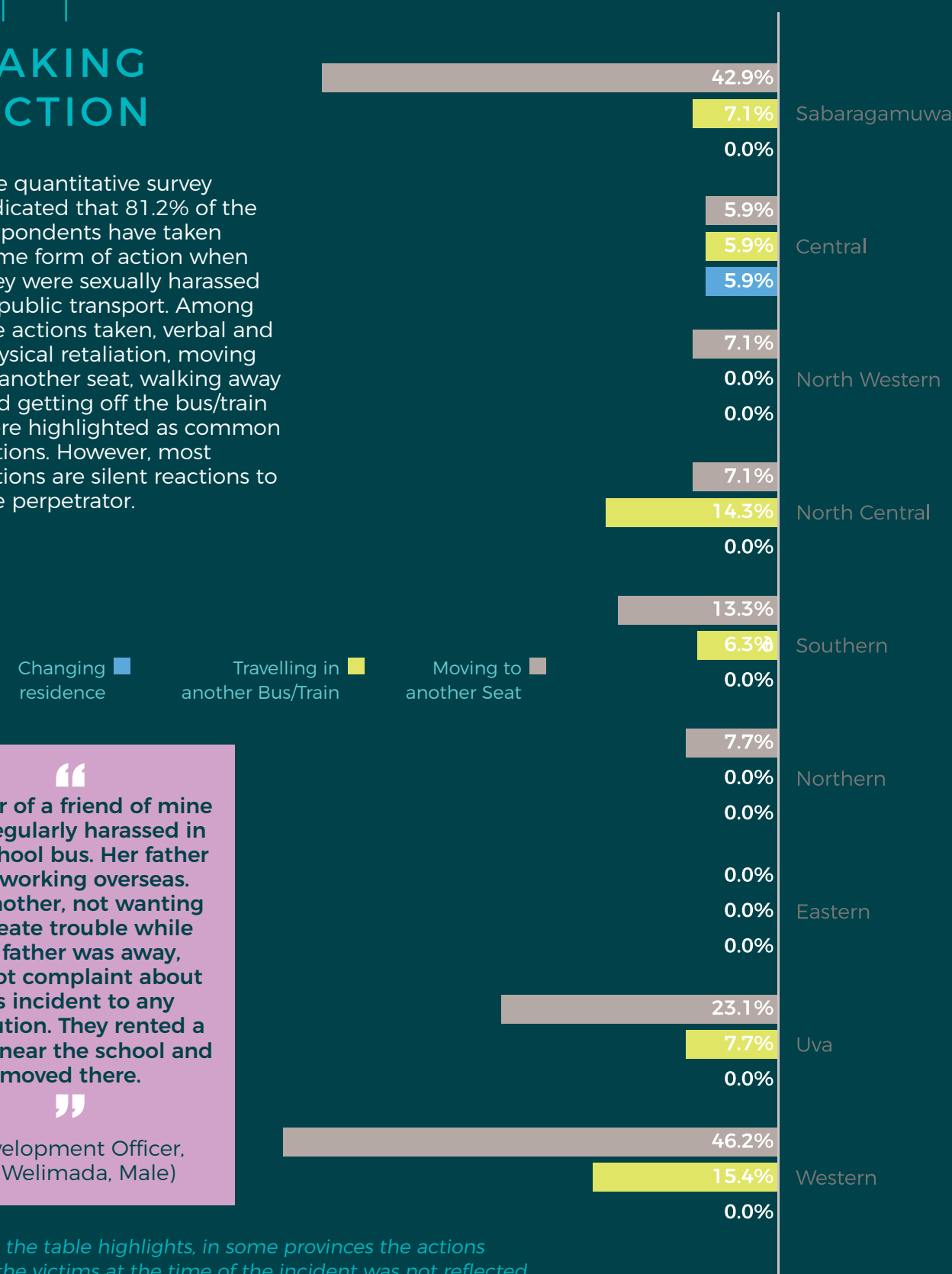
	Yes		No		No response	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
The laws governing sexual harassment in Sri Lanka	1,289	51.56	1,154	46.16	57	2.28
The penalty for the crime of sexual harassment in Sri Lanka	882	35.28	1,504	60.16	114	4.56



# TAKING ACTION

The quantitative survey indicated that 81.2% of the respondents have taken some form of action when they were sexually harassed in public transport. Among the actions taken, verbal and physical retaliation, moving to another seat, walking away and getting off the bus/train were highlighted as common actions. However, most actions are silent reactions to the perpetrator.

Figure 1.8: Action taken by Victims at the Time of the Incidents – In depth Interviews



“A sister of a friend of mine was regularly harassed in the school bus. Her father was working overseas. Her mother, not wanting to create trouble while the father was away, did not complaint about this incident to any institution. They rented a house near the school and moved there.”

(Development Officer, 32, Welimada, Male)

*\*As the table highlights, in some provinces the actions of the victims at the time of the incident was not reflected*

Figure 1.9: Altering behavior due to fear of sexual harassment

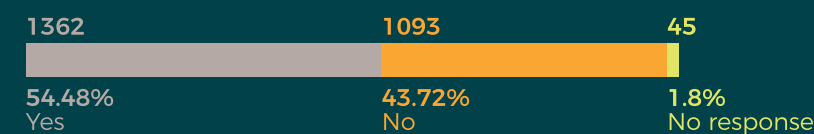


Table 1.13: Behaviour alterations of respondents

	Ranking by Respondents					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Changing normal attire/being conscious of attire	304	272	159	8	2	
Changing bus/train routes	73	139	88	4	2	
Changing times of travel	151	224	139	15	2	
Not attending classes/other activities that you would otherwise like to attend	38	126	72	7		
Being extra alert	784	238	151	3	8	1
Other	8	40	57			

“We do not talk with strangers inside the bus. If harassment takes place, we move from that place. As nurses, we travel to Colombo to attend seminars/workshops etc. and sometimes travel at night when most actions of sexual harassment are carried out. What I do to prevent these acts is to book the entire seat for myself.”

(Principal, Nursing School, 48, Badulla)

“An older man followed me to the train every day after work and made inappropriate suggestions. Though I refused to agree he continued his behavior daily for two weeks which made me very depressed. As a last resort, I stopped going in that train.”

(Employee, Super Market, 19, Kandy)

# 12 BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

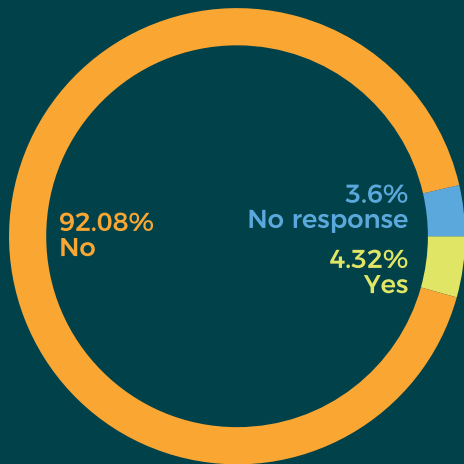
The data highlights that 50.6% of the respondents do not intervene on behalf of the victim and 82% stated they have noticed others being sexually harassed.

The main reason for this as noted in focus group discussions was the ‘unwillingness to take the risk of causing conflict’ and ‘fear of drawing attention to oneself.’ It must be noted that this behavior has created a more conducive environment for the perpetrator to continue and repeat actions of sexual harassment. Bystander intervention has the ability to create a deterrent for perpetrators of sexual harassment and contribute to a safer environment for all individuals.

# 13

## SEEKING THE HELP OF THE POLICE

The research highlighted that only 4% of victims sought help from the police. The reason for the low number is that respondents were not in a position to take the complaint to the police at the time of the actual incident for practical reasons. When the harassment persists, the study indicates that most often the victim would choose to lodge a complaint through their parents or a relative.



# 14

## MOTIVATION AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Table 1.14: Perceptions of the respondents on factors that may motivate perpetrators to commit the offence

Motivation	Ranking by Respondents							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Desire to Control	116	52	48	29	16	7	5	1
Desire to dominate	82	93	94	31	24	12	3	
Sexual Frustration	437	417	552	54	10	2		
To experience sexual activities published in the media	205	360	334	65	29	5	7	
Lust	721	643	422	29	15	2		
Enjoyment	200	456	410	47	34	7		
Mental disorders	539	322	334	69	17	4	6	
Do not know	182	17	89	3				

Table 1.15: Deterrents believed to prevent sexual harassment in public transport

	Ranking by Respondents											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Recognizing sexual harassment in Public Transport as a criminal offence in the Penal Code of Sri Lanka	840	404	165	41	35	31	16	5	3	1	2	
Entering the offender's name to a database	78	392	319	27	21	14	14	5	8	4	2	
Establish CCTV cameras in buses and trains	482	335	290	52	37	13	12	2	2	2		
Have women-only buses in operation in addition to the unisex bus	207	232	171	45	14	10	12	5	2	5	5	2
Amend laws governing sexual harassment to make co-passengers as well as the bus conductor and drivers liable if they fail to take action against the perpetrator	232	301	296	92	46	21	9	6	1	2		1
Special female task force to look into matters of sexual harassment in public transport	61	105	159	56	39	33	17	17	5		2	3
Maintenance of a log of sexual harassment incidents in each bus	12	30	35	3	11	4	11	8	7	5	2	2
Paste stickers in buses and trains notifying passengers of their rights against sexual harassment	229	190	311	63	55	37	23	19	7	4	2	
Make SLTB, SLR and NTC accountable	115	110	146	38	22	13	16	12	6	9	3	
Publishing the offender's names and photographs on social media (newspapers and television)	58	77	135	41	24	19	17	15	14	8	3	2
Establishing a user friendly complaint systems such as Telephone/SMS/MMS/ Skype etc.	60	75	145	40	14	19	6	7	2	4	8	2
Expanding the police complaining systems with female police officers	85	153	194	52	21	30	19	11	13	4	2	13
Other	29	46	88	18	20	17	12	12	5	7	1	





# RESPONDENTS' SUGGESTIONS

The stakeholders consulted at the FGDs, IDIs and KIIs made the following suggestions to address the issue.

## INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

- Establish CCTV camera networks and improving the standards of the transportation services
- Minimize congestion by legally limiting the number of passengers allowed on a bus and increasing the number of buses during peak-time
- Establish a compliant mechanism which is exclusive to the transport sector
- Empower conductors to stand against harassment and to take action
- Increase the quality of the conductors and drivers by training and recruiting qualified individuals
- Inclusion of female conductors and drivers

## POLICY CHANGE

- If the harassment is taking place with the knowledge or assistance of the driver and/or conductor, enforcing strict legal measures to remove the license of the bus and operators
- Introducing comprehensive sexuality education in schools and create a dialogue among students on the harmful impact of sexual harassment
- Enact legislative systems that are flexible and efficient in addressing issues of sexual harassment in public transport. E.g. keeping records of the victims, giving authority to conductors/drivers to take actions against incidents
- Introduction of regulations regarding the types of TV/radio/songs/movies broadcast in buses
- The introduction of 'ladies only' buses, trains and train berths which divide two rows as male, female and students only

## AWARENESS RAISING

- Awareness programmes covering all districts and social groups to educate women on how to react and respond when getting harassed and to educate co-passengers on ways to intervene and the legal status
- Create awareness on the legal action and punishment for offenders in order to discourage perpetrators
- Deliver a communication campaign with cartoons and posters with the involvement of the media
- Display of emergency numbers through posters in buses explaining the complaints process and next steps if an individual is being sexually harassed in a bus

*Disclaimer: These recommendations are suggestions by the respondents, and are not fully endorsed by UNFPA*





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective institutional changes central to the safety of women and girls need to be established. Planning and operations in the transport sector needs to reflect equitable values that take into consideration the needs of all commuters. Evidence suggests that although the majority of users of public transport are women, the operation and service delivery is male dominated. As such, there is clear gender segregation within the transport sector that needs to be addressed.

A key recommendation is to mainstream gender within the transport sector especially within the National Transport Ministry, to ensure that the needs of women and girls are noted prominently in service delivery. The establishment of a focal point at the highest level within the Ministry of Transport and a commission to drive the changes with clear timelines and budgetary allocations is essential. The support of key line ministries such as the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and

the Ministry of Education should be sought in order to ensure coordinated action. Response interventions must also look into the infrastructure aspects of the transport system, such as spacing and lighting, while ensuring appropriate adherence to regulations.

In line with recommendations at the national level in mainstreaming gender, mandatory training along with standard operating procedures to intervene in the event of incidents need to be established for all transport operators. Furthermore, a code of conduct for transport staff and passengers needs to be developed and displayed at all service delivery points.

Provincial and local government institutions need to develop a Public Safety Policy and “City Safety Audits” to be incorporated into local plans. Furthermore, accountability mechanisms related to sexual harassment need to be in place when issuing permits for private transport operators.

Mainstream national campaigns and a media strategy to target norms and attitudes of commuters to intervene when incidents take place should be delivered,

also empowering women and girls to speak up when faced with incidents of sexual harassment.

A complaint mechanism should be initiated exclusively for incidents of sexual harassment, with easy access at bus stands and railway stations. This can be a parts of monitoring incidents and a data collection mechanism.

Given that the issue of sexual harassment in public transport is trivialized, it limits the ability for commuters to control the situation, thus impeding their ability to seek legal and criminal redress. It is a grave violation of rights and a clear indication of the existence of power structures that perpetuate norms and attitudes discriminating women and girls.

As highlighted in the study, the mobility of women and girls are influenced by many factors among which safety is the key priority. Transportation is an enabling factor in empowering women and girls and therefore, investments within the transport sector will ensure equitable benefits to the people of Sri Lanka.



