

Sexual harassment in public transport among female university students in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract

Background: Globally, women and girls are subjected to various forms of sexual harassment while using public transport daily.

Objective: To determine the prevalence of sexual harassment and identify different forms and associated risk factors among female university students who use public transport in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Methods: A cross-sectional study design using a questionnaire was employed to collect data. Data were collected from female first-year undergraduate students, who use public transport and are aged 18 years and above studying at the University of Dar es Salaam and Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences.

Results: The overall prevalence of sexual harassment on public transport was 88%. Study participants reported the highest levels of sexual harassment (91%). Verbal harassment was the most common form of sexual harassment (95%), and being called names such as baby, sweet, honey or love was reported by most students (78%). Factors associated with sexual harassment on public transport were: overcrowded vehicles (AOR=2.90, 95% CI: 0.09-4.50) and use of public transport as a form of transport (AOR=4.54, 95% CI: 0.40-8.90).

Conclusion: The study findings highlight the need for implementing plausible interventions on the issue of sexual harassment through awareness campaigns, and modern surveillance and reporting systems in public spaces.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, university female students, public transport, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Background

Sexual harassment of women is a form of gender-based violence that exists on a global scale. It is characterized by a wide range of distasteful and unsolicited acts of a sexual nature carried out against women at the expense of their freedom and comfort (Madan & Nalla, 2016). Behaviours that constitute sexual harassment can be classified into three forms, namely: verbal, non-verbal, and physical forms of sexual harassment (Gautam et al., 2019; Madan & Nalla, 2016; Mamaru et al., 2015). Sexual harassment of women is not only limited to private spaces, but also can take place in public spaces such as on the streets, workplaces, and also on public transportation (Chafai, 2017; Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018; Tripathi et al., 2017).

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Worldwide, many women are abandoning their traditional roles and involved in more public life, and seeking better education and job prospects (Gautam et al., 2019); these daily routine activities put many women at an increased risk of experiencing sexual harassment in public spaces such as in public transportation (Madan & Nalla, 2016).

Although sexual harassment is gender based by nature, women experience it differently from men. Women are more likely to report being objectified, put down, or treated differently because of their gender (Lindberg et al., 2007); whereas men experience vulgar and homophobic comments, presumably to enforce traditional gender role stereotypes (McMaster et al., 2002). Most students also experience some forms of sexual harassment during high school, either occasionally (59%) or often (27%), with girls experiencing more frequent and severe forms than boys (Koss et al., 2020). Despite the awareness of the frequency of sexual harassment, there is little available research on the forms of harassment experienced by adolescent boys and girls.

Sexual harassment can have long-term negative effects on the mental, social and physical well-being of the individual (Gautam et al., 2019; Mamaru et al., 2015; Tripathi et al., 2017). Sexual harassment can have long term negative implications on the overall wellbeing of the individual, contributing to reduced self-esteem, increased anxiety and long term depression (Tripathi et al., 2017). Various types of research reveal that the consequences of sexual harassment are diverse and serious, regardless of whether the focus of research is employees or students and staff in the higher education sector particularly. For instance, some researches show that ill health, anxiety, lack of motivation and dropout rates are results of sexual harassment (Barling et al., 1996; Chan et al., 2008).

Experiences of sexual harassment in higher education led to physical, psychological and professional consequences for individuals. Examples of such consequences in literature are irritation, anger, stress, discomfort, feelings of powerlessness and degradation. It is well documented that sexual harassment in higher education can lead to depression (Martin-Storey & August, 2016; Selkie et al., 2015) nervousness (Richman et al., 1999) post-traumatic stress disorder (Henning et al., 2017), (physical pain (Chan et al., 2008) unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (Philpart et al., 2009), increased alcohol uptake (Fedina et al., 2016; Selkie et al., 2015), weakened career opportunities and decreased job motivation (Chan et al., 2008). Detailed job-related factors often include absence, diminished job satisfaction, engagement and productivity, reduced self-confidence and self-image, and people giving notice from their jobs (Lapierre et al., 2005; Willness et al., 2007). Even observing or hearing about a colleague's exposure to sexual harassment can generate 'bystander stress' and similarly cause conflicts in the work (Willness et al., 2007).

Public Transport and sexual harassment

Public transportation plays a crucial role in providing long-term mobility services to commuters. Women as compared to men are more frequent users of public transport; therefore, the availability of safe, affordable and reliable public transport for women is a number one priority for women all over the world (Ball & Wesson, 2017; Ceccato, 2017). Unfortunately, this is not the reality for many girls and women worldwide whose safety continues to be compromised while using public transportation. For example, the high prevalence of sexual harassment of females on public transport has been reported in multiple studies (Asian Development Bank, 2014; Gekoski et al., 2017; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014).

However, many cases of sexual harassment in public transport often go unreported. For example, (Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018) observed that 98% of all cases of sexual harassment of female students on public transport were not reported to the police. Similarly, a study in London (Transport for London, 2017) revealed that less than 10% of cases of sexual harassment in public transport in 2012-2014 had been reported to the police. Many women fear reporting cases of sexual harassment due to

the shame and prejudice attached to speaking and also the shift in blame. Failure to report cases of sexual harassment contributes to encouraging perpetrators to continue harassing women on public transport without fear of repercussions.

Although women of all ages can fall victim to sexual harassment in public transport, the risk is much higher for younger people such as university students (Ceccato et al., 2021; Gautam et al., 2019). University students represent a population group that is highly active and also due to their minimal income and lack of private car ownership, many are reliant on public transport as compared to other urban inhabitants (Ceccato et al., 2021). The prevalence of sexual harassment of female university students on public transport has been reported in several studies carried out in Asia (Gautam et al., 2019; Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018; Tripathi et al., 2017). Studies have shown that sexual harassment of female students has negative implications on their academic performance, and mental wellbeing which collectively reduce their probability of reaching their long term goals (Gautam et al., 2019).

In Tanzania, there is a lack of studies that explore sexual harassment of women in public transport despite it being a very rampant issue. Although studies have explored public transport challenges for commuters (Kanyama et al., 2004; Mack, 2009) living in Dar es Salaam city, none have specifically looked at the prevalence of sexual harassment among university female students on public transport.

Factors such as time of travel, frequency of use of public transport, a form of public transport users and over-crowdedness of public transport vehicles have all been associated with sexual harassment of female students in public transport especially in urban settings (Gautam et al., 2019). It was reported that 78% of the female students in five Health Science Colleges in Kathmandu had experienced sexual harassment while on public transportation with the highest proportion of victims falling between the age groups of 20-23 years (Gautam et al., 2019). Dar es Salaam city continues to experience rapid urban growth coupled with an increased need for social and transportation services; whereas more than 60% of the people who live in Dar es Salaam are dependent on public transport. Increased use of public transport among the inhabitants of Dar es Salaam city has created a problem of sexual harassment of women (Kanyama et al., 2004). It should be noted that there is no special transport in Dar es Salaam for female students. No previous study has assessed sexual harassment among university female students in Tanzania.

Therefore, it is of interest to investigate sexual harassment among female university students who use public transport to reveal the extent of sexual harassment among them; its different forms and associated risk factors. This study aimed to determine the prevalence of sexual harassment and its risk factors among female university students who use public transport in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Materials and Methods

Study design

This study employed a cross-sectional design with a quantitative approach for data collection.

Study Area

The study was carried out in Dar es Salaam city. The city was chosen because it is the largest city in Tanzania and also majority of the universities in the country are situated. Furthermore, Dar es Salaam is a metropolitan city with improved road infrastructure and has more commuter buses compared to any other city in Tanzania.

Study population

The study population was female first year undergraduate students who use public transport, (aged 18 years and above) studying at University of Dar es Salaam and Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences.

Sample size estimation

The sample size formula for cross-sectional studies was used to estimate the minimum number of students to be recruited for this study (30). As there were no previous studies done on the topic in Tanzania, a study by (3) which was done in Kathmandu valley, Nepal was used as reference for calculating our sample size ($p=77%$). Using a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error and an anticipated nonresponse rate of 10%. The formula gave the minimum sample size of 304 students. Using proportionate allocation technique, the minimum number of students to be sampled from the selected universities and colleges was computed based on the existing number of female first-year students' enrolment. Table 1 below shows that 279 students were allocated to the College of Humanities, University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM); while 25 students to School of Medicine, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS).

Table 1: Sample size allocation

University (College/School)	Population (N)	Proportion (p)	Sample size (n)
UDSM (COHU)	808	808/882	$(808/882)*304=279$
MUHAS (MEDICINE)	74	74/882	$(74/882)*304=25$
Total	882	1	304

*MUHAS- Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences

*UDSM – University of Dar es Salaam

Sampling technique

Simple random sampling was adopted in the selection of the two universities that were included in the study. Each university name (a total of seven) was written on a piece of paper which was folded and placed in a box, where two universities were randomly chosen. These were Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences and University of Dar es Salaam. From each of the selected universities, one college/school was randomly selected (COHU from University of DSM and School of Medicine from MUHAS). Female students who participated in this study were selected systematically by skipping two people and handing the questionnaire to the next one. This was done after finishing their sessions before they go for a break. This was done in collaboration with class representatives of the respective classes.

Ethical issues: Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences Institutional Review Board. In addition, permission to conduct the study in the selected universities was obtained from the respective authorities. All study participants were briefed on the purpose of the study before giving the written consent forms. All information was kept confidential; no names were recorded to avoid giving away the identity of the participants.

Data collection tool

Data were collected from January to February 2021.

A structured questionnaire was developed following an extensive review of available literature on the subject. It consisted of questions on socio-demographic factors, forms of sexual harassment, and also risk factors for sexual harassment on public transport, area of residence, how frequently they use

public transport, the kind of public transport they use, the situation of public transport used, at which time of a day do they use public transport if they have ever experienced sexual harassment while on public transport, if yes which type of sexual harassment they have experienced. Pre-testing of the data collection tool was carried out for 10 students at Ardhi University in Dar es Salaam. After the pre-test, some modifications were done to some of the arrangement of the questions.

Data analysis

Data were checked for completeness on daily basis. After coding, the data were entered into a computer, checked, cleaned and analysed by the statistical package for social sciences software (IBM SPSS version 23). The findings were summarized and described using descriptive statistics – including frequencies and percentages. The association between independent and dependent categorical variables was assessed using the Chi-square test. Binary logistic regression was used to determine the significant predictors of sexual harassment on public transport. Both odds ratio (OR) and adjusted odds ratio (AOR) with their corresponding 95% confidence intervals are reported. All analyses were based on the 5% level of significance.

Results

Prevalence of sexual harassment

A total of 268 (88%) out of 304 participants had experienced sexual harassment while using public transport. The study participants who had experienced sexual harassment on public transport (n=268) were asked about the forms of sexual harassment they experienced). More than three-quarters of all the participants had experienced all three forms of sexual harassment, with 254 (95%) of the participants had experienced verbal sexual harassment making it the most common form of harassment, followed by 222 (88%) who experienced physical sexual harassment while 201 (75%) experienced non-verbal sexual harassment (*see table 2 below*).

Table 2: Distribution of sexual harassment among female university students by: place of stay; form of public transport; frequency of use of public transport; crowdedness and time of travel (n=304)

Variable	Frequency n(%)	Experienced in sexual harassment n(%)	Chi-square (p-value)
Yes(n=268)			
Place of stay			
On campus	222 (73)	192 (86)	2.35 (0.138)
Off-campus	82(27)	76 (93)	
Form of public transport			
Public bus	268(88)	245(91)	9.35 (0.025)*
Rapid Bus Transit	18(6)	15(83)	
Taxi	5(2)	2(40)	
Bajaji	13(4)	6(46)	
Frequency of use of public transport			
More than twice a day	40(13)	37(93)	5.47 (0.245)
Daily	139(46)	120(86)	
Twice a week	73(24)	66(90)	
Less than 4 times a month	25(8)	23(92)	
Rarely	27(9)	22(81)	
Overcrowded vehicle			

Yes	240(79)	219(91)	5.07 (0.012)*
No	64(21)	49(77)	
Time of travel			
Morning	19(6)	18(95)	11.89 (0.009)*
Afternoon	42(14)	20(48)	
Evening	177(58)	173(98)	
Late at night	66(21)	57(86)	

The study respondents were asked to further describe the characteristics of sexual harassment they had experienced. Regarding verbal sexual harassment, more than half (65%) of the 254 respondents reported being called names such as baby, sweetie and love as the most common characteristics. From the results, (56%) of the study respondents who responded on characteristics of non-verbal sexual violence reported someone inappropriately touching their bodies while (46%) of the study respondents reported someone telling them jokes of a sexual nature, and someone displaying sexually suggestive visuals such as winking, throwing kisses or licking lips to them respectively as the most common characteristic of physical sexual violence. (See table 3 below).

Table 3: Characteristics of the different forms of sexual harassment experienced

Characteristic	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Verbal sexual harassment (n=254)		
Someone giving you compliments of a sexual nature	101	33
Someone whistling at you	127	42
Someone telling you jokes of a sexual nature	141	46
Someone calling you names such as baby, sweetie, and love	197	65
Someone asking personal questions about your sex life	133	44
Non-verbal sexual harassment (n=201)		
Someone displaying sexually suggestive visuals such as winking, throwing kisses or licking lips at you	140	46
Someone asking for sexual favours	115	38
Someone showing you offensive/sexual pictures on a phone	46	15
Physical sexual harassment (n=222)		
Someone kissing you	27	9
Someone standing behind or in front of you and inappropriately brushing their body against yours	145	48
Someone inappropriately touching your body	170	56

Factors associated with sexual harassment

This study explored the association between sexual harassment and the selected variables as presented in table 4 below. The results revealed that more than half (73%) of the respondents lived on campus as compared to 27% who lived off campus. However, all of the respondents who lived off campus had experienced sexual harassment while using public transport. The public bus was the most common means of transport used (88%) and also responsible for the majority of cases of sexual harassment on public transport (91%). Both the taxi and the Bajaj were used by less than 10% of the

respondents in the study. In addition, 91% of all study participants who travelled on an overcrowded public transport vehicle experienced sexual harassment as compared to 77% who experienced sexual harassment in a non-crowded vehicle. The Chi-square test of association shows that there is a statistically significant association between the form of public transport ($p=0.025$); overcrowding ($p=0.012$); and time of travel ($p=0.009$).

Table 4: Binary logistic regression for predictors of sexual harassment

Variable	N (%)	OR (95% CI)	AOR (95%CI)
Place of stay (n=304)			
On campus	192 (87)	2.25 (0.81-6.23)	1.79 (0.80-4.03)
Off-campus	76 (93)	Reference	
Form of public transport (n=304)			
Public bus	245 (91)	3.10 (0.609-4.53)	4.54 (0.40-8.90)
Rapid Bus Transit	15 (83)	1.16 (0.153-2.57)	0.33 (0.07-1.581)
Taxi	2 (40)	1.20 (0.14-3.58)	1.67 (0.15-3.47)
Bajaji	6 (46)	Reference	
Frequency of use of public transport (n=304)			
More than twice a day	37 (93)	0.86 (0.15-4.34)	0.357 (0.08-1.64)
Daily	120 (86)	0.55 (0.31-4.31)	0.51 (0.22-1.95)
Twice a week	66 (90)	0.77 (0.14-4.15)	0.47 (0.134-1.62)
Less than 4 times a month	23 (92)	0.65 (0.14-4.51)	0.60 (0.128-2.823)
Rarely	22 (81)	Reference	
Overcrowded vehicle (n=304)			
Yes	240 (96)	2.45 (0.134-4.67)	2.90 (0.09-4.50)
No	28 (52)	Reference	
Time of day (n=304)			
Morning	18(95)	0.51 (0.05-4.49)	0.35(0.04-2.969)
Afternoon	38(90)	0.64 (0.16-2.48)	0.667(0.19-2.32)
Evening	155(88)	0.67 (0.27-1.67)	0.90(0.39-2.07)
Late at night	57(86)	Reference	

Table 4 above summarizes the results from the binary logistic regression analysis. The results show that an overcrowded vehicle is a significant predictor of sexual harassment, with the odds being almost 3 times greater (AOR= 2.90; 95% CI: 0.09-4.50) than when it is not overcrowded. In addition, the use of public buses as a form of public transport was seen to be a potential predictor of sexual harassment of university female students on public transport (AOR: 4.54; 95% CI: 0.40-8.90). The odds of sexual harassment occurring on the public bus were more than 4 times greater than that in a Bajaj.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the prevalence of sexual harassment and different forms and associated risk factors among female university students who use public transport in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

We further hypothesized that there is no prevalence of sexual harassment among female students who use public transport. The study findings revealed that the prevalence of sexual harassment among university female students is 88%. This is consistent with findings from other studies (Gautam et al., 2019; Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014) which assessed sexual harassment among female students on public transport in Kathmandu, Nepal.

In an African context, similar results were observed on the prevalence of sexual harassment (Gekoski et al., 2017). One of the reasons for this high prevalence might be women's empowerment that is taking place on a global scale. More women are changing their traditional roles and taking up more space in the public sphere by seeking jobs and education opportunities (Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014). Therefore, their reliance on public transport has increased and this puts them at risk of falling victim to sexual harassment (Gautam et al., 2019). Logically, it is expected that empowering women, and promoting equitable opportunities in education and employment should help cut down the violence of any form directed towards women, however current statistics reflect the opposite. Further research is needed to find out why sexual violence is still prevalent among university students regardless of empowerment programs.

In this study, the risk factors for sexual harassment were individual factors (place of stay, frequency of use of public transport, time of travel, and type of public transport used) and physical factors (over-crowdedness of public transport). We hypothesized that there is no association between individual factors (place of stay, frequency of use of public transport, time of travel, and type of public transport used) and sexual harassment. However, there was a significant association between a form of public transport users and experience of sexual harassment; these results corroborate with findings from Nepal (Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018). The public bus had the greatest probability of sexual harassment on public transport as compared to other means of public transport such as taxis or Bajaj. Possible reasons for the similarity of the findings can be attributed to study contexts.

In this study, the most common type of sexual harassment experienced by female students on public transport was verbal sexual harassment, followed by physical sexual harassment and non-verbal sexual harassment. Similarly, the same pattern of occurrence was reported among the female respondents (Ceccato et al., 2021). On the other hand, our results are in the same line with findings from another study in Nepal which reported the presence of sexual harassment among females in public transport (Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018) whereby the most common form of sexual harassment experienced was physical harassment, followed by verbal, and the least common being non-verbal. One of the possible explanations for the high prevalence of verbal sexual harassment in this study is that this form of sexual harassment is usually the least reported form of sexual harassment, as victims were not aware of how to respond to it or where to seek help, and for this reason, perpetrators are left unpunished and therefore, proceed conducting those acts in the future (Mamaru et al., 2015).

In this study, the most commonly experienced type of verbal sexual harassment was name calling such as baby, honey, sweet or love. For non-verbal sexual harassment, it was the display of sexual suggestive visuals. Likewise, non-verbal sexual harassment has been reported in Ethiopia among female students (Mamaru et al., 2015). Different reasons could be given for the highest prevalence of verbal harassment. It appears that victims of verbal harassment rarely reported the incidences to legal bodies due to feelings of shame, and lack of awareness on what to do and where to go. Consequently, perpetrators continue to harass other people in the future.

It has been noted that strict laws and legislation to protect women are lacking in many countries. For example, it was reported that 59 countries in the Middle East, North America, the Pacific

and East Asia lack laws that protect women from sexual harassment (Gautam et al., 2019). In the context of Tanzania, laws have been put into a place under the SOSPA that punish perpetrators of sexual harassment and provide compensation to victims of sexual harassment; however, their effectiveness remains questionable following the limited number of prosecutions that have taken place since its inception. The lack of strict governing laws on sexual harassment protects perpetrators of sexual harassment and gives them the courage to continue doing such acts. For young female university students, fear of being sexually harassed or experiencing sexual harassment can have long term negative effects on their overall emotional, physical and social well-being and this can affect their academic performances and hinder them from achieving their long term goals (Gautam et al., 2019).

Limitations of the study

Interpretation of the findings from this study should be made with the following limitations in mind. First, this study is limited to the experiences of female university goers and therefore may not necessarily reflect the experiences of all female public transport users of different age groups.

It could, however, serve as a baseline for future studies that explore sexual harassment on public transport at a larger scale with a wider age group range. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is possible that the respondents could have overestimated or underestimated their actual experiences, therefore not reflecting the actual extent of the problem due to social desirability bias. Limitations aside, this study offers a glimpse of the experiences of sexual harassment of young female university students while commuting using public transportation in the city of Dar es Salaam, and Tanzania as a whole; an area of study that was lacking in the existing literature.

Conclusion and recommendations

The prevalence of sexual harassment of female university students on public transports considerably high and exists in a variety of forms. The use of public bus transport remains a hotspot for sexual harassment of female students, especially during peak hours. From these findings, there is a clear need for the implementation of plausible interventions at a national, regional and district level to curb the high burden of sexual harassment. These can include nationwide campaigns to raise awareness of sexual harassment on public transport, and also the incorporation of better safety measures in public spaces such as increased numbers of public buses.

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