Exploring women's sexual harassment experiences on public transport in Lagos

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Abstract

Sexual harassment on public transport is a global phenomenon, but there exist knowledge gaps in sub-Saharan Africa where prevalence of informal transit is a key factor. Our study explored women's sexual harassment experiences on public transport and policy responses in Lagos, Nigeria. We relied on secondary data from academic research and UKAID Empower II final report. Using descriptive analysis, we found that sexual harassment such as deliberate contact, groping and offensive sexual comments occurred onboard, at bus stops, and mostly at night in Lagos. Women's common reactions include shouting to discourage offenders; change of sitting position or disembarking from the vehicle. Women acquired defensive gadget, consciously select sitting position in vehicles and avoided travelling at certain periods of the day as coping strategies. Under-reporting of harassment was common and worsened by government's weak policy response. Our findings, which resonate with global experiences, indicate that sexual harassment on public transport is critical in Lagos but not strongly addressed. We recommend more gender inclusive policies, awareness campaigns tailored to the cultural differences of different communities, adoption of the SHE CAN Tool and other best global practices to provide for and sustain women's safety on public transport.

Keywords: Sexual harassment; women; mobility; public transport, She Can Tool

Introduction

The subject of sexual harassment in public space is among the many expressions of gender-based violence (GBV) women face every day in cities. How this is a problem in cities all around the world is well captured in literature on the accounts documented by academic studies, think tanks, NGOs and civil society organisations. Studies supporting this assertion include Dhillon & Bakaya (2014), Dunckel Graglia (2016), Hollaback! (2018) and Kash (2019). Despite the increasing concern on sexual harassment in public space, Logan (2015) observed that a great knowledge gaps still exist on how women experience sexual harassment in public space, how to address it and even what constitutes sexual harassment in public space.

There are several definitions of sexual harassment. As a guide, the definition focus specifically on harassment of a sexual nature directed at women, hence, this study adopts the definition of UKAID's EMPOWER II Final Report (2024) which sees sexual harassment as unwanted advances given by someone to another (whether verbal, visual, physical, or psychological, such as intimidation or stalking). This definition builds on Wesselman and Kelly (2010)'s definition which sees it as *"unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public".* Quinones (2020) noted that this definition encompasses a range of behaviours that might not be considered harassment in certain contexts but are perceived as such when performed by strangers in public. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) defined sexual harassment as "unwanted sexual conduct deliberately perpetrated by the harasser, resulting in sexual, physical, or psychological abuse of the victim regardless of location, whether in the workplace, the street, public transportation, educational institution or even in private space (Rizzo, et al.', 2012). Indeed, women are victims of various unwanted sexual contact in public transit (Odufuwa, 2009; Deike, 2013; Korn, 2018).

The concern for safe and secured mobility for women is also gaining traction among researchers across the globe due largely to the prevalence of gender-based violence particularly in public transport sector. The clear message across the globe is that women need protection, especially in the public space including public transportation.

Studies dedicated to mobility of women have shown that the female gender of different age groups are exposed to varying degrees of violence and harassment in their everyday life while using public transportation; leading to mobility limitations and restrictions of access to jobs or educational opportunities which play a major role in high rate of poverty among women (Logan, 2015; Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Clark et al, 2016, & Kash, 2019).

Notwithstanding the increasing concern for the safety and security of women in public transport among researchers, the public perception and government attention to the issue is quite disappointing, particularly in the countries of the global south. The most recent effort targeted at sexual harassment on public transport in Lagos is the EMPOWER project funded by the UKAID through the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office under the High Volume Transport Applied Research Programme. The project's scope is sub-Saharan Africa. The EMPOWER project developed the SHE CAN (Sexual Harassment Engagement – Changing Attitudes meeting Needs) Tool as a user-friendly, internet based decision-making resource, assisting policymakers and transport providers to develop an evidence-based approach to addressing sexual harassment and personal security within public transport (EMPOWER II, 2024).

The EMPOWER is a multistage policy-driven research project with multiple stakeholders implemented in some sub-Saharan Africa cities. The EMPOWER II final report (2024) acknowledged that the Lagos study on sexual harassment on public transport is biased towards formal Bus Rapid Transit, consequently the results failed to reflect what obtains in the informal transport sector. Additionally, the project's stakeholder's mapping and engagement left out those in the academia. This results in poor dissemination of the project outcomes among the academia, thus widening the knowledge gaps about sexual harassment on public transport in Lagos.

This paper seeks to bridge the knowledge gaps on sexual harassment on public transport in Lagos. Specifically, the paper interrogates the nature and scale of sexual harassment, how women as victims react to the experience and how it affects their mobility. In addition, the paper examines women's responses to harassment and the government policy recommendations as documented in the EMPOWER II final report. Based on best practices established in literature, this study facilitates our understanding of what needs to be done to achieve better policies and public actions for enhancing the safety of women on public transport.

Existing Literature on Sexual Violence and Harassment in Public Transportation

2.1 Sexual harassment in public transportation

Globally, several authors including the academics, government and non-governmental institutions, civil societies and international development agencies have researched extensively on mobility of women with striking differences and similarities between the global north and south and across the urban and rural divides. While laying the foundation for literature review on women's safety and security in public transport, Quinones (2020), singled out the work of Moser (1993) as having the most relevant and influential contribution among many studies exploring women's issues in cities. Moser's work on gender planning as an alternative to the traditional 'gender-blind' urban planning traditions proposes the recognition and separation of women's practical needs and strategic needs as the basis for gender planning. The need for gender bias has echoed in many urban planning fora and projects and largely has influenced the research and planning approaches across the globe.

Furthermore, Quinones (2020) observed that transport planning tends to be 'gender-blind' in the same way that Moser describes urban planning in general, this situation produces an urban transport system in which many poor city dwellers, and especially women become transport disadvantaged (Levy, 2013). Quinones (2020) argued that the distinction between the practical needs and strategic needs of women as proposed by Moser (1993) is important "as many policies aimed at reducing sexual harassment in public spaces tend to address only practical needs and do not challenge gender roles or power relations in public space". The obvious absence of gender considerations in the planning of transportation has led to more studies of the implication of gender in transportation, thus, over the years, several studies have been built on Moser's philosophy. These include those addressing gender differentials in relation to urban mobility and travel behaviour (Alade & Fadare, 2012; Deike, 2013), user experience in public transport (Fernando & Porter, 2002), safety and security and others dovetailing to sexual violence and harassment in public transport (Hsu, 2011; Graglia, 2015; Graglia, 2016; Braun & Paulo, 2018; Korn, 2018, Larissa, 2018; Lewis, 2019; OXFAM International, 2019; Micheal, 2020).

The transport needs and preferences of women is quite distinct from men. Women daily travels are multi-purpose, multilinked and usually short distance due to their multiple gender roles of

childcare, shopping, home keeping, care giving to infirm adult members of the family and energy sourcing for the home (Alade & Fadare, 2012; Levy, 2013; Levy, 2016; Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). Furthermore, Quinones (2020) observed that women's modal choice is mediated by different considerations than that of men, and these are often not included in mainstream transport planning. According to Levy (2016), these considerations range from safety concerns to time constraints associated with reproductive work, to access to private vehicles and driver's license, and the financial resources available for travelling.

Consequently, women depend more on public transport and walk more than men for their everyday travels. Levy, (2016) affirm this position as true, especially for poor women, and as a result, they are more often sharing space with strangers. This situation makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment, particularly at nighttime due to the informal nature of the public transport system, especially in many of the low and middle-income countries. The degree of women's vulnerability to sexual violence and harassment affects their experiences of travelling and their perception of security (Quinones, 2020). There are clear indications from literature that the issues of sexual harassment in public transport are scarcely published in many of the low-income countries, particularly in the sub-Sahara Africa.

Evidence from literature also established that the issues of sexual violence and harassment in public transport are multidimensional and vary across continents. Common issues of importance established in literature include greater fear of insecurity, profiling, victimisation, neglect and justice which discourages reporting of such incidents (Bott et al., 2005). Quinones (2020) did an extensive review of several studies dedicated to analysis of sexual harassment in public transport and public space in general and observed that one of the first works to address this issue is Gardner's (1995) ethnography of public harassment in Indianapolis. The study analysed the experiences of different types of harassment and how women experience harassment in public and semi-public places. Both the study of Gardner and that of Quinones in Bogota are like the context of this study on Lagos.

More recent studies on sexual harassment experience in public transport are largely concentrated in the global north. For instance, Gardner et al. (2017) cited in Quinones (2020) conducted a literature review on studies carried out in developed countries. The study reported that women experience higher levels of fear of crime than men; a finding earlier established by Bott et al., (2005). This finding appears to be related to the possibility of sexual crime and the occurrence of street harassment. The study also suggests that sexual harassment in public transport seems to be growing, although they acknowledge that there are high levels of under-reporting. Karla and Muneeza (2018) reported that about 80% of women are wary of being harassed in public spaces including public transport facilities.

Plan International and Our Watch (2016) revealed that 23% of young women aged between 15 and 19 years find it unsafe to travel on public transport after dark. Korn, (2018) reiterated the fact that women when compared to men face distinctive fears, insecurities and interactions in the urban space and that the feeling of insecurity is a constant threat to women when traveling in public spaces or making use of public transport. Osmond & Woodcook (2015) noted that the fear of crime is among the key reason women avoid using public transport. Women also avoid using public transport late in the evening mostly due to the absence of formal and informal surveillance (Yavuz and Eric, 2010; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014).

Sheila and Partheeban (2009)'s study on women transports challenges in Chennai, India revealed that two-third of the respondents had been sexually harassed while commuting with the women rating experience in buses and trains as the worst. Similarly, Odufuwa (2009), in his explorative study of gender and safety in public transportation in Lagos Metropolis, revealed that almost three-quarter of respondents (women) using public transport have experienced physical harassment, sexual harassment, rape, pocketing, kidnapping, robbery. It can be deduced that harassment both physical and sexual, theft are major threats faced by women commuting via public transport.

Another dimension in the subject of sexual harassment on public transport is the issue of victim-blaming. In a recent study by Logan (2015), the author addressed the issue of victim-blaming, as well as the problem of harassment being widely regarded as "human nature" or "harmless demonstrations of sexual attraction". This suggest that sexual harassment is considered a norm in some clime, and this may likely worsen the pain that women experience while in public transit. Logan (2015) further observed that reporting is made difficult since the offenders are commonly strangers. The issue of victim-blaming is prevalent in many developing countries, and this is a clear indication that women lack adequate protection in the public space, thus, efforts are needed to close the gender equality gaps through appropriate legislation and strong political will to enforce the legislations.

Quinones (2020) observed that the issue of sexual violence in public transport is becoming popular among researchers in developing countries citing the examples of those conducted in Delhi (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Lea et al., 2017, Madan & Nalla, 2015) and Kathmandu (Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014). Dhillon & Bakaya (2014) cited in Quinones (2020) explored the experiences of young adult women with harassment and found that this occurred mostly during the day and in crowded spaces. The study also analysed how women reacted to harassment, which ranges from not doing anything to hitting or shouting at the harasser. Based on their research, Lea et al., (2017) classified these range of reactions into three categories: keeping silent, fleeing or resisting. The study however concluded that women who resisted by making a scene often got help from passengers or succeeded in shaming the aggressor. Overall, the studies concluded that the prevalence of sexual harassment on public transport and public space is very high (Madan & Nalla, 2015, Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014), that women who suffer harassment often do not report it (Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014) and that authorities are perceived as apathetic towards this issue (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014). These findings lend credence to the fact that is issue of sexual violence and harassment is not receiving necessary attention it deserves from policy makers.

Despite the degree of violence and harassment experienced by women on public transport, ignoring this act has become a culture. Studies have shown that sexual harassment is a crime that is not receiving the necessary attention it deserves. Lack of special protection by law, neglect from other commuters and victimization are some of the major factors responsible for women not reporting their ugly experiences. For example, Oxfam International, (2019) observed that the act is ignored by fellow commuters and in some cases, the women are victimized. In Sri Lanka, it was reported that 82% of bystanders do not intervene to offer any form of assistance or protection and in some instances, the victims are blamed for exposing themselves to these situations. Michael (2020)'s study on victimology of sexual harassment on public transportation: evidence from India highlighted victimization as a major problem. Similarly, Korn (2018) in the study of sexual violence and women's mobility on public transportation in Santiago, Chile revealed the experience of a 20-year-old lady harassed in the metro and got help from none of her fellow commuters instead they laughed and recorded the event. This situation discourages women from speaking up to challenge their unpleasant experiences in public transportation. A major factor attributed to this trend is the poor knowledge of what constitutes sexual harassment (EMPOWER II, 2024)

In the context of Latin America, Quinones (2020) reported the works of Dunckel-Gralia (2013) and Dunckel-Gralia (2016) which addressed the women-only transport policies that were implemented in Mexico City. Quinones observed that the problem of victim-blaming and the idea of a natural order between men and women also resonated in the study. Furthermore, it was reported that the study analyzed how women reacted to the occurrence of sexual harassment in public places, establishing that women do change their way of dressing, to "avoid" harassment in public transit. The effects of the policies implemented against the incidence of sexual harassment was also considered. The study concludes that making the problem visible by implementing pink buses and taxis is the main positive impact of the policy. The success of the policy implementation is a positive development which could be replicated in other geographical contexts; however, the applicability of this strategy needs adequate evaluation before adoption and implementation.

Further literature review on sexual violence and harassment in the Latin America context explored the work of Kash (2019). The study addressed the issue of sexual assault and its effects on victims in two cities in South America. Focusing specifically on the TransMilenio and how overcrowded conditions play out in the occurrence of sexual assault and reactions from victims, Kash showed that women who have experienced sexual assault experience certain emotional disturbances such as hypervigilance, anxiety and other negative effects because of the events. Cited in Quinones (2020), Kash (2019) highlighted how the approach to prevention and punishment is not sufficient when addressing sexual assault or harassment, as many women have already been victims and they require different actions to help them feel safe again in public.

The need to protect women, particularly in the public space is critical and may likely be a factor for the focus Sustainable Development Goal 5 which is directed to achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Achieving this goal will be difficult if the issue of sexual harassment and violence, particularly in public transport, is not addressed. Unfortunately, many cities in the middle- and low-income countries do not have transport policies that show concern for gender equality. Prior to the EMPOWER II project, gender differences have never been acknowledged by any known transport policy or legislations in Lagos, Nigeria.

Evidence from literature has clearly shown that sexual harassment, particularly in public transit deeply affects women's access to the city (Levy, 2013) and has severe psychological effects on the women who experience it (Kash, 2019). The EPOWER II (2024) report acknowledged the paucity of literature about sexual harassment in the African context. It also confirmed that there is a widespread lack of understanding of sexual harassment. In many of the Sub-Saharan cities where Lagos is situated, public transport facilities are not designed to take care of women's mobility needs and preferences, hence, they struggle with men to access public transport, and this situation makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment. The case of a 22-year-old lady murdered while in transit on February 26, 2022, in Lagos (The Nation, 2025) makes the subject of sexual violence and harassment a call for concern among researchers and policy makers. Thus, this study seeks to advance knowledge about sexual harassment in Lagos public transport and provide insights for the formulation of adequate public policies and best practices that address this problem.

2.2 The EMPOWER Project: Tackling sexual harassment on public transport in sub-Saharan Africa

The EMPOWER research was initiated and funded by UKAID through the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office under the High Volume Transport Applied Research Programme. The first EMPOWER project's initial objective was to help make a change in the existing processes regarding sexual harassment and gender bias in the transportation sector in Sub-Saharan countries. It was designed to build the capacity of transport professionals to deliver gender-equitable, inclusive transport with improved participation, and a diverse sector workforce as well as safety and personal security. Specifically, it addressed the causes of sexually related harassment and assault on women and girls when they travel (UKAID-EMPOWER II, 2024).

The principal output was the SHE CAN Tool which offers stakeholders the necessary resources to identify and tackle sexual harassment in public transport through data collection methods, interventions and case studies. The EMPOWER II project delivered an integrated Programme of stakeholder mapping, engagement, training, workshop, data collection, pilots and roadmaps focusing on impact-driven measures, inspired by the SHE CAN Tool and its resources. The tool contains guides and templates to help organizations gather data on the prevalence of sexual harassment, deliver stakeholder mapping exercises, organize surveys and workshops as well as offer dozens of tailored interventions that can be deployed to tackle the issue. The passenger surveys conducted for the EMPOWER project in Lagos produced very significant outcomes that helped shape the development of the SHE CAN tool. An interesting observation from the survey results is that women are more likely to be open to discussing sexual harassment than men. Addition finding from the report indicated that the design and implementation of surveys should be carefully managed to avoid creating an environment in which women feel uncomfortable responding.

Materials and Methods

The choice of Lagos

The choice of Lagos for the study is due to its primacy among other cities in Nigeria and Africa. Lagos is the most populous city in Nigeria and second in Africa after Cairo **(**Wikipedia**,** 2026). The population is currently estimated at over 23 million people, which is approximately 11.5% of the country's population. The vehicle population of Lagos is about 3 million and about 93% of passenger and goods movement is by road. Over 95% of the public transport system is controlled by the informal sector (LASG, 2019) and this has significant implications for safety of women who rely on public transport for their everyday travels. The dominance of Lagos public transport by informal service providers and the disorderly access to public transport services accentuate women's vulnerability to sexual harassment.

Study Approach

The study reported in this paper adopted a mixed method using both quantitative method of data collection and analysis (a survey and statistical analysis) as well as a qualitative method and analysis (interviews and analysis). The surveys data were collected from female passengers using structured-close-ended questionnaire while the interviews were conducted on some women in both public and private offices using semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured into four parts to obtain data on respondents' socio-economic profile, travel characteristics, experiences of sexual harassment and coping strategy and how the experiences have affected their mobility pattern. The interviews conducted through interview guide specifically addressed the perceptions of professionals in the planning field on the subject and what the feel about government policy towards addressing the menace. Mixed method was used so "that both breadth and depth of understanding would be facilitated" (Johnson et al., 2007) The survey covered both formal (BRT) and informal (mini bus and others) public transport systems in Lagos. Three major corridors namely:

Lagos-Ikorodu (north-south), Lagos-Badagry (west) and Lagos-Abeokuta (north-south) within Lagos metropolis were selected for the study. These corridors were selected for two reasons; first, they jointly define the morphology of Lagos and secondly, they carry the largest traffic within the city.

Sampling Frame

This study is focused on female passengers aged 18-65 using both the BRT and Yellow bus along the selected corridors. The choice of age 18 years as the benchmark is that they are legally regarded as adults, thus, no parental or guardian consent is required to interview them. The sampling frame was derived based on information from the pilot survey conducted within the study area at selected bus stops along each of the three corridors during the morning peak period (7am to 10am). The evening peak period was avoided as achieving the desired sample size may extend late into the night hours. During the pilot survey, not less than 750 female passengers were captured over the three hour morning peak period and thus formed the sampling frame. In the actual survey, purposive sampling technique was used to derive the sampling size of 313 female commuters based on willingness to respond to interviews using structured questionnaire. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Of the 313 questionnaires administered, 301 were duly completed and returned for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of sexual harassment, particular care was taken to minimize harm. Although no ethical approval was obtained from any institution, interviews were conducted in private, safe settings chosen by participants, and questions were framed using trauma-informed approaches to reduce the risk of distress. Participants were reminded that they could skip questions or stop the interview at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Identifying information was removed from transcripts, and pseudonyms were used in reporting. Data were stored securely in encrypted files accessible only to the research team. No personal details were disclosed to third parties.

Results

Socio-economic and travel characteristics of Respondents

Findings from the study revealed that 37.6% of women making use of public transport fall between the ages of 30 and 39 years, more than half (53.8%) had tertiary education as their highest level of education, 50.3% are married, 62.4% are employed and 52.8% work in the formal sector. These findings suggest that the women who are vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment as captured in the survey are young, well-educated and married; thus, they are more likely to combine work with the home management. As the majority of them are employed, it is a necessity for them to be out in the morning and evening. A cursory look at their trip characteristics revealed that 38.9% use BRT, 35.9% use yellow bus, 12.3% have access to private cars and the rest use other forms of paratransit that are smaller than the BRT and the Yellow bus (Table 1).

Table 1: Mode of Transport

	N	%
Private vehicle	37	12.3%
Cab hailing (Uber/Taxify)	8	2.7%
Minibus (Korope)	16	5.3%
Yellow bus (Danfo)	108	35.9%
32-Seater bus	7	2.3%
BRT	117	38.9%
Autorickshaw	8	2.7%
Total	301	100

Based on Lagos experience, women using the yellow bus are more vulnerable to sexual harassment as there is no orderliness in boarding of buses at bus stops. It is a survival of the fittest between men and women. However, the situation on the BRT is better as passengers must queue before boarding. This notwithstanding, female passengers are vulnerable to harassment as standing is permitted in the buses particularly during the peak periods. Furthermore, more than half (51.2%) undertake more than five trips per week. This may not be unconnected to their work and gender roles as 66.5% of them reported work trip as their major trip purposes. Majority (58.8%) make their daily trip between 6am and 9am, the trips of 48.2% take between one and two hours and 44.5% of them undertake daily trips of over 10 kilometres. Leaving home as early as 6am and sitting in uncomfortable buses for a period of one to two hours exposes women to sexual harassment in a city like Lagos where the public transport is always overcrowded especially during the evening peak period.

Nature and scale of sexual harassment

For ease of recall, women were asked to share their experiences of sexual violence and harassment in the last one month to the date of the survey. The study revealed that respondents very rarely experience rape, which is the worst form of sexual violence; however, 1.3% of respondents experienced this form of sexual violence and harassment within a month. Furthermore, the major forms of sexual harassment experienced by the respondents include lewd, deliberate contact and groping, offensive sexual comments and remarks,

staring and leering, and obscene and offensive gestures onboard and at bus stops and terminals. In Table 2, data presented show that in the last one month, close to 50% of respondents experienced deliberate contact/groping in public transport. Specifically, 42.3% experienced this form of harassment less than five times in the last one month while 3.7% experienced same more than five times within a month. This suggests that this form of sexual harassment is a regular occurrence in Lagos public transport.

The time of the day women experienced various forms of sexual harassment was considered in the study. It was revealed that women experienced sexual violence and harassment more in the night hours, while some also had their unpleasant experience in the morning and afternoon hours. For instance, Table 2 showed that 71.8 of women experienced deliberate contact/groping in the evening/night hours. The study further revealed a balance in the location of sexual violence and harassment; 50% of the women claimed that occurrences took place both on the road and at bus stops while the other 50% had their experience aboard public transport. However, deliberate contact/groping tends to occur more onboard than on the road as offenders take advantage of close contacts in the vehicles to commit the crime.

Table 2: Deliberate Contact/Groping

		N	%
No. of occurrences in the last month	No occurrence	163	54.0
	Less than 5 times	127	42.3
	More than 5 times	11	3.7
Location of Occurrence	Bus stops/terminals	59	19.4
	On the road	117	38.9
	On board	125	41.7
Time of Occurrence	Morning	31	10.3
	Afternoon	54	17.9
	Evening/Night	216	71.8

Women's reaction and coping strategies

Women's reactions to violence and harassment in public transport varied in forms. As presented in Table 3, the study revealed that 26.47% reacted by shouting to discourage the offender; 22.94% were angry but did not react; 17.65% changed their sitting position in the vehicle; 5.29% felt embarrassed; 4.71% ignored the action, 4.12% disembarked the bus while others verbally abused the offender; some were tolerant to avoid shaming and very few reported to the police. The implications of these forms of reactions are many for the individual victims. For instance, those who shouted to discourage the offender are bold and are ready to defend themselves, while those who are angry but did nothing or changed their sitting positions are likely to be afraid of what the offender could do next or what the reaction of other passengers may be. Furthermore, the various forms of reactions apart from those who shouted to discourage the offender suggest that women lack the required protection in public transport. Besides, it also shows that victims do not usually get the necessary support from co-passengers or the transport operators to fight this crime.

Table 3: Reaction to Sexual Harassment

Reaction	%	Rank
Angry but did nothing	22.9%	2
Changed position in transit	17.6%	3
Disembarked from bus	4.1%	6
Felt embarrassed	5.3%	4
Ignored	4.7%	5
Not applicable	4.7%	5
Reported to the police	4.7%	5
Shouted to discourage it	26.5%	1
Tolerant to avoid shaming	4.7%	5
Verbally abused the offender	4.7%	5

The study also revealed the coping strategies of women in anticipation of sexual violence and harassment in public transport. The study revealed that majority acquire defensive gadget such as pepper spray to respond to attacks from men when travelling. Similarly, a large proportion adopts travelling with a company who could assist in case of an attack. Some reported that they deliberately change sitting position while others adopt conscious choice of sitting position in the vehicle and avoiding travelling at certain periods of the day, especially very early and at night hours.

Policy response from government

This section addresses government's policy response to the issues of sexual harassment on public transport in Lagos. This involves a document analysis of the EMPOWER II final report (2024) – a policy driven research project report funded by the UKAID. The EMPOWER report revealed that Lagos State government through Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority has in the last five years taken very bold steps by partnering with UKAID to tackle the menace of sexual harassment on public transport in Lagos develop the SHE CAN Tool and other frameworks for tackling sexual harassment on public transport in Lagos. This implies that there has been a tangible policy response to sexual harassment on Lagos public

transport, but the impacts have been with very low. This could be attributed to several factors including the relatively young age of the SHE CAN Tool. Additionally, the non-inclusion of the Nigerian academic community and the informal transport sector which account for over 70% of public transport providers in the stakeholder's mapping and engagement has serious implications for dissemination of the project outcomes. The academic community is research-focused and disseminates research outcomes through several avenues including local and international conferences and workshops. Again, majority of sexual harassment experienced by women occur largely in the informal public transport, hence, the inclusion of this sector in developing and implementing policies for providing and sustaining safety of women in public transport cannot be overlooked.

Additionally, we appraised responses from interviews conducted with some women from the public and private sector. Specifically, respondents were selected from the Lagos state ministry of transportation, Lagos state ministry of physical planning and urban development and the University of Lagos. As a way of gaining a very clear insights on government's policy response to the issues of sexual harassment in public transport, same questions presented to both male and female members of the Lagos state chapter of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners. A common response obtained is that sexual harassment in Lagos public transport is a norm that many people do not talk about. Whereas, some considered it as critical, giving the recent murder of a female passenger on a BRT trip and the government is not demonstrating the political will to arrest it.

However, one of the respondents who travelled with the BRT observed that the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team has produced a campaign against domestic and sexual violence in the state which has been displayed in the BRT buses. The displayed campaign material encouraged victims of domestic and sexual violence to speak out. Seven telephone numbers of the response team are displayed in the campaign material. However, it must be mentioned that the inclusion of domestic violence in the campaign material suggests that the campaign is not specifically directed at sexual violence and harassment in public transport. Furthermore, the campaign against domestic and sexual violence displayed is only limited to BRT buses, the yellow buses and other paratransit are completely left out. This may be attributed to the non-inclusion of the informal transport sector in the survey design of the EMPOWER project.

Discussion

This paper explored women's sexual harassment experiences on public transport in Lagos with secondary data from both academic and a policy driven research project. Specifically, it interrogates the nature and scale of sexual harassment, how women as victims react to the experience and what they do in preparation for harassment and finally, evaluates the government's policy response to manage the social vice. Findings from literature confirmed that there are few studies on this topic in sub-Saharan Africa. Also confirmed is the fact that sexual harassment happens extensively on both formal and informal networks.

Data analysis revealed that while rape rarely occur as a form of sexual violence and harassment in Lagos public transport, other forms of harassment such as deliberate contact/groping, lude, offensive sexual comments and remarks, staring and leering and obscene and offensive gestures are commonly experienced by women, hence, sexual harassment is an everyday experience for many women in Lagos public transport. This position has been established by many authors as a common experience in many other cities of Asia and Latin America (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Lea et al., 2017; Madan & Nalla, 2015; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014; Quinones, 2020).

The prevalence of this social ill has been documented in many developing countries with less occurring in the global north. This notwithstanding, studies have shown that sexual violence and harassment is a crime that is not receiving the necessary attention it deserves. This neglect is well documented in Korn (2018), Oxfam International (2019) and Michael (2020). This neglect discourages women from speaking up to challenge their unpleasant experiences in public transportation (Bott et al., 2005; Logan (2015). Shaming, stigmatization and fear of profiling are the reasons why women are not speaking up in Lagos. This is a case of suffering in silence; an everyday experience of women using public transport in Lagos and other cities of developing nations. Women should be protected against violators of their freedom.

Women's reaction to sexual harassment on public transport was also prominent in literature. As revealed in this study, women in Lagos react to sexual harassment in public transport by shouting to discourage the offender; verbally abused the offender, getting angry but did nothing to the offender and changed their sitting position in the vehicle. Some felt embarrassed; ignored the action, disembarked the bus while others were tolerant to avoid shame and very few reported it to the police. Based on their research, Lea et al., (2017) classified these range of reactions into three categories:

keeping silent, fleeing or resisting. The study however concluded that women who resisted by making a scene often got help from passengers or succeeded in shaming the aggressor. The study also confirmed that women who suffer harassment in Lagos public transport often do not report it, and this aligns with the findings of Neupane & Chesney-Lind (2014) and Logan (2015). Again, these findings lend credence to the fact that is issue of sexual violence and harassment is not receiving necessary attention it deserves from policy makers.

The study also revealed the coping strategies of women in anticipation of sexual violence and harassment in public transport. It showed that majority acquire defensive gadget such as pepper spray to respond to attacks from men when travelling while adopts travelling with a company who could assist in case of an attack. Some also deliberately change sitting positions while others adopt conscious choice of sitting position in the vehicle and avoid travelling at certain periods of the day, especially very early and at night hours. Plan International and Our Watch (2016), Korn, (2018), Osmond and Woodcook (2015) all agreed that the fear of sexual harassment is among the key reason women avoid using public transport especially late in the evening and where this is no protection (Yavuz and Eric, 2010; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014) while Kash (2019) showed that women who have experienced sexual assault experience certain emotional disturbances such as hypervigilance, anxiety and other negative effects as a result of the events.

As regards governments, policy response, this study concludes that there is no government's policy response to sexual violence and harassment in Lagos public transport. This is based on responses from individuals working in both government and private sectors. The only evidence of government's policy response observed in the Lagos BRT is more of a general campaign than transport related response. Quinones (2020)'s work on Bogota showed that policies implemented against the incidence of sexual harassment produced visible positive impacts. Again, this demonstrates a strong political will on the part of the government to deal with this social ill. The Lagos state government needs strong political will to protect women from sexual harassment in public transport. A good step in this direction is the finalisation and implementation of the state draft transport policy.

Conclusions

This study interrogates sexual harassment of women in Lagos public transport space and the policy response from government. It established that gender-related violence and harassment is an everyday experience for many women in Lagos. The findings in this study align with what obtains in other parts of the world, though they differ in nature and scale. Additionally, there has been a tangible policy response to sexual harassment on Lagos public transport with the development of SHE CAN Tool, but the impacts have been with very low due to low publicity and the non-inclusion of the academic community in the stakeholder's mapping and engagement. The low level of awareness of the SHE CAN Tool may also be attributed to its relatively young age - less than three years. Again, majority of sexual harassment experienced by women occur largely in the informal public transport, hence, the government through LAMATA needs more engagement with the informal transport service providers. The inclusion of the academia in developing and implementing policies for providing and sustaining safety of women in public transport cannot be overlooked.

Recommendations

The concerns for women's safety and security in public transport space are growing giving the vulnerability of women to sexual violence and harassment in public transport environment. Inadequate protection for women by the government in Lagos is also a great concern. Consequently, we recommend urgent implementation of the Lagos state transport policy with provision for safe and secured mobility for women. It is important for LAMATA to engage with the academia, the informal transport operators and the media to popularize the SHE CAN Tool. It is very important for the government to implement other frameworks and policy actions recommended in the EMPOER II final report. In decision and policy making, there is need to give priority to gender equality and adequate representation by integrating women's needs and interests in transport policy.

In addition, there is need for greater public education particularly for men. Greater enforcement of justice against offenders is also recommended. A policy that prescribes punitive measures for public transport operators in whose vehicle any case of sexual harassment is reported should be adopted. Campaign against sexual harassment in public transport should be intensified in notorious areas. Other strategies recommended to deal with sexual harassment in public transport in Lagos include the adoption of "Be your sister's keeper" as a mantra that should be encouraged among commuters and public transport operators. It is also recommended that public transport terminals should have adequate lighting and CCTV cameras to discourage men who use the cover of darkness to commit the crime. Finally, regular gender impact assessments of transport policies to monitor their contribution to a

gender-neutral transport system is greatly encouraged.

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