

Tackling gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the public transport sector: the role of key actors

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Outline

- Gender-based violence and sexual harassment in male-dominated work and public transport
- Evidence from research in Kenya
- The role of stakeholders
- Conclusions

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment

- GBV “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women... whether occurring in public or private life (UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 20 December 1993
- Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence and workplace discrimination
- “Sexual harassment, most broadly defined, refers to the unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in the context of a relationship of unequal power.” MacKinnon (1979: 1)
- #MeToo brought sexual harassment to worldwide attention in 2017

GBV and sexual harassment in transport

- Transport sector known for violence, particularly for women workers, from passengers, colleagues, managers
- Women less than 20% of transport workforce worldwide
- Research on male-dominated work shows sexual harassment can be used to signal that women unwelcome in ‘male’ work
- International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work agreed by states, employers and representatives of labour in June 2019; noted that violence and harassment a particular problem in transport sector

GBV and sexual harassment in transport

- Sexual harassment of women passengers a major concern worldwide
- Women-only carriages, buses and taxis are one response
- GBV and sexual harassment common for women workers in our research for ITF in 5 cities in Global South
- Research and action on sexual harassment often focussed on passengers, not women workers

The research

- Research for International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) on gender impact of technological change in public transport in five cities: Bangkok, Bogota, Cape Town, Mexico City and Nairobi
<https://www.itfglobal.org/en/reports-publications/impact-future-work-women-in-public-transport>
- Local researchers in each city undertook documentary research and interviews with women workers and stakeholders; workshop in Bogota involving researchers, ITF and local union activists
- Additional research on media reports in Kenya

Public transport in Kenya

- Largely operates through the informal matatu sector, which includes buses, minibuses and 14-seater vehicles. Also bus and rail services
- In Nairobi an estimated 8,000 matatus operate along 70 routes, carrying about 400,000 passengers a day [actual data unavailable]
- Matatus organised into Savings and Credit Cooperatives Societies (SACCOs) & Transport Companies which regulate the workers in the sector; estimated 200 SACCOs in Nairobi
- Most workers informally employed and are not in unions, but some are in the Matatu Workers Union (MWU), Transport Workers Union (TAWU), Public Transport Operators Union (PUTON).
- Estimated 10% matatu drivers are women, but 30-40% conductors women

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Evidence from Kenya: The Media

<https://www.youtube.com › watch> **#MyDressMyChoice: Kenyans hold rally to support woman ...**
14 Nov 2014 — A lady was stripped naked and *sexually* assaulted by Matatu operators for alleged indecent dressing. The director of public prosecutions has ...

<https://www.dw.com › mydressmychoice-kenyans-hold...>
17 Nov 2014 — The **#MyDressMyChoice campaign** began after a woman was brutally assaulted outside a Nairobi bus stop for wearing a miniskirt. Protesters ...

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Evidence from Kenya

[Tout, driver get death sentence for sexually harassing female ...](https://home.creaw.org)

[https://home.creaw.org ›](https://home.creaw.org)
[2017/07/20 › tout-driver-get-...](#)

20 Jul 2017 — The incident in which the three, a matatu driver, a tout and a petrol station attendant *molested* the female passenger sparked outrage 3 years ...

[NIBS College student dies after being pushed out of moving ...](https://www.tuko.co.ke)

[https://www.tuko.co.ke ›](https://www.tuko.co.ke) ✓ [Local News](#)

14 Jun 2018 — A female *student* from the Nairobi Institute of Business Studies (NIBS) college died after a tout allegedly *pushed* her *out of a moving bus*.

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Evidence from Kenya

[https://ke.opera.news ›](https://ke.opera.news)
[comments](#)

7 Jan 2021 — One *Karatina University student* that was *thrown out of a moving vehicle* is going through pain as she broke both her legs after incurring severe ...

[Woman dies after being thrown out of moving bus; vehicle ...](https://tv47.co.ke)

[https://tv47.co.ke ›](https://tv47.co.ke) TV47

8 Feb 2021 — Woman dies after being thrown out of moving bus; vehicle seized by police ... Judy Wanjiku, who was an employee of Equity Bank- Ruiru branch, ...

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Evidence from Kenya

[Uproar as Nairobi Tout Slaps Passenger at Matatu Terminus ...](https://www.kenyans.co.ke)
<https://www.kenyans.co.ke> ›
[News](#)

24 Mar 2021 — "@NTSA, @MOH #ma3route. The conductor of this *matatu* wants to beat a *woman* because she asked the driver to *wear* a mask. They've hit her

[https://twitter.com](https://twitter.com/citizentvkenya) ›
[citizentvkenya](#) › [status](#)

8 Jun 2021 — **Justice delayed, denied: Family of Judy Wanjiku seeks justice** after her death from a moving matatu. Wanjiku was allegedly thrown out of a ...

What is the problem?

- The media is awash with reports of passengers harassed or killed as a result of public transport related violence
- Such cases come into public limelight through citizen social media reporting
- The outcome is often public outcry necessitating the authorities and human rights groups to respond
- In several instances, the outcomes have been successful and in favour of the victims [harsh punishment (life imprisonment); women voices amplified (#Mydressmychoice) - <https://floneinitiative.org/index.php/2021/06/>]
- Sadly, **some would have died** and therefore justice cannot bring back life

But what about the workers?

- Whereas public sympathy is received in the case of passenger assault or attacks, what about the workers?
- Cases of sexual violence against workers often go unreported
- First, because it is assumed that that is part of the 'chaotic' work environment
- Also the negative public perception towards women in public transport – arguably – it could be 'what they asked for'
- Also the lack of time to report and follow-up such cases – the outcomes might not be favourable as this might lead to loss of income for women who already are earning very low incomes

But what about the workers?

- Also the fear of victimization by colleagues and even employers deter women from reporting
- Some unions have female committees and these too have proven to be ineffective for dealing with reports, not enough women in union leadership, most transport workers not in unions despite the known benefits – discourages by SACCOS & employers
- Female workers often end up settling the matter without the support of their unions or SACCOS
- But is this the right approach?

The role of stakeholders

- The government (i.e. regulatory authority), the unions, the SACCOs and the employers must take decisive action to fight sexual violence in public transport – whether that is targeted at the workers or the users
- Punitive deterrent measures are necessary, including a supportive structures that encourage women workers to report and follow the cases to conclusion without fear of loss of jobs, or further harassment or intimidation
- Technology can be used to enhance women workers' safety and security – as well as protection against sexual violence – CCTVs that are managed and monitored by police gender desks; panic buttons in cabs

The role of stakeholders

- Providing friendly and flexible work environment for women workers to minimize their risk of being violated at work or as they get to or leave workplaces – safe working hours, i.e. not 4am start
- Address factors that contribute to situations of violence – e.g. improving fleet surveillance, payment options preferably cashless options, and discouraging re-routing of vehicles; improve passenger information systems
- Public education and lobbying to say no to any form of violence in public transport – whether directed at workers or passengers; encourage respect for and protect workers
- More women transport workers and joint action to eliminate sexual harassment for passengers and workers will improve safety for *all*

Conclusions

- Joint focus on sexual harassment of passengers *and* workers in transport research and actions to prevent it
- Safe, trusted mechanisms for reporting, i.e. union women's committees, through SACCOs, employers, police
- Transport operators need to be more active, visible and consistent in imposing sanctions on harassers
- Trade unions: supporting women in leadership roles; using ILO Convention to build awareness, inclusion of GBV in collective bargaining and health and safety policies