

A Survey Study on Sexual Harassment Experienced by Female Students Traveling Between Chittagong City and the University of Chittagong on Public Transport

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Abstract: Sexual harassment is a common phenomenon in our society that has reached a severe form on public transport, where data shows most passengers have experienced the incident to some degree. This study aims to determine the occurrence of sexual harassment in public transportation and its effects on female students to uphold the dignity of human rights. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from 120 female students at the University of Chittagong. Statistical analysis gives the result with significant values where half of the respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment on public transportation, and 38.33% say they have experienced it twice or thrice in the past six months. Moreover, 55% of respondents think 999 beneficial, while 33.33% of respondents disagree that women's safety applications are helpful. However, 90% of respondents do not know any martial arts, and 73.33% do not carry anything for safety. It is highlighted that 51.67% considered lack of strong laws may be responsible for sexual harassment and 33.33% filed cases when only severe. This paper ends with recommendations for addressing the issue, including a separate bus for women with female drivers and helpers, the strong enforcement of regulations, the effective involvement of university authorities, and adequate police presence. Appropriate implementation of the suggestions may lead the problem to a sustainable solution.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, public transport, effective laws

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is a matter that makes the women folk embarrassed and feared to move in any places with their mental freedom and it grossly degrades their human rights and dignity. Sexual harassment in public place and public transport has become a very severe problem in our country that discourages women to move in any places with mental satisfaction. Even it is such a problem which hampers the female students while moving to their educational institutions. In the present ultra-modern age, the people are thinking for a society beyond discrimination. However, still the society comes across news of sexual

harassment in the daily newspapers almost every day. The talk of equality and the talk for human rights will go in vain if safe society cannot be ensured for women.

Harassment comprises a wide range of criminal activities, which are often described as behavior that demeans, humiliates, or embarrasses a person and is distinguished by its lack of social and moral acceptability. These are actions that, in a legal sense, appear to be disturbing, upsetting or threatening to women. These originate from discriminatory motives and have the appearance of nullifying or limiting an individual's rights.

Sexual harassment is a form of undesired sexual activity that occurs within men and women. It is characterized by a wide range of offensive behaviors such as teasing, winking groping, staring, sexual comments, pinching, telling sexual jokes, spreading sexual rumors, displaying porn films, sketching sexual pictures, and squeezing or stroking ladies' private parts (Madan & Naila, 2016 and Ali & Kramar, 2015). Harassment accusations of this sort might occur for a variety of causes, including assaulting a private person for any reason. Touching can include massaging someone or any part of their body without consent, fidgeting with their hair, grabbing at their clothing with the intention of ripping them off or exposing body parts, caressing their arm, hand, or any other part of their body in an extremely sexual way, hugging an individual without her permission, attempting to kiss someone without asking, cornering a victim with their body. Physical harassment can even be classified as touching oneself ahead of someone if it is done in a sexual manner and makes someone uncomfortable. Harassment occurs in different social places like the workplace, conveyance, home, educational institutions or churches etc. Especially, the article focuses on harassment occurred on public transport. About 94% women in Bangladesh experience harassment publically on transport in verbal, physical or other forms, a study by development organization BRAC (2018) revealed. It operates as sexual pressure that is applied to a person who is not in a strong enough position to reject it (MacKinnon, 1987). Fitzgerald et al., (1995) put them into three groups: sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and harassment based on gender.

Wise and Stanley (1987) proposed that, by identifying 'specific' acts to be included in the phrase, molestation is portrayed as 'exceptional' as opposed to being a frequent display of men's dominance. Experiential reality is likewise excluded from the molestation framework since it is normatively defined. In an example, while calls to 'cheer up' are difficult to identify as molestation under formal standards, they represent a large part of some women's experience of unknown men publicly space and are uniquely gendered and thus behaviors that are not seen as "sexual" or "harassment" may go unreported (Vera-Gray, 2016). Larkin (1997) observed that such occurrences are so frequent that they are rarely categorized as harassment.

There are many international conventions containing the issue of sexual harassment and violence against women. New Women Foundation (2019) reported from GENEVA the platform discussions of a new International Labour Organisation (ILO) a tool to address harassment and violence at work and expresses worry about the potential erosion of internationally recognised international standards for women's rights, including harassment as a form of gender-based violence. The Platform while discussion took into consideration principles from the Convention on the Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Declaration on the Elimination of

Violence Against Women, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, known as the Belém do Pará Convention, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of girls in Africa, called Maputo Protocol and also the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and force, called the Istanbul Convention.

In Bangladesh, Penal Code, 1860 contains sections 354 and 509 that say about the activities as sexual harassment that are insulting to the modesty of women and provide for the punishments. Section 509 of the said Act has been enlisted in the Mobile Court Act, 2009 for the purpose spot punishment. Similarly, section 78 of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police Ordinance, 1978 and section 76 of The Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance, 1976 contain provisions of penalty for teasing women. More severe and elaborate provision covering the issue has been added in the Prevention of Repression on Women and Children Act, 2000 (Amendment 2003) that includes the physical characteristics like touching various bodily parts of a lady or child, making an impolite gesture or annoying a lady sexually in course of satisfying their feeling mischievously (Khan, 2015). The directives of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh's High Court Division address several difficulties with the concept of harassment against children and girls at employment, at educational institutions, and on the streets. It defines harassment as some sexually suggestive comments or gesture conveying directly or over the phone, sending email in indecent means, watching indecently and use of any offensive languages like etc.

The present law containing provisions restraining sexual harassment in Bangladesh is a positive beginning, but it is antiquated and limiting because it refers to harassment as an offense to a woman's modesty. Moreover, non-explicitly sexual forms of gender harassment must be covered by the present laws. However, enacting progressive laws by itself would not suffice to cover the matters. As everyone is aware, it is crucial to ensure that current laws are followed and that individuals responsible for their enforcement are held accountable for their actions. By constant token, if social attitudes—particularly pervasive cultural tendencies of “blaming the victim” in cases of harassment—don't change, the effectiveness of laws are constantly undermined. Women can't expect the law or the police to protect them if the authorities already assume that women who report crimes are “guilty” or “morally lax” (Siddiqi, 2003).

In response to a writ petition filed by *Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) v Govt. Bangladesh & Ors.* [2011] 31BLD(HCD) 324, the High Court Division of Bangladesh observed that we fully concur with the arguments made by the learned advocate for the petitioner organisation because of an in-depth and thoughtful analysis of the provisions mentioned above shows that they are simply insufficient to address the situation of sexual harassment in this country. The phrase “intention to outrage or insult the modesty of any woman” is exceedingly ambiguous and nearly impossible to prove in several of the aforementioned sections, particularly in section 509 of the Penal Code, 1860. 10-point directives issued by the HCD in above case outlining the definition of harassment, which includes all non-contact sexually connoting offenses as well as all other contemporary forms of sexual insults against the potential victims (Hussain, 2016) which are not properly utilized (Farhin, 2018). However, according to a recent newspaper report, Bangladeshi academic institutions and therefore workplaces have not yet coped with court rulings because of a lack of awareness (Farhin, 2018).

The root causes of harassment can't be fixed until people's attitudes toward women, especially poor working women, change in a fundamental way. Women should always have the right to be in public places, no matter the time or place, without having to risk their reputations or their physical safety (Siddiqi, CPD- UNPF, June, 2003). In the past, several scholars focused their studies on molestation entirely on faculty campus or places of employment throughout many different nations. The scholars of the high school for long weren't treated as victims of such harassment (Loredo et al., 1995). Nonetheless, certain findings of a study conducted in the United States revealed that a large proportion of sexual assaults are committed against women aged 18 or under (Greenfeld, 1997). The number of child victims of harassment in Bangladesh is not low (Rahman, 2005). Due to numerous structural factors, including patriarchy, sociocultural norms, and gender expectations, harassment still occurs often in Bangladesh (Nahar, Van Reeuwijk, & Reis, 2013).

There are many articles supporting this issue, almost on a daily basis a minimum of a commentary is found regarding women being harassed at public transport but the quantity of proper study remains very less. Many NGO's like BRAC and Action Aid have done study on this but the provision of research paper supported this issue was less.

This study mainly focused on the rate of sexual harassment determination specially on university female students while travelling to the University of Chittagong from Chittagong city and vice versa. Why public transport? Because most female students cannot afford long-distance private transport, they frequently use it, particularly buses or *tempo*. The University of Chittagong is located about 22 km away from the city center. The study's main goal is to analyze the influence of sexual harassment on the traveling environment, productivity, and female students' attitudes and responses to harassment and safety standards. In order to gain insight into which groups of women may be most affected by harassment on public transport, it is often the case that personal and circumstantial factors influence experience and fear of harassment and assault.

2. Methods and Materials

This study is based on data acquired directly from female students of University of Chittagong while they use the public transport as mode of transport to go to the University of Chittagong from Chittagong city and return from the University. Data had been collected throughout the months of November and December of 2019. A pre-set questionnaire survey was used to get primary data from the respondents. The questionnaire met the standards such as simple, easily understood, concrete and conformed as much as possible to the respondent's way of thinking, and realistic. The questionnaire avoided technical terms and imprecise phrasing that could be interpreted differently. Questions that might affect the sentiments of respondents were also avoided. For easy understanding, the questionnaire was formed in both English and Bengali languages. The questionnaire was included in statistical analysis point in para-3.2. The total number of participants in this study was 120 and they were all female students of (18–25) age level. They were chosen using a non-probability judgmental sampling process. The respondents participated within the survey voluntarily and were unengaged to answer the questions. They were free not

to answer any particular question if they did not want. Data were collected with the prior permission of the authority of the University of Chittagong. Additional secondary data were gathered from various research papers, government reports, international reports, journals, books, and newspapers. MS Excel and SPSS software were used for data analysis. The purpose of this descriptive study is to assess the level of harassment faced by female students while traveling.

3. Findings of the Study

3.1 Questionnaire checking

Our initial stage in the data preparation procedure was to determine whether or not the questionnaire is acceptable. This involves assessing the quality of the interviews and the completeness of the questionnaires. This action was taken when gathering the data. A questionnaire was not acceptable if it was either partially or completely incomplete, if it was answered by a person with insufficient knowledge or who did not qualify for participation, or was answered in such a way which gave the impression that the respondent could not understand the questions.

Through this questionnaire, it was tried to detect the forms and trends of sexual harassment with its frequency that is faced by the women students of the University of Chittagong while moving to and from the university. This significant result of frequency of occurrences made a clear alarming view of the issue.

3.2 Statistical Analysis

The results from the questionnaire of 120 samples were evaluated for SPSS test and all the values were found very significant (P-value of <0.01) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) that are given in Table 1.

Table 1
The Statistical Analysis at a Glance

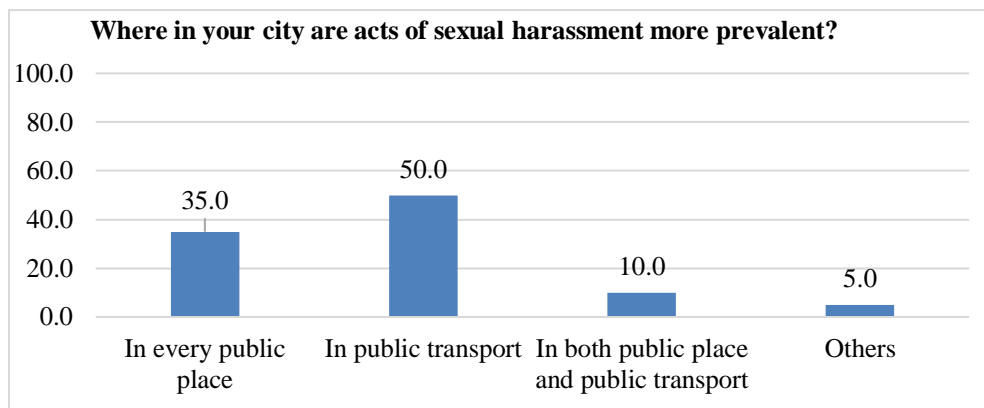
Questionnaire	N	P Value	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
			Lower	Upper			
			Where in your city are acts of sexual harassment more prevalent?	120			
At what time of the day you feel insecure while travelling by public transport?	120	<0.01	2.5524	3.0476	2.8000	1.36954	0.12502

Which public transport do you prefer?	120	<0.01	3.4291	3.8375	3.6333	1.12969	0.10313
When a girl goes out to a public space, I think	120	<0.01	1.6233	1.8767	1.7500	0.70114	0.06400
On an average in a 6 month period, how many times do you face/witness incidents categorized as high on severity by you in the above question?	120	<0.01	2.7143	3.1190	2.9167	1.11960	0.10220
Generally, do you confront a situation when someone tries to harass you in a sexual manner?	120	<0.01	1.8215	2.1785	2.0000	0.98731	0.09013
Generally, do you try to draw the attention of the bystanders of the incident?	120	<0.01	1.6985	2.0681	1.8833	1.02230	0.09332
According to you, what extent the women safety apps are helpful?	120	<0.01	2.8735	3.3932	3.1333	1.43740	0.13122
Do you think calling 999 is helpful when you feel insecure?	120	<0.01	1.3812	1.5854	1.4833	0.56484	0.05156
Do you carry something like (pepper spray, chili powder etc.) for your safety?	120	<0.01	1.6531	1.8136	1.7333	0.44407	0.04054
Do you know any martial art technique for your safety?	120	<0.01	1.8455	1.9545	1.9000	0.30126	0.02750
Do you think that martial art technique is necessary for women's safety?	120	<0.01	1.0716	1.1950	1.1333	0.34136	0.03116
Have you ever stepped in to confront an incident where someone else was being sexually harassed?	120	<0.01	2.0317	2.3683	2.2000	0.93125	0.08501
In your opinion what are the major obstacles to stop sexual street harassment?	120	<0.01	2.2217	2.9117	2.5667	1.90855	0.17423
Do/would you report a case of sexual street harassment to the legal authorities?	120	<0.01	2.9975	3.6025	3.3000	1.67332	0.15275

3.3 Prevalent of Sexual Harassment

From the University of Chittagong, 120 female students were enlisted for this study. All of them agreed on the occurrence of the incident where half of them (50%) thought the sexual harassment took place at public transports, 35% believed it occurs at public place, 10% considered it occurs at both public place and public transport and 5% thinks that it occurs in others (Figure-1).

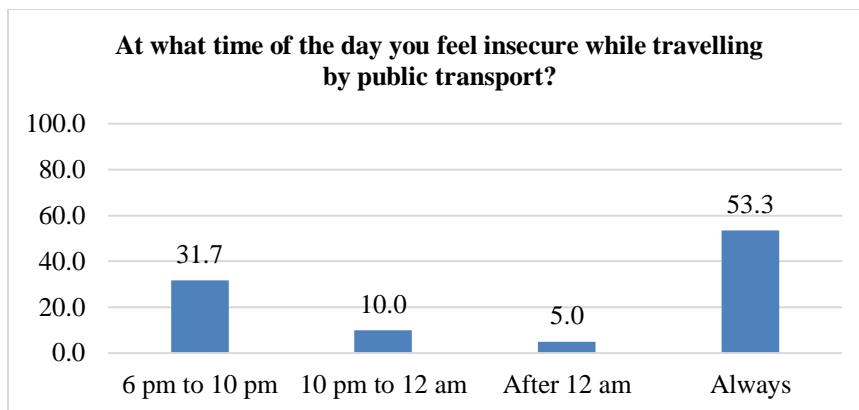
Figure 1
Prevalent of Sexual Harassment



3.4 Time Range of Feeling Insecurity while Travelling by Public Transport

Here most of the respondents (53.33%) felt insecure always, 31.67% respondents felt insecure during 6pm-10pm, 10% respondents felt insecure during 10pm-12am and 5% felt insecure after 12 am (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Time Range of Feeling Insecurity while Travelling by Public Transport

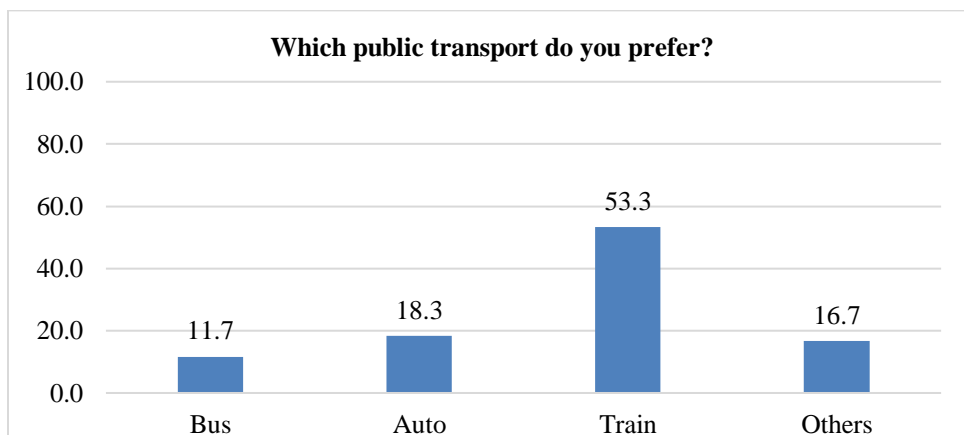


3.5 Preference of Types of Public Transport

In this regard the flow chart depicts that, 53.33% respondents preferred train, where rest of the respondents (46.66%) availed other modes of transport like auto, bus etc. (Figure-3).

Figure 3

Preference of Types of Public Transport

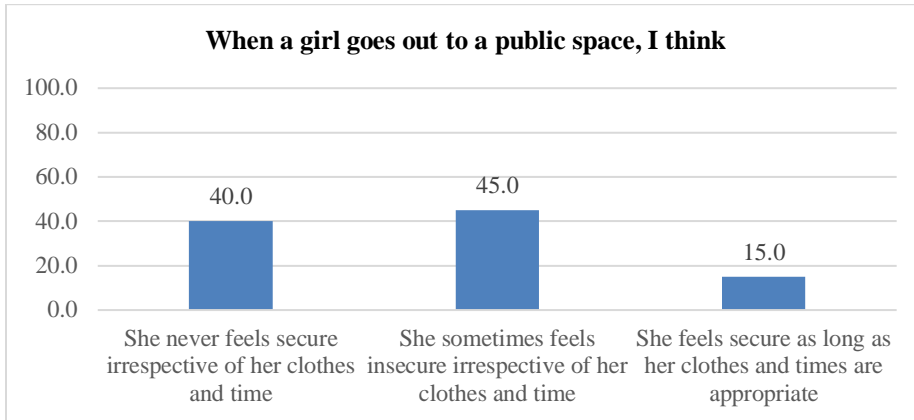


3.6 Insecurity Feeling Irrespective to Cloths and Times

Here only 15% of the represents felt secure in appropriate time and clothing while 85% of the respondents thought that there were no relation between security and appropriate time and clothing in case of sexual harassment (Figure-4).

Figure 4

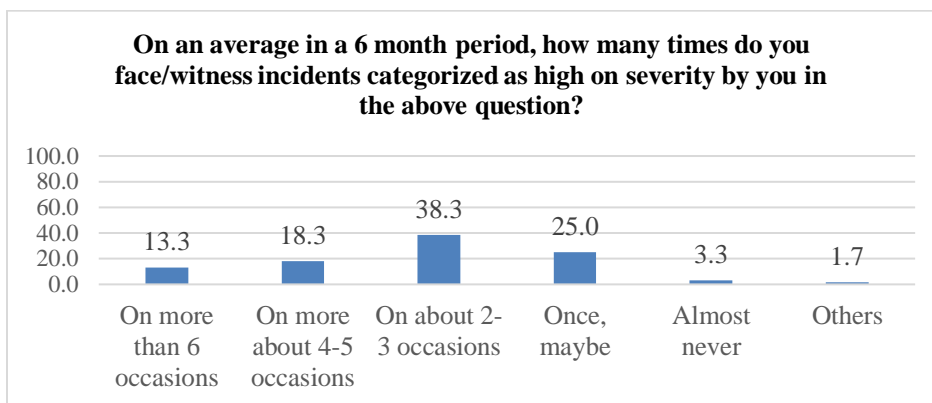
Insecurity Feeling Irrespective of Cloths and Times



3.7 Frequency of Incidence of Sexual Harassment in 6-month Period

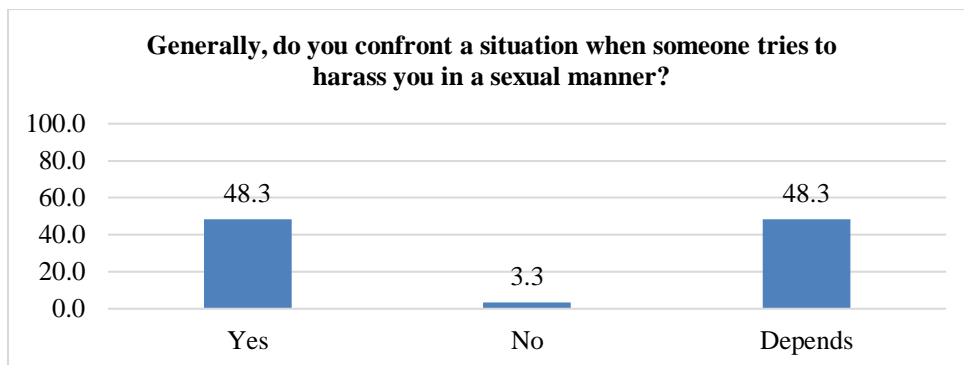
The chart below shows that, over a six months period, 96.69% respondents faced or witnessed the problem of sexual harassment ranging from minimum one time to maximum six to more times. On the other hand, only 3.33% respondents said they did not face the problem for minimum level at that time (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Frequency of Incidence of Sexual Harassment in 6-month Period



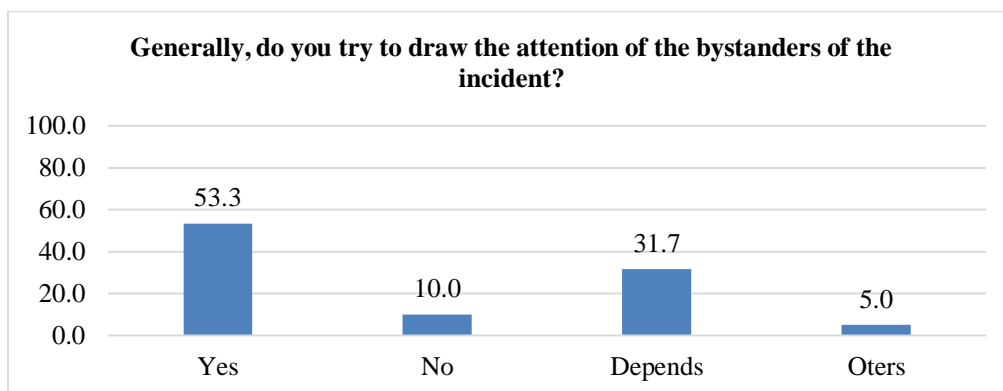
3.8 Confrontment of Sexual Manner

The graph describes that, 96.66% respondents confronted the situation if anyone wanted to harass her where half of them did it irrespective of circumstances and rest of the half confronted depending on the situation. 3.3% respondent did not confront the situation (Figure-6).

Figure 6*Confrontment of Sexual Manner*

3.9 Seeking attention of the bystanders of sexual harassment

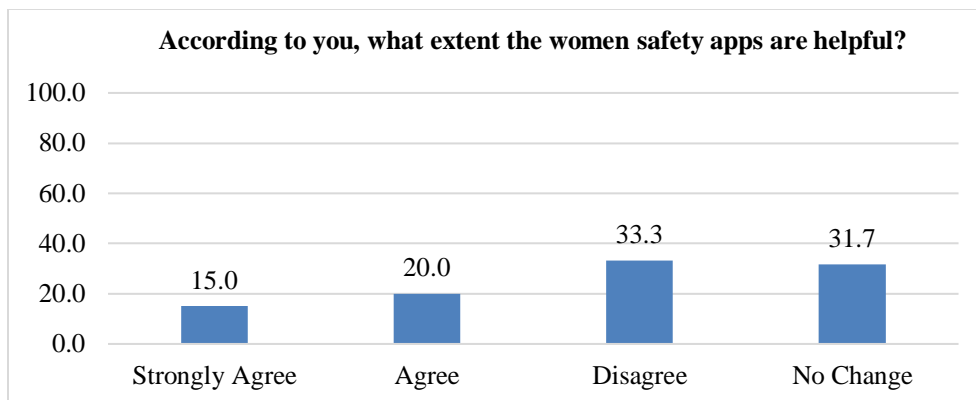
The chart demonstrates that, 85% of the respondents tried to seek attention of the bystanders from which 31.67% did this observing the situation. 10% respondents did not try and 5% did something other (Figure 7).

Figure 7*Seeking attention of the bystanders of sexual harassment*

3.10 Extent of Usefulness of Women Safety Apps

This chart presents that, regarding the usefulness of women safety apps, 35% agreed as effective while 65% (33.3% + 31.7%) disagreed and considered it as no change (Figure 8).

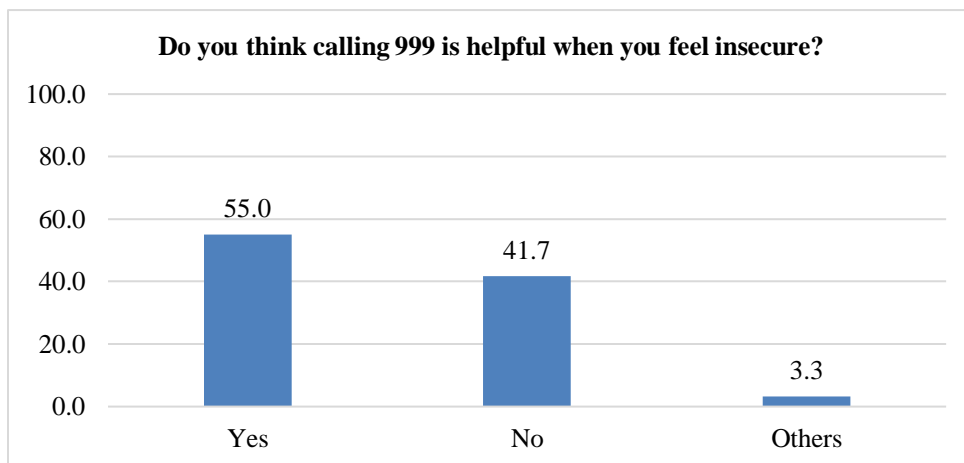
Figure 8*Extent of Usefulness of Women Safety Apps*



3.11 Range of Usefulness of Calling 999

This chart expounds that, 55% respondents found 999 helpful, 41.67% did not find it helpful and 3.33% responses to others (Figure 9).

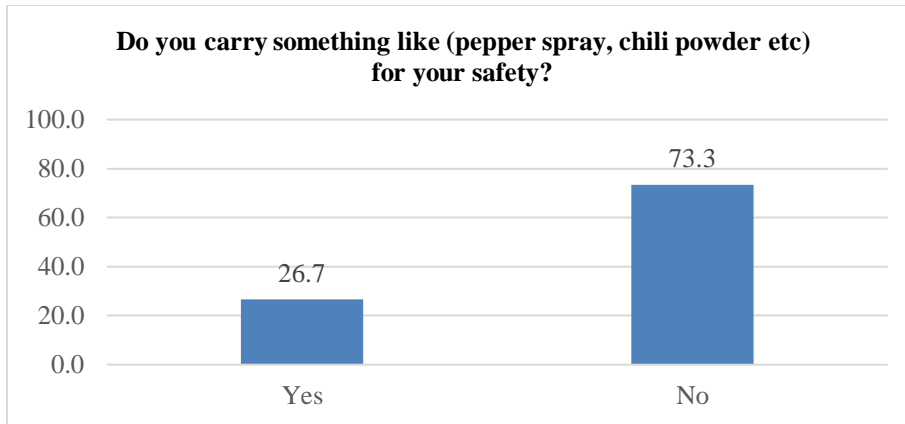
Figure 9
Range of Usefulness of Calling 999



3.12 Carrying any Materials for Safety

Figure 10 delineates that 73.33% respondents did not carry anything and 26.68% carried something for safety.

Figure 10
Carrying any Materials for Safety

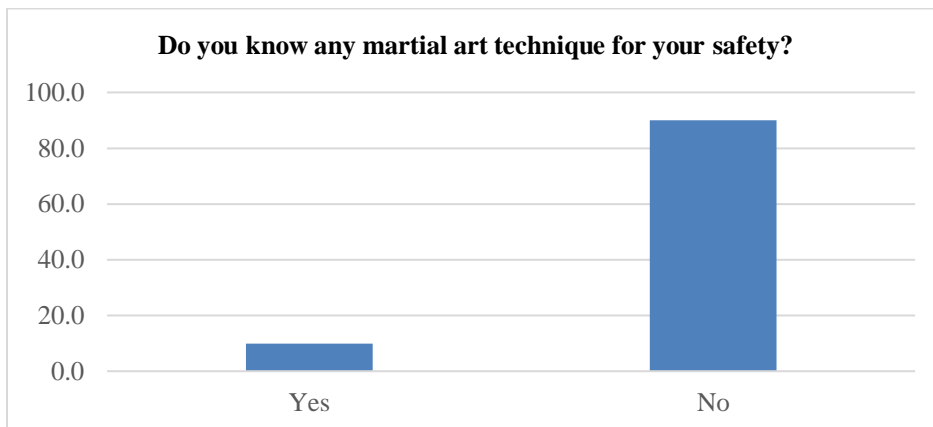


3.13 Knowledge of Martial Art Technique

Figure 11 outlines that majority of the respondents (90%) did not know martial art technique where only 10% knew it.

Figure 11

Knowledge of Martial art Technique

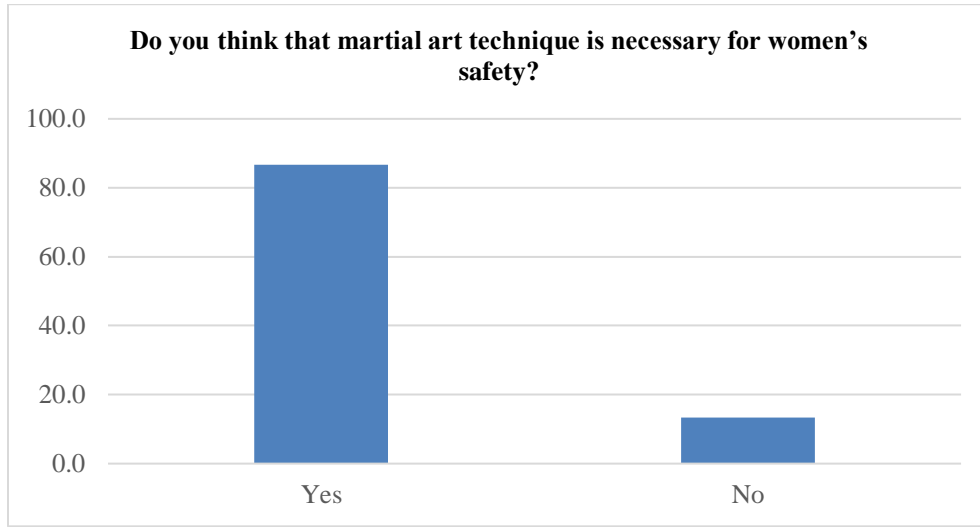


3.14 Necessity of Martial Art Technique for Women's Safety

Here, regarding the usefulness of martial art technique, 86.6% respondents considered it as helpful while 13.33% did not think so (Figure 12).

Figure 12

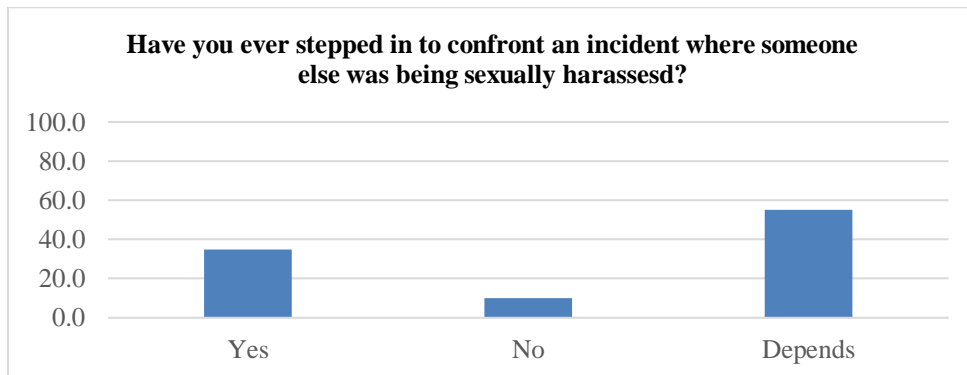
Necessity of Martial art Technique for Women's Safety



3.15 Step to Confront to Others' Sexual Harassment

Here the flow chart draws that, 90% respondents confronted the harassment of others from which 55% did this observing the circumstances. 10% respondents remained silent in this situation (Figure 13).

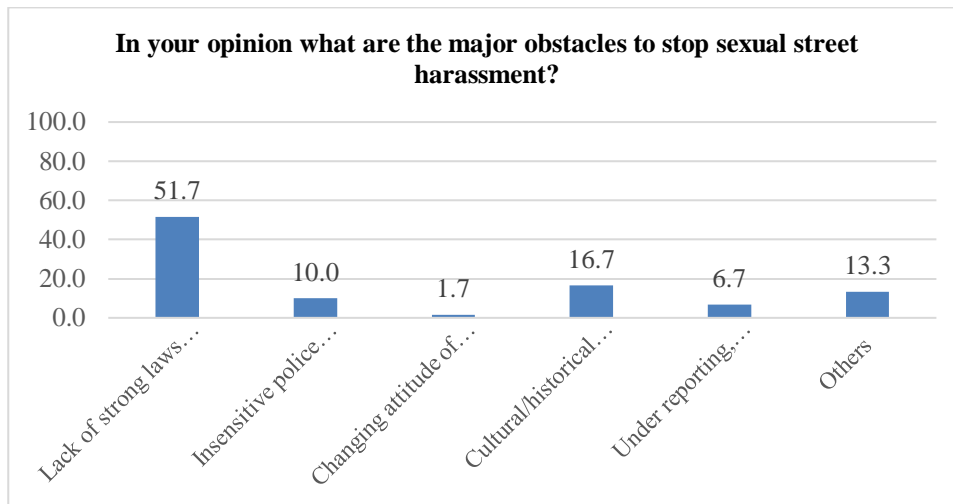
Figure 13
Step to Confront to Others' Sexual Harassment



3.16 Major Obstacle to Stop Sexual Street Harassment

From the chart it appears that more than half of the respondents (51.7%) considered lack of strong laws as the major obstacle to stop sexual harassment while rest of the respondents pointed to some other reasons like insensitive police, changing attitude of women, male dominance, under reporting and others (Figure 14).

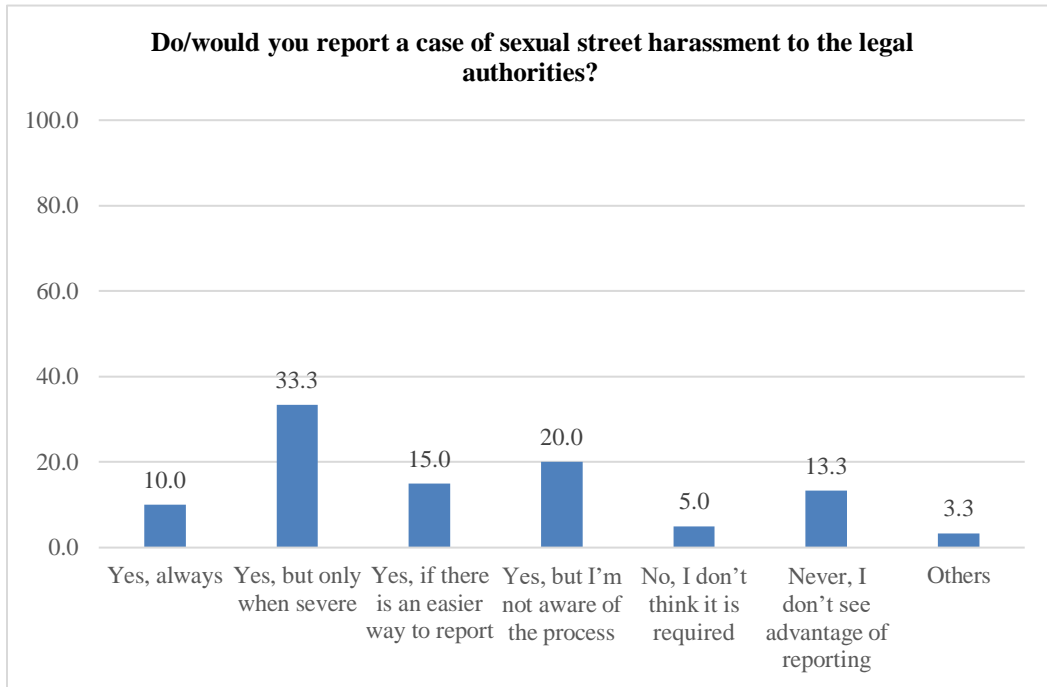
Figure 14

Major Obstacle to Stop Sexual Street Harassment**3.17 Report of Sexual Harassment Case to the Legal Authority**

The chart represents that 78.3% respondents thought of reporting a case to the law enforcing agency from them some considered the sheerness (33.3%), easiness (15%) and some did not know the process (20%). Rest of the respondents thought as not required and it had no advantages and others (Figure 15).

Figure 15

Report of Sexual Harassment Case to the Legal Authority

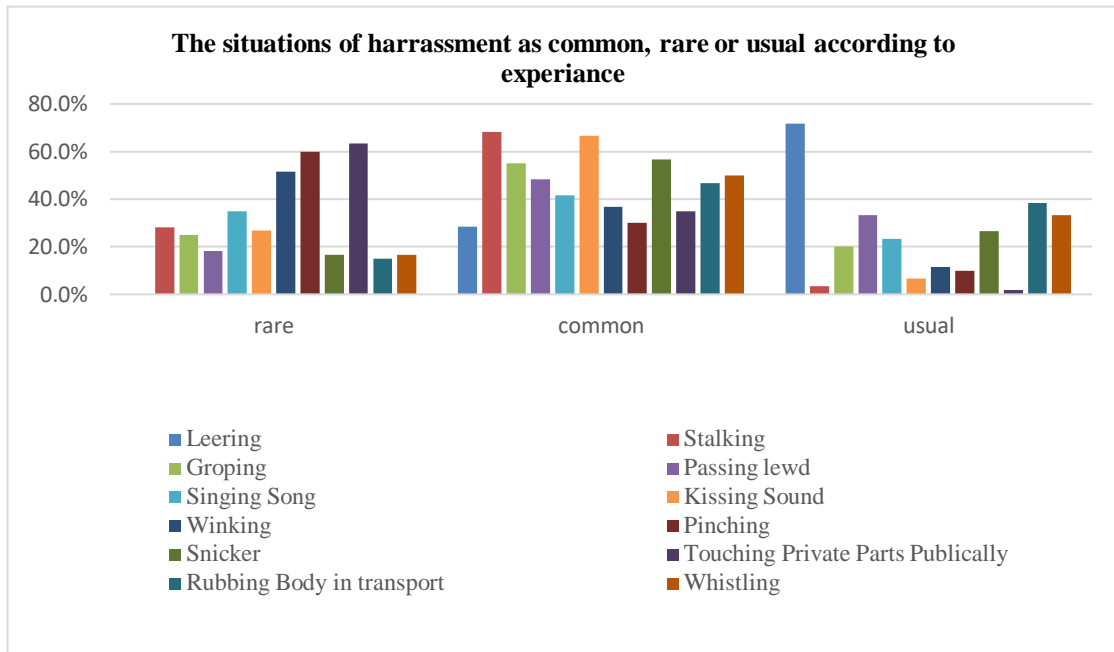


3.18 Scenario of Different Kinds of Sexual Harassment

The chart below depicts that, almost all sorts of sexual harassment are experienced by the women folk in our country while moving on public transport. Among these sorts of harassments, more than 71% women suffer leering as very usual form and stalking and kissing sound as more common which cover about 68% and 66% consecutively. And most of the forms of harassment are very common that they have to face (Figure 16).

Figure 16

Scenario of different Kinds of Sexual Harassment as Rare, Common or Usual



4. Suggestions from the Respondents

From 120 respondents, most important suggestions are stated below:

- Current laws should be carefully followed, sexual harassment offenders should face severe penalties, and law enforcement agencies should act without delay.
- Mapping technology should be connected to all public vehicles.
- The government should develop operations, policies, and enforcements to help control harassment on public transportation.
- Government should create training sessions for drivers about ethics, rules and respecting passengers.
- The administration of the institution needs to be more aware of sexual harassment cases and support women speak out against it.
- Students from early age, especially in schools should be taught religious and moral facts.
- The social and educational institutions should initiate diverse awareness programs to create consciousness among the population in the field of street sexual harassment.
- Need to learn martial art and should be included in the curriculum as co-curricular activities.
- Along with women, man should also protest against such kind of social diseases.

5. Recommendations

The majorities of female students of University of Chittagong who reside far from campus regions lack access to transportation, and therefore are more likely to experience harassment when travelling. To mitigate the situation, following recommendation can be materialized.

- It is found that the majority of the students are harassed by the unknown persons during their journey to and from the University especially once they are alone. So, to keep them safe they may be grouped consistent with class or batch so that it can generate fear to the offender of being protested.
- Students should be aided in locating themselves, as well as others, on social media in order to assess the way they present. Female students can seek assistance from their male friends and institutional authorities in order for them to take the situation seriously and put an end to such dreadful behaviors.
- According to the court's orders, the committee of each educational institution shall take an active role in resolving the problems.
- A monthly or semi-annual program on effective strategies for preventing such sexual harassment may provide students the courage and confidence to protest such heinous behaviors.
- Each and every case that is reported needs to be brought under the watchful, vigilant surveillance of the local representative or appropriate police force.
- University authority should provide the identity of vehicle drivers and helper of bus and other transports that frequently move from city to University and vice versa Including CCTV on every transport.
- Separate female-only bus with female drivers and helpers can be arranged by the Government for the female student of University. Buses should have adequate light at night. Number plate of transports should be placed inside the transport also.
- The number of buses should be increased because overcrowding and not enough seats for passengers make it easy for harassers to target women.
- All faculty of University of Chittagong should establish complaint cell where the student can give their modesty complain report. The University's disciplinary body in charge of these cases should be made up of individuals who can preserve their objectivity and confidentiality throughout the procedures.
- University authority should facilitate martial art program among the female students. Features of emergency call service are a bit complicated and its server remain busy most of the time. This problem can be fixed by making the structure of these apps easy and available.
- Consciousness program should be provided among the transports authority and implement law properly.

This issue needs to be handled by taking both preventive and corrective approaches by families, guardians, educational institutions, religious leaders, religious institutions, police, and native representation, where all should cooperate to improve awareness among both males and females about various aspects of such harassment.

6. Conclusion

Considering the survey we have conducted and the discussion we have made, a concluding argument can be drawn that, almost all forms of sexual harassment are faced by women while moving on public transport. Though there are so many laws prevailing in Bangladesh in this regard to punish the offenders, but still the rate of sexual street harassment is not decreasing rather increasing. All of the respondents replied that, they had and still having the experience of various sorts of sexual street harassment in almost every day in public transport. When the respondents were asked about different forms of sexual harassment they face as rare, common or usual, they replied most of the forms are very common and usual. In order to prevent sexual harassment in public transportation, the administration and the university should take the necessary action. In this respect, they should consider the suggestions offered by the respondents who are the part of the victims of such sorts of harassment and it is mostly sought through the study.

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