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A CROSS CULTURAL STUDY OF GENDER TRANSPORT POVERTY: THE EVERYDAY EFFECTS ON WOMEN'S LIVES

- Invited lecture -

Key Words

Gender
transport
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KPIs;
Hexagon-
spindle model

Abstract

This paper draws on research conducted during the 18-month, collaborative WEMOBILE project, which brought together designers, planners and ergonomists from UK, Pakistan, Malaysia to raise awareness and (re)present problems women in low-middle income countries (LMICs) face in their everyday travel. Based around 3 knowledge sharing trips to Lahore (Pakistan), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Coventry (UK), the research directly addressed Rand's comments regarding the need for transport professionals to show cultural sensitivity. Each visit consisted of a series of interactions with the environment and local women to gain greater insights into the everyday problem's women experienced when travelling in their cities. Methods included workshops, empathic design, visual and autoethnography, focus groups, multi-stakeholder world café, surveys and phenomenological interviews. The paper will outline the problems faced by women and some recommendations for future action.

1. INTRODUCTION

[1] stated that ‘Transportation is a challenge for women in developing nations, but it is a challenge for everyone at the same time. Transportation professionals must be careful to take culture into account when designing transportation options in developing nations.’ With contributing factors being underinvestment in public transport, transport infrastructure, rapid urbanization, lack of integrated planning, corruption and rises in car ownership etc. It has been argued that inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, non-existent or badly designed pedestrian crossings, poor location of bus stops and shelters, and high steps on buses contribute to a system that is hostile to women.’ ‘the nature of the entire transportation system of the city is then not only insensitive to the needs of women, but also actively disables accessibility and induces poverty” [2. p78].

Gender transport poverty is truly a wicked problem. It is an extreme example of transport poverty, bounded with social and cultural practices, which needs to be addressed, if women can enjoy safe mobility and the rights as equal citizens. Research [3] acknowledges disproportionate burdens on women - they earn less, have multiple roles and their mobility is restricted by social, cultural and religious norms. Lastly, the lived experience of women – WEMOBILE’s focus - reveals women face more harassment on transport and public spaces and their gender transport poverty is heightened by the dual roles they undertake. The Centre of Economic Research in Pakistan’s survey found nearly 30% of respondents considered it “extremely unsafe” for women to walk in their neighbourhood, with 70% of male respondents discouraging “female family members from taking public wagon services” [4]. Walking on poorly maintained roads or footpaths and avoiding vehicles [5] in urban areas is stressful and tiring owing to environmental effects - overcrowding, temperature, humidity and pollution.

2. WEMOBILE: PAKISTAN AND MALAYSIA

Wemobile’s methodology developed the expertise and experience of researchers, enabling them to gain firsthand experience of women’s transport in Malaysia, Pakistan and UK thereby increasing capacity and capability of female researchers and reducing the likelihood of cultural insensitivity in transportation solutions [1]. Each site conducted empathic, (visual auto) ethnographic and participatory research (supplemented by quantitative surveys) - world cafés, focus groups, multistakeholder panel discussions and pop up installations.

In terms of the two countries:

- Pakistan ranks 128 out of 182 on Human Development Index (2010), 124 out of 155 on Gender Development Index (2009) and 132 out of 134 on the Global Gender Gap Report (2009). [6] stated that: ‘...transport remains a neglected area among gender specialists and transport specialists are still reluctant to take on gender issues. Until this is done, the prospects for

many women who live in areas characterized by poor physical accessibility and inadequate transport will remain poor’.

- Malaysia ranked 101 out of 149 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index for 2018; while it ranked well in terms of women’s access to education and educational attainment, this did not translate to economic participation and opportunity (ranking of 84) or political empowerment (ranking 131) [7].

The differences between Lahore (Pakistan) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), where our studies took place was noticeable, at all levels and is reflected in the results shown in below. Basically, women in Malaysia had freedom and agency, they were allowed to work, travel and see friends. Women in Pakistan enjoyed no such freedoms, gender segregation in public spaces was considered culturally appropriate and legally enforced, women can only work with the permission of their families, and their travel is restricted. Although women in both countries reported harassment on public transport, for women in Pakistan this is much worse, with many women not using public transport or venturing into the public realm. Social and cultural issues inhibit women’s equality and agency, adding significantly to their mobility burdens.

As well as harassment and having to pay more for safe transport (e.g. ride hailing services), the mobility of working women in both countries was restricted by additional time and effort which needed to be expended on looking after the family. In both countries, regardless of whether women worked or not, they were still required to look after their house, household and family dependents. This not only restricts where they could find employment, but their working hours, their journeys and the length of their days.

The main factors raised by participants from all sessions are summarized below.

- Social and societal factors.

Lahore: harassment and physical assault in the public realm, on and while waiting for transport, with women’s presence becoming less common on streets: mother is main care giver and housekeeper regardless of employment status.

Kuala Lumpur: women less technically competent than men in motoring and vehicle maintenance; Women’s mobility effected by their role as principle care givers/raising of children, e.g. in terms of job choice, distance they can travel and hours of working

- Cultural and religious factors

Lahore: lack of agency, empowerment and female role models. Women are censured and forbidden to go out. Cannot use motobikes. Dual burden on women

Kuala Lumpur: Malay men are head of household and approve women’s travel, women are discouraged to travel at night. Women priorities their family and home duties and work a schedule around this

- Safety

Lahore: women do not feel and are not safe outside the house. Their families also fear this. Wearing long clothes on public transport and motor bikes provides additional risks of injury. Window screens used to hide female passengers

Kuala Lumpur: Women are not encouraged to travel at night. Media reporting creates fear of safety.

- Health

Lahore: Exposure to pollution from transport and construction, no opportunities for exercise.

Kuala Lumpur: Exposure to pollution from transport and construction.

- Transport operation

Lahore: Male dominance of all forms of private and public transport. Male right to mobility. Poor transport discriminates more against women.

Kuala Lumpur: Car ownership and driving lower amongst women. Attempts to make transport safer for women e.g. women only carriages. Public transport unsafe for women. Geography and climate effect transport delivery.

- Transport infrastructure and design

Lahore: Lack of joined up services and coverage of public transport, no pedestrian infrastructure, poor maintenance, overcrowding at bus stops, lack of lighting

Kuala Lumpur: need for universal design as no specific thought given to the vulnerable groups or gender friendly designs. Known crime hot spots around stations need to be attended, better wifi-coverage in the city for calling cabs

- Economic

Lahore: Classism in transport; women who travel to work on public transport have to hide this fact; upper middle-class women own their own cars to overcome mobility barriers; on demand services are too expensive for most to use regularly, even though they offer a safer alternative

Kuala Lumpur: Women on lower incomes rely on public transport even though they know it is unsafe.

- Urban planning and architecture

Lahore: lack of pedestrian infrastructure e.g. pavements, crossing points; pedestrian bridges are far apart and very unsafe for women. Lack of disabled access on transport and to buildings.

- Regulations

Lahore: Lack of awareness of regulations which could be used to reduce mobility barriers e.g. Article 9: Security of Person; Article 15: Freedom of Movement; Article 25: Equality of Citizens; Article 26: Nondiscrimination in Respect of Access to Public Spaces.

Kuala Lumpur: Lack of enforcement of regulations and policies for women's travel safety; disconnect between transport providers.

- Political /governmental

Lahore: Need for recognition of women's mobility needs and its importance; lack of female representation on decision making bodies; need for inclusive design

Kuala Lumpur: As for Pakistan.

- Environmental/ climatic

Lahore: Extreme hot weather makes it difficult to walk outside: Rural areas and villages inaccessible for public transport

Kuala Lumpur: Raining and hot climate discourage travelling; Transport infrastructure unable to cope with predictable rain patterns causing delays and alternative transport

3. TRANSPORT ERGONOMICS

Transport ergonomics has traditionally had a limited focus [8] has extended this to include macro, social, group and cultural factors. The results outlined above show very clearly that transport occurs within a context, and personal mobility is influenced by social, cultural and religious norms, which have a far greater and more profound effect.

The two countries in WEMOBILE are representative of Low-Middle Income Countries, with Malaysia allowing greater quality and freedom to women. However, in both cases, a woman's mobility was restricted by her gendered role in society, as home maker and carer. The women in our study had to

- Pay more for safer travel e.g. using ride hailing services,
- Made longer and more complicated journeys to and from work because they could not drive or ride motorbikes,
- Endure harassment (or worse) as pedestrians and passengers,
- Complete housework and care duties before and after work,
- Find employment opportunities near to child care centred or near their home,
- Plan for travel disruption (for themselves and their children).

Trip chaining by women, in particular is starting to be recognized in the EU transport community, along with the need to 'understand women's travel needs'. This research highlights the complexity of those needs. When compounded by the problems associated with inadequate, inefficient and unregulated transport, poverty and criminality, women's mobility is severely compromised. Physically tiring, long

journeys, disrespect and harassment on the street, by transport staff and passengers, naturally lead to reduced mobility especially when women are also required to spend long hours on household duties. and the extra burdens inadequate transport places on women, contributing to gender transport poverty and a poorer quality of life.

In the multistakeholder discussions in both countries most participants were eager for changes to increase safety and security of women (e.g. through better transport infrastructure and through enforcing regulations) and to provide them with greater access to transport (e.g. through motorbike lessons, car maintenance, training in use of public transport).

At a wider level, it was believed that multiagency teams could come together and work towards understanding and removing gender discrimination. Investment, commitment and partnerships are needed to develop inclusive transport systems in a master plan for transformational change with regulated planning processes enabling gender mainstreaming and action planning across departments, having a key emphasis on developing and enforcing current equality legislation

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