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AN INVESTIGATION OF GENDER TRANSPORT POVERTY AMONG YOUNG MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN IN KARACHI

Key Words

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Abstract

Although Karachi is an economic hub of Pakistan it lacks a systematised public transport system. The poor quality of service leads to widespread transport poverty. This is worse for women as it sits alongside cultural and social practices which restrict women's agency and personal mobility. owing to the prevalent local patriarchal attitudes. Little research has been conducted on how the deprivation of agency contributes to greater gender disparities in transport provision and leads to gender transport poverty.

The aim of this paper is to study the different aspects of transport poverty on women in Karachi, taking it as a representative lower-middle-income city (LMIC) in the global South, and to assess the impact of transport poverty on women's opportunities. A mixed methods approach – surveys, interviews and focus groups, autoethnography – was used to gain phenomenological insights into the everyday experiences of women while using public transport. The results show that gender transport poverty is manifest at all stages of the journey lifecycle and severely curtails women's participation, in the labour force and life of Pakistan. The paper presents the results and a multifaceted study to understand gender transport poverty.

1. INTRODUCTION

Equal access to mobility provides access to opportunities and the benefits of living in the cities. For women, religious, social, and cultural norms may curtail their freedom and agency to travel. Such factors operate in addition to the transport poverty experienced by all citizens. In Pakistan, cultural norms and gender discourses prescribe the use of transport services, restricting women's mobility and making them dependent.

Pakistan is consistently ranked as the world's second worst country when it comes to gender equality [1]. In relation to mobility, masculinity is often coded as 'mobile' and femininity as static'. In practice, this means that men have ownership of public spaces, have more freedom to travel to work and for leisure purposes. Women have no agency in decisions about travel. They are expected to remain at home. They are not welcomed on public transport or in public spaces and leisure related journeys are restricted. The paper explores the effects of transport poverty on the lives of middle-class young women in Karachi, Pakistan, who are more educated and aspirational, yet at the same time are aware of their position in the world

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mobility in Low Middle Income Countries (LMICs) is a wicked problem, systemically linked to many socio-political and cultural problems [2 and 3]. Here, although underinvestment in public transport, transport infrastructure, rapid urbanization and rises in car ownership makes transportation a challenge for everyone, [4] argued that inadequate pedestrian infrastructure and poor transport design create a system hostile to women and commented that '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'. [3 and 5]'s theoretical framework of transport poverty stressed the intersectional dimensions of transport-related social exclusion. The four conditions which can contribute to transport poverty:

- Mobility poverty; Non-availability of transport appropriate to individual needs.
- Accessibility poverty; The inability of transport to reach destinations that ensure a decent quality of life.
- Transport affordability; not being able to afford the cost of transport.
- Exposure to transport externalities; e.g., pollution, congestion, and accidents

Gender transport poverty [5] acknowledges the disproportionate burdens on women – lower income, multiple roles and socio-cultural mobility restrictions own can have an impact on the wider issues underlying gender transport poverty. Transport-related social exclusion recognizes that mobility is socially produced and is unevenly distributed along ethnic, class, gender, and religious lines [14]. In this model, transport poverty encompasses not only the lack of physical and financial resources but also the social and spatial deprivations which can influence an individual's mobility. Hence, socioeconomic status, marital status, gender, and age can also contribute to social disadvantage. These factors can lead to reduced mobility and

marginalisation of groups [6]. For example, women's mobility may be influenced directly (e.g., through poor bus design) and indirectly through social and cultural norms which deny her agency and freedom to travel. When the public domain is masculinised women are subjected to more harassment [7, 8, 9]. Piecemeal solutions include gender-segregated transport [10, 11] zero tolerance of harassment, gender-aware planning [12] and products increasing attention on the aggressor [13]. It is not clear whether these can be effective without tackling the wider issues of gender inequality.

This paper argues that there is a need to further extend conventional measures of transport poverty to include gender-relevant themes. For this is important to consider why women do not travel and whether this is imposed or chosen [14] or a by-product of poor practices. This necessitates investigating the barriers that exert power on women's independence such as traditional gender roles [15].

Here one should not assume that everyone is free to travel. Freedom of movement is subjective, and gender has a significant role to play in determining one's mobility choices at an everyday level. This requires looking at both micro- and macro-level factors, that affects one's mobility to understand transport poverty on gender lines. For this purpose, the hexagon-spindle model [16] can be useful.

3. METHODS

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used starting with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative studies. The participants belonged to a variety of professions and locations within Karachi. The mean age for women was 27.7 years and for men (a comparative group) was 25.5 years. Thematic analysis was undertaken of all material, starting with reading transcripts and coding discussion, followed by organizing and classifying the data into categories/ themes.

Table 1. Participant breakdown

Methods	Participants	Duration
Online survey	185 responses from 16-40 years old (94 women and 91 men)	Over 4 months
One-to-one interviews	28 interviews with 21-35-year-olds (18 women and 10 men)	90 minutes
Autoethnography	Researcher	Fieldwork observations in different locations
Focus group discussion	12 participants aged between 21-35 years (6 women and 6 men)	60 minutes in 2 groups.
Expert interviews	10 men:1 woman	30 minutes

4. RESULTS

All the results triangulated well. Taking a whole journey perspective, women's mobility is curtailed in the following ways:

During planning – having to assert their need to travel. Permission may not be granted for travel to work, to health care or recreational outlets), or may be subject to a number of restrictions, e.g., time and mode of transport, or require a male chaperone. Extra money is needed for emergencies as there are no fixed tariffs for on demand transport and women will be charged higher

Walking to the bus stop. Here women are subjected to harassment and criminality as they are not welcomed in the public realm. The pedestrian infrastructure is poorly maintained, with garbage routinely burnt on the roads. Bus stops are not lit, do not provide any information, and waiting makes a woman more vulnerable. There is no internet coverage of bus routes.

In relation to bus travel. Buses are infrequent, do not run to schedule, and operators may change routes, they are usually overcrowded and may not stop to let a woman board or get off the bus safely. There are no train services. Few women drive and they cannot ride motorbikes. The buses are poorly maintained and ventilated. Gender segregation inside gives women a third of the seats, but these are positioned in the worst places. Many women feel trapped in the buses, subjected to the male gaze and assault. Bus journeys are long, women may have to wear full bukhas, they arrive at destinations hot, stressed, and dishevelled. If they travel for work, they may be late and will be ridiculed if they appear to have used public transport. As buses become more infrequent and dangerous after 6pm, they have to arrange careems (on demand transport) or male chaperones to escort them home.

Taking paid employment is seen as a privilege. Permission is needed and certain occupations discouraged, even for educated women. In all cases women have to also manage their household duties. This may add 4 hours extra work each day. Additionally, because of they have to walk/use public transport/ or take careems their commutes are longer, more convoluted, dearer and stressful than their male counterparts.

Therefore, it was possible to summarize these in Figure 1 using the Hexagon - Spindle Model [16]. This enables the results to be mapped on to different sectors of the transport system e.g. organisational, contextual and personal sectors, and also shows the 'places' where problems arose for Karachi's young women.

The expert interviews revealed a deep rooted, meta narrative of lack of respect and concern for women's needs, central to the wicked problem of gender transport poverty and affecting every interaction women have, or are unable to have, with transport. Such factors are depicted in the outer rim of Figure 1. Consideration of such factors is of fundamental importance, because no service or organisation operates within a vacuum, and wider effects, such as people's agency may have a greater bearing on inclusivity than traditional ergonomics issues, such as vehicle design.

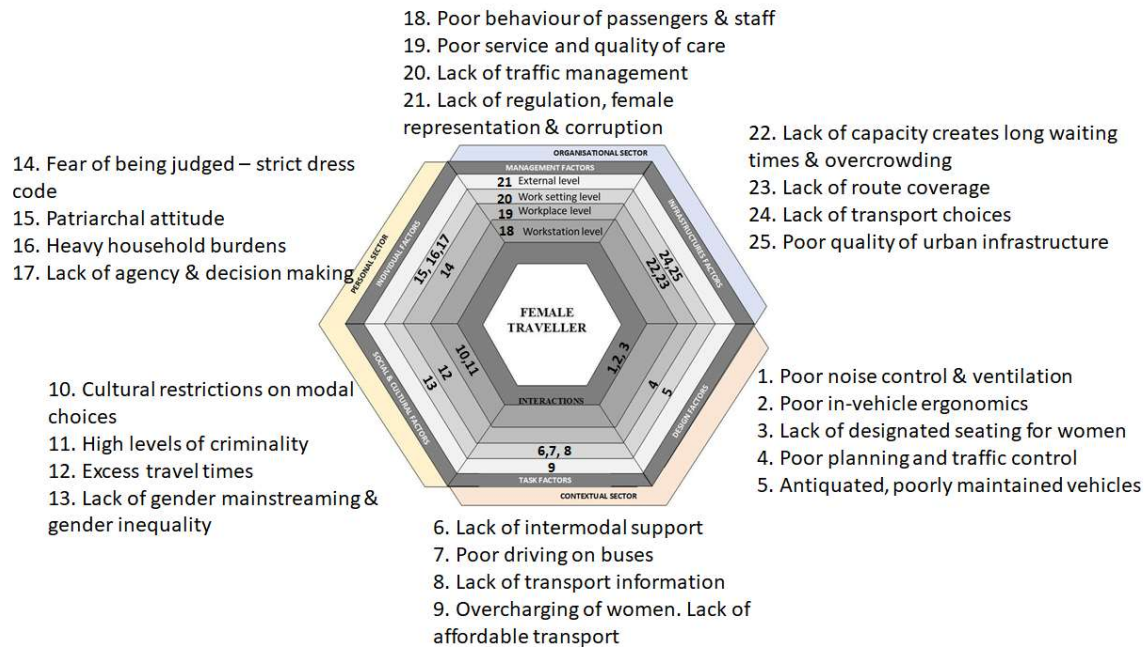


Figure 1. Summary of results mapped on to the Hexagon- Spindle Model

The Hexagon Spindle Model was used because it takes a systematic and holistic perspective of the whole journey and emphasises that if a problem occurs in one part of the journey, this will lead to changes in subsequent journeys. This was clearly shown in the narratives where women speak of having to use more expensive forms of transport (careems) for reasons such as avoiding long wait times at bus stops where they are subject to harassment, to escape overcrowding on buses/ not being able to get a seat, to arrive on time, or to travel when they like in safety. This is shown schematically in Figure 2 [17].

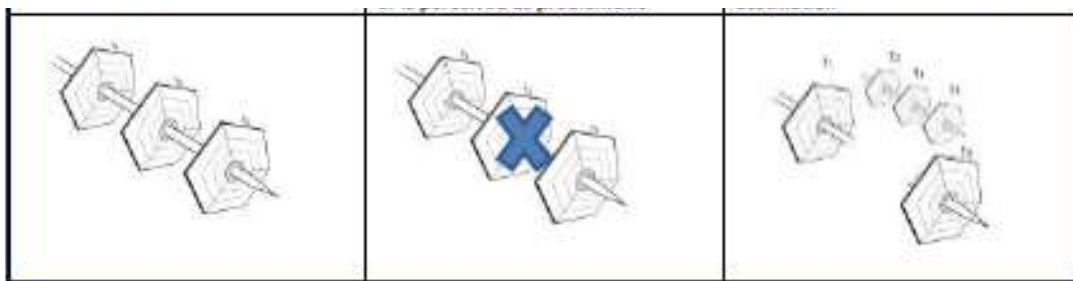


Figure 2. Consequences of problems for journey changes

Here, 3 journey stages are schematically depicted, a problem in one of the layers of the hexagon (Figure 1) in any part of the journey, will result in changes to travel patterns which are lengthier and more inconvenient. Mapping results onto the model helps to identify where policy, guidelines and recommendations could be introduced at a number of levels to address gender transport poverty. The following section provides examples of this.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS GENDER TRANSPORT POVERTY

The wide ranging guidelines produced by [18] have been designed to effect all areas of the transport system at different levels and requiring different levels of resources, which makes them achievable in small incremental steps. For example,

At a macro level issue. 2 areas may be addressed by policy and regulation. Firstly, gender equality with a recognition of women's rights to safety and employment; Secondly, enforcing and strengthening existing rules and regulations to make bus operators more accountable (e.g., for tariffs, routes, vehicle maintenance and training). The lack of an urban mobility plan means that public transport provision is unable to reduce social disadvantage or transport poverty.

At an organisational level, gender mainstreaming plans or gender action plans could be used to integrate women into employment, decision making bodies, or consultation processes.

At infrastructure level investment is needed in the pedestrian infracture, IT connectivity development of roads and addition of rapid train services. This requires a master plan, investment, and central coordination (expert interviews revealed such unclear division of roles and lack of accountability in transport departments).

At an operational level, transport operators remain largely unaccountable once they have their licence. Interviews revealed little driver training or vehicle maintenance, high-level of corruption to escape fines and win routes. Prevalent attitudes were that women should not work/be in the public realm, therefore only rudimentary/worse seating was provided for women, no attempts were made to safeguard their safety either on the bus, at bus stops or when getting on/off the buses.

In terms of vehicle design, fleets were old, poorly maintained, polluting, and ventilated. Few checks were made on their roadworthiness, and there was no restriction on how many people could travel in or on top of vehicles. In all cases women were disadvantaged because of their anthropometry and clothing, leading to discomfort and safety hazards. Private operators' priority was to pay off initial costs, not maintain the vehicles. Regulations and restrictions on type of vehicles entering the county, their maintenance and design could enable less polluting more inclusive and modern vehicles (e.g., with lower steps, ventilation, grab rails and better seat allocation, cc-tv cameras).

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