

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT: CONSULTATION WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITY IN BOGURA



Globally, around 35 per cent of women face gender-based violence in their lifetime, a phenomenon that represents one of the most widespread violations of human rights¹. In 2019 and 2020, UN Women conducted a series of research studies on *Gender Friendly Educational Institutions and Workplaces of Bangladesh* at the district level, an undertaking that was aimed at understanding the magnitude and nature of sexual harassment prevalent in those educational institutions and workplaces. The recent evidence showed that women and girls often experience sexual harassment in public transport while going to their educational institutions and workplaces, pointing to a dangerous trend that has become a serious concern for both groups since sexual harassment affects women and girls psychologically, disrupts their regular lives and creates lifelong trauma².



Very often we face sexual harassment in public transport. This type of harassment affects our mental health which has serious implications for our personal and professional lives. But we cannot share our feelings with our family members, not even with our husband. If we do, they will ask us to resign from our job. Through this workshop I want to request UNO and the development organizations to take necessary action to stop such violence in this Upazila.

– Nasrin Parvin, Upazila Livestock Officer, Duphacia, Bogura.



With the aim of preventing sexual harassment in public transport, an awareness-raising consultation was arranged with the public transport authority of Bogura district, Bangladesh on 26 November 2020 during the annual international campaign, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.



Participants and guests attended the consultation meeting on 26 November 2020. Photo credit: Christian Aid

- 1 “Violence against women is a men’s issue”, *The Daily Star*, 25 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/violence-against-women-mens-issue-1789915>
- 2 Abul Barkat et al, *Situation Assessment. Situational Analysis of Sexual Harassment at Tertiary Level Education Institutes in and around Dhak* (Dhaka, Human Development Research Centre, 2013).

A total of 27 representatives from CNG owners and drivers participated in the meeting where they made commitment to ensure the safe mobility of women and girls by eliminating sexual harassment in public transport, and change the behaviour of CNG drivers regarding the perceived causes, beliefs and attributes surrounding the sexual harassment and violence against women happening in public transport.

Please don't be afraid to come to the helpdesk for reporting incidents of sexual harassment.

– **Rojina Khatun,**
Women and Child Helpdesk Officer,
Sub Inspector

The discussion emphasized the role the public transport authority and different transport owners' associations can play to ensure the safe mobility of women and girls in Bogura district. Women and girls experience sexual harassment daily while commuting in public buses and CNG Taxis. During the discussion Sohag Mia, the CNG taxi driver, mentioned that while they observe women experiencing sexual harassment in the vehicle, they opt to remain silent fearful that the accused male passenger might become violent and angry if they protest. The Sub inspector of Police and Women and Child Helpdesk Officer, Rojina Khatun, emphasized seeking legal and psychosocial support in cases of sexual harassment incidents through the helpdesk. She informed the participants that the Government of Bangladesh has allocated two police vehicles to provide police assistance against any kind of violence against women when women and public call through 999 helpline.

The importance of raising awareness and disseminating life-saving information, including local helpline numbers, is essential to preventing sexual harassment in public sector transport. One recommendation put forward is to involve other vehicle owners' organizations, such as bus drivers and bus owners' association that can reduce sexual harassment in all types of public transport in Bogura district. The involvement of the local government administration and the law enforcement agency during the consultation increased the importance of the discussion and contributed to ensuring broad-based information-sharing of the legal support that the survivor can seek. Furthermore, a 'code of conduct for public transport passengers' should be developed as per the High Court Directives to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence that occur in public transport. In addition, to raise awareness on sexual harassment, a sticker campaign targeting public transport should be immediately initiated in the district as part of an extensive awareness-raising campaign.

This consultation was organized as part of Combatting Gender-based Violence Project in Bangladesh (CGBV), funded by Global Affairs Canada, and implemented by Christian Aid. The consultation was part of a broader intervention that involves the public transport sector stakeholder in preventing sexual harassment through raising awareness and responding to prevent sexual harassment, as per the High Court Directive of 2009.

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