

Sex Crimes against Women in Public Transports of Bangladesh: Contribution of Male Female Power Distance and Lack of Informal Sex Education



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Abstract

In Bangladesh sex crimes committed against women have risen sharply in recent years. The intensity of violence in terms of graphic horror and macabre crime scenes have particularly been observed in the transport sector of this country wherein several rape, and murder following rape of female bus passengers had been reported. The perpetrators were ill-educated or uneducated male public transport workers who were aged in between 20 and 35. Bangladeshi society is a high-power distance society, several research posits, and here relationship between employer and employee, teacher and student, and most importantly and commonly male and female, are marked by very high power distance. To a great extent the collectivism in Bangladeshi society also promotes and entrenches power distance between male and female as females expect that protection and safety can be gained if they follow the authoritarian male members amongst their immediate family members, and society at large. Using Hofstede's theory we analyze Power Distance and Masculinity, as well as sex education in Bangladeshi Society and how it informs phenomena like sexual violence on women on the public transports of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Power-distance, Masculinity, Hofstede's Dimensions, Sexual Violence, Public Transport, Sex-Education.

Introduction

Sex crimes against women in public transports of Bangladesh have been particularly intense and horrific in view of some of the recent incidents as reported by the nation's national newspapers. In February 2018 *JatriKalyanSamity*— an association that looks after the welfare and comfort of public transport users published a report that listed at least 21 incidents in which women were either raped or gang-raped on public transports across various parts of Bangladesh, and at least two incidents where murder followed rape (*JatriKalyanSamity*, 2018). Sexual harassment of women on board public transports is a widely acknowledged phenomenon in Bangladesh, and the rise in crimes of such nature is alarming. The issue of women being sexually harassed is not confined to public transports only but also in public spaces. A symposium held by urban specialists at Brac University in July 2018 found that in a survey conducted by them 64.3% of the 600 women respondents claimed that they had experienced crime and violence of a sexual nature in Dhaka's public spaces. Saira R. Khan, a Professor of School of Law at Brac University lamented that, "detailed definition of sexual harassment and stalking provided by a judge following a petition of 2008 of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association has not yet been included in the women and children repression prevention act 2000." This, according to the participants, limited the justice delivery as per the penal code. Coupled with this is the society imposed shame on victims which allows the precarious conditions to persist ("Public places in Bangladesh hotspots for crime", 2018). In 2015 during a rally brought out for Bengali New Year celebrations at the Dhaka University campus, a group of rogue youth sexually assaulted seven women in broad daylight. This incident shocked all conscientious citizens of the nation; and it was wondered how 30 youths could perpetrate such a crime amid festivities and celebrations in a crowded space ("Women sexually harassed", 2015).

Thus the public spaces are deemed precarious for women who venture to go out for work or leisure, and since public transportation is an essential part of the public space that is crucial to urban life, the sexual harassment and crime situation vis-à-vis public transport system of Dhaka demands special attention. In a 2018 publication by Brac, one of the largest NGOs of the world, which was titled "Roads Free from Sexual Harassment and Crash for Women" it was revealed that 94% of the women who commuted to work or school by public transport in Bangladesh were experiencing sexual harassment in some form (BRAC, 2018). Almost all women who use public transports in Bangladesh have a feeling of insecurity, and unease when they board a public bus, and the culture of the country that prevails often prompt women not to disclose the issue of harassment or share their experiences with their peers, immediate family members, and of course the public in general.

The BRAC report identified that lack of lessons with regard to gender equality and the enforcement of law are the key reasons for the rise in such crimes. The fact that women are too embarrassed or constrained by social norms not to come forward and disclose their experiences (as victims) also gives impetus to the perpetrators to carry on their harassments with impunity. When asked how the women victims responded to these incidents, 81% claimed that they remained silent, or moved away from the site of harassment to maintain their safety and honor (BRAC, 2018). In this paper it is agreed that lack of gender education and awareness are issues that contribute to the violence and sex crimes that are pervading the public transport system of Bangladesh. Law enforcement and stricter laws can certainly stifle the surge in such harassments and violence, but law alone is not enough. We need to look deeper and study the nature of the power distance between men and women in Bangladesh in order to get to the root of the problem. The sex education and gender awareness initiations in Bangladesh needs to be examined. The sex education given in schools and within family circles may not be adequate, maybe misleading and can be contributing to the lopsided perception of women by men in Bangladesh, especially men who had not received any schooling, or little schooling, and are working in the transport sector. Therefore, the sex education and gender sensitivity of men using public transport needs to be examined. The religious views about women, and their place in society, often color their judgment, and they question the status and presence of women in the workplace or outdoors. In the minds of men, especially male members of Bangladeshi society prejudiced views may actuate them to behave in a particular manner towards women. There are some reasons behind such a mindset to exist in men in general. The improvement in gender equality has not been satisfactory despite many government initiatives (Ferdaush and Rahman, 2011). Structural and social institutions, according to a report commissioned by an NGO named *Unnayan Onneshon*, is still very much governed by patriarchal

traditions: women are recognized for their reproductive roles only, and they are still considered to be primarily homemakers and not active economic agents. Such age old traditions and perceptions, according to the paper, persists through most parts of Bangladesh (Ferdaush and Rahman, 2011). The report explains that there are no effective policies to ensure safety of women at home, educational institutions, outside in public areas or transports, and therefore "parents are more likely to keep their girls inside their home. Hence, they are not able to participate in education, health, employment or other sectors" (Ferdaush and Rahman, 2011). These concerns indicate as far as independent, public transport using women go, men often do not consider their leering behavior or criminal proclivities unwonted, or out of place.

This study reveals how cultural stereotypes have contributed significantly to further the power distance that prevails between ordinary male and female citizens of Bangladesh. To this if one adds misinformation, ill education and regressive cultural ideas on sex, what results is almost a vindication of sexual harassment and violence (at least to these men). The focus on sex crimes against women vis-à-vis public transportation is owing to the seminal importance of an effective, efficient and safe public transport system for the development of a country. It is accepted in academia and development discourse that good transportation systems are major catalyst of economic growth and poverty reduction (ADB, 2017). In Bangladesh the government is aware of the importance of gender equity when it comes to provision of public transport; to this effect the Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project has taken initiatives for gender responsiveness. There have been positive elements such as an app development for use with smartphone mobile platforms named *SafetiPin™* which can enable women call for help and improve safety awareness (ADB, 2017).

Community policing and other awareness programs targeting the safety and comfort of women have also been incorporated; and these can certainly be deemed as an acknowledgement of women safety issues in the public transport sector, and the need to initiate some measures against these.

In this paper the issues of male and female power distance in Bangladesh as well as the nature of the sex education they receive will be explored, especially as it is informed by cultural and religious practices. Then a relationship of these elements with the sex crimes that prevail in the transport sector will be shown. Recommendations to mitigate or abate the problems are based on the findings of the study.

Methodology

This was a mixed method research: qualitative research work was combined with a survey of women who used public transport. Owing to the sensitive nature of the topic it was felt that individual in-depth interviews with key informants, and four focus group studies with two distinct group of stakeholders relevant to the nature of the enquiry would be required. For this study six key informants were interviewed who represented two different but

important stakeholders in the realm of public transport and education. The number of FGDs conducted were four (4), and the number of in-depth interviews (IDI) were six (6). After 4 FGDs and 6 IDIs saturation is likely to occur when the last or final IDIs or FGDs will not reveal any new insights or ideas that were not mentioned in previous interviews or discussions ("How to Conduct Qualitative Formative Research", 2011). That is the reason the total number of FGDs and IDIs are kept ten (10).

The quantitative research was conducted on female students of BRAC University who used public transport. A 15 item questionnaire was administered across 70 students. The questionnaire incorporated a 7 point Likert Scale to capture their responses. The focus group discussions (FGDs) centered on two distinct groups: one representing female public transport users consisting of students, readymade garments workers, and regular job holders on the one hand, and on the other male public transport users constituting students, readymade garment workers, and transport workers. Altogether four focus group discussions were held: two male groups and two female groups. Qualitative interviews were utilized because they are more flexible compared to quantitative interviews. The quantitative survey confirmed and corroborated the findings from qualitative research, thereby giving the findings a validity. In an in-depth interview, for instance, the interviewer has the flexibility to adapt the interview in response to the way the interviewer is responding to his or her questions, and if any additional issues or areas need to be broached on. In order to help clarify the topic or explore the topic in further details, new questions can be inserted in qualitative interviews (McGivern, 2006, p.185). In the case of this study, the qualitative interview technique was very useful as probing was possible, and further explanations were elicited from the respondents. This could not have been achieved unless the fluid nature of the interview process supported the researcher. The in-depth interviews were also useful because the interviewer could face the interviewees in an unthreatening and ambient setting- in an office, café or quiet place- where the interviewer could feel at ease and answer the questions.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The members of the group members in an FGD may influence the view of an individual respondent and lead to group thinking. In-depth interviews often preclude such possibilities as no else is there (save the interviewer) to affect the answers of the respondent, and usually the respondents are able to provide a bias free, independent and uncontrived response to the question being asked (McGivern, 2006, p.187). In the case of focus group discussions the standard procedure of 1) Forming, 2) Storming, 3)

Norming, and 4) Mourning were followed (McGivern, 2006, p.192). Here follows the details of the procedure that were utilized:

Forming

At this stage the group forms, and focuses their attention to the overall task. The following steps completed the forming stage:

1. Here the researcher explained what this research is about and why they (the FGD participants) have been requested to participate. With tact and politeness ground rules such as "switching off" of cell phones were introduced.
2. The consent form was produced and explained before handing it down to each of the participants. The participants read or learnt about the consent form and provided their assent by signing the forms.
3. The moderator and researcher provided their credentials, and then a round of self-introductions by the FGD participants concluded this step.
4. Introductory questions were asked at this point.

Storming

At this point the moderator introduced the topic and explained what the FGD was trying to achieve through involvement of the participants.

Norming

At this point they relaxed, and understanding had set in, and the main questions were probed. The answers to the questions were given and discussed.

Mourning

At this point the FGD was coming to a close and questions that signal the end of the focus group discussion were asked. The participants knew that they were being invited now to provide some final thoughts.

In order to select the issues and questions that went in the question bank of the in-depth questionnaire and the FGD guidelines, the researcher conducted extensive literature survey on the phenomenon of power distance, and the way power distance plays a part in the sexual harassment in public transport, newspaper reportage of incidents and analyzing them in the light of power distance. The same was done with respect to sex education and key questions and issues surrounding sex education in Bangladesh, especially sex education and perspectives of the young were broached upon.

The FGDs were conducted at the BRAC University Library's FGD room. The participants were selected on a convenient sampling basis. Each FGD lasted for 90 minutes- the acceptable limits within which FGDs are generally carried out (Memduhoglu et al., 2017). The participants at the FGD were all related to public transport usage. The following table captures the general demographic characteristics of four FGDs:

Table 1
Demographic Constitution of FGD Participants

Number of FGDs	4
Number of Participants in Each	6
Total Number of Male Participants`	11
Total Number of Female Participants	13
Age Range	21-40
Occupations	Student: 12 Public Transport Workers: 6 Readymade Garments Employees: 4 Other Wage Earning Women 2 Total Number of Participants: 24

The FGDs were conducted in two waves over a period of two days. In each day two FGD sessions were held.

Survey

According to a *Daily Star* report of the 10 million public transport users of Dhaka city, about 21% are women (“Make transportation women-friendly”, 2018). This renders the number of women public transport users to 2,100,000. With respect to this population the sample size used for the survey was 79. This sample size was arrived at with 95% confidence level and 11% confidence interval (“Sample Size Calculator”, 2012). The sampling method chosen was convenience sampling owing to the following: a) simplicity of sampling and the ease of research, b) short time, c) cost considerations (McGivern, 2006, p.230). The survey participants were all BRAC University female students. They filled out the survey form while they were waiting to be advised for Fall 2019 semester course registration.

Upon duly signing the informed consent form 79 female students filled out a 15 point questionnaire. The questionnaire was an attitude survey where the respondents were obliged to respond on a 7 point Likert scale. As mentioned earlier, the rationale behind approaching female BRAC University students for filling out the survey form had been taken owing to ease of accessing them during the registration process, the cost, and time considerations. Women students were chosen as a crucial sample set from the population for this study for they constitute a significant proportion of the urban transport users according to a study undertaken by a gender rights NGO *Nari Udyog* (Shefali, 2000, p.5). Female students are an important group in terms of number also, and are the potential beneficiaries of possible reforms. They also are reported to feel transport/mobility problems while performing their social and economic responsibilities within their respective communities, and are supposedly vulnerable users of the public transport (Shefali, 2000, p.6). Thus it was assumed that their views can be recorded objectively since the brunt of male–female power distance, and sexual harassment that are reported on media are faced by them. The survey findings when corroborated with the FGD and interview findings maybe generalizable.

In-depth Interviews and the Rationale for Utilizing In-Depth Interviews

In choosing the in-depth interview participants, convenient sampling technique was again chosen as the method. In order to explore the

theme of the research and maintain consistency the interviews were conducted with individuals who are users of public transport, or public transport crew. The six respondents were divided in equal number between men and women. The following table captures their demographic and professional features:

Table 2: Demographic Distribution of In-Depth Interviewees

	Total Number of Interviewees	6
Gender	Male	Female
Age Group	34-42	22-33
Profession	Student (1) Public Transport Crew (2)	Student (2) NGO Employee (1)

The two constituencies that were explored, namely ‘students’ and ‘public transport crew’, are important constituencies for the theme of the research because the experiencing or witnessing of the sex crime or their perpetrators are mostly encountered first hand by the members of these two constituencies. The smaller number of sample size was owing to cost considerations, and its limitations was assumed to be offset by FGDs, and the survey that was to be conducted. The findings from in-depth interviews could also confirm in a corroborative way the results obtained through other methods. The men who operated the public transports as crew often felt vulnerable to encounter questions regarding sexual harassments as some considered that their profession was being implicated for complicity in the act. Therefore, eliciting honest and factual responses required the interviewer to utilize a comfortable and non-intimidating atmosphere, build trust, and help the participant go through a reflective process before sharing their experience and telling their stories (Elmir et al., p. 13, 2011). The female and male students who had participated as in-depth interviewees also required the same.

Describing or discussing one’s evaluations of the male-female power distance or sex education issues in the light of one’s experience of harassment can be quite challenging as disclosure of topics and issues that are painful maybe necessary. The in-depth interview had been that tool which would make the process of disclosure easy, and hence, was judiciously applied.

Informed Consent of Interviewees, Survey and FGD Participants

Upon setting out to conduct this qualitative research, and quantitative survey it was understood that the survey participants, in-depth interviewees,

and FGD participants would be the primary unit of research for this endeavor, and hence the onus was upon the researcher to ensure that in no way the rights of these individuals in terms of their privacy, and the way the information or opinions they disclose would be utilized, are violated. In order to establish an ethical procedure for conducting the research 'Informed Consent' of both the interviewees (interviewed for key informant interviews), survey respondents, and FGD participants were taken. In an established definition of Informed Consent, it is stated that without any deception the interviewees are to be informed about the purpose and procedures of the research, and the interviewer ought to ensure that interviewees or research participants have gained a holistic sense on the research before giving their consent to be interviewed or participate in the study (Holloway, 1997). In tandem with the meaning of Informed Consent, and in line with a tried and tested research protocol developed by Thomas Groenewald, an informed consent agreement was developed for the consideration and comprehension of all the participants from whom data had been collected. Before gaining informed consent verbally and in writing the interviewees and FGD participants were told the following:

1. That by giving interviews they are participating in a research on sexual misconduct on public transportation
2. The broad objectives of the research (without stating the central research question or opinions that may make them biased)
3. The research procedure
4. The risk and benefits of such research
5. The voluntary nature of research participation, and their rights not to participate.
6. The fact that it was an academic research and how their identity would be kept confidential and protected.
7. That the research findings will not be used for any commercial or explicit political ends (Groenewald, 2004).

A printed paper both in English and Bengali language delineated the above to the participants, and the participants were requested to sign a dotted line upon comprehending the Informed Consent agreement. This signature was considered to be a proof of consent. In case of this study the researcher had to interview poorly literate or illiterate individuals, and in those situations the contents of the agreement were read out to the prospective research participants, explained thoroughly in local (Bengali) language when needed, and only then the participants were asked whether they have consent in participating in the study or not). In the case of qualitative in-depth interviews, quantitative survey, and all Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that were held, a signed informed consent form was obtained from all the participants. The informed consent document explicitly explained the purpose of the research, the academic nature of the involvement, the protection of the privacy of the respondents, and the utilization of the information for strict academic purposes. In case of respondents who did not have

the literacy to read the informed consent form, the clauses of the forms were read out and explained before their consent was gained, and signature was collected.

Male-Female Power Distance in Bangladesh

Gert Hofstede and Geert Jan Hofstede's seminal book *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* maintains that individuals in societies carry a pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that they have learned since they were born, and this is what they define as the software of the mind. According to them "Culture consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of a group or category of people from others (Hofstede&Hofstede, 2010, p. 3)." The first dimension of Hofstedes' cultural dimension is Power Distance. Power distance is a concept that deals with the issues of unequal power that exists in members of a certain society and how that plays a part in the way they behave and relate to each other. Hofstede says, "Power distance can be defined as the extent to which the lesspowerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Institutions are the basic elements of society, such as the family, the school, and the community; organizations are the places where people work (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010, p. 62)." The concept of Power Distance had been studied from various angles, and according to Oyserman, power distance is not only about acceptance of the individuals or a particular group in society of the existence and inequality in power, wealth, prestige and status.

It is also about individualism. Oyserman says "Individualism highlights human differences, including awareness of unequal distribution of valued characteristics; power distance highlights the extent to which these individual differences are related directly to other inequalities in power, wealth, or prestige, and the extent to which these inequalities are seen as legitimate or illegitimate (Oyserman, 2006, p. 353). Thus to what extent the inequalities of power and power distance are seen as valid or legitimate is also an issue that deserves exploration when it comes to enquiries on Power Distance. The study of power dynamics and the application of the concept of power distance have been applied in organizations, communities and specific professional settings. For instance, in a recent study in Australia the issue of Power Distance seemed to explain the power dynamics and quality of relationship that prevailed in between general practitioners and community pharmacists in various Australian communities (Rieck, 2014, p.445). Wherever there is apparent power disparity, the relationship between two entities can often be described meaningfully in terms of Power Distance.

According to Hofstede and Hofstede, power is seen as a basic fact in certain societies that precedes the choice between good and evil. The legitimacy of the power or the source of power often takes a back seat and seems irrelevant. Might prevails over right, and there is an unwritten and unspoken consensus that inequality is an order in this

world which is quite natural, and everyone has his or her place. This accepted order satisfies people's need for dependence, and it accords a sense of security to those who are powerful, and those who are not. These societies try to achieve consistencies in people's positions with regard to power, wealth and status. A desire for consistency in the status of people in various spheres or echelons of society is typical of large power distance cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010, p. 77). Bangladesh scores high (80) on the Power Distance Index (PDI) constructed by Hofstede and Hofstede for 76 countries and is ranked 12 amongst the 76 countries that constitutes the list (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010, p. 57).

When the gender dimension is added from Hofstede and Hofstede framework we find that Bangladesh is also somewhat high on the Masculinity Index constructed by Hofstede and Hofstede for the 76 countries. Bangladesh scores 55 and is ranked 29th amongst the 76 countries: confirming that it is a rather masculine country (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010, p.142). Since Bangladesh also gains high score as a

nation where collectivism prevails over individualism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010, p.103), it becomes obvious here that Power Distance creates conditions that state that in such a society the gender norms will be: men make better leaders; women should be chaste, but men don't need to be etc. (Hofstede&Hofstede, 2010, p.146).

If we examine the incidents of violence against women in the public transport system, and the consistent picture of harassment that emerges from the newspaper reports we can link them to some of the ideas or perspectives that Hofstede and Hofstede reveal through their Power Distance and Masculinity Dimension construct that prevails vis a vis in High Power Distance Cultures. Upon modifying the table presented by Hofstede and Hofstede in their "Key Differences Between Small- and Large-Power-Distance Societies we could come up with certain sets of questions that helped us probe the topic of Power Distance meaningfully in tandem with violence against women in the public transport system of Bangladesh. The perspective is presented here:

Table 3

Small Power Distance and Large Power Distance Vis-a-Vis Implications for Bangladeshi Male-Female Power Distance

Small Power Distance	Large Power Distance	Issues/Questions Spun off for Bangladeshi Male-Female Power Distance
<p>The use of power should be legitimate and follow criteria of good and evil. Skills, wealth, power, and status need not go together. Mostly wealthier countries with a large middle class. All should have equal rights. Power is based on formal position, expertise, and ability to give rewards. The way to change a political system is by changing the rules (evolution). There is more dialogue and less violence in domestic politics. There are small income differentials in society, further reduced by the tax system. Scandals end political careers of those involved.</p>	<p>Might prevails over right: whoever holds the power is right and good. Skills, wealth, power, and status should go together. Mostly poorer countries with a small middle class. The powerful should have privileges. Power is based on tradition or family, charisma, and the ability to use force. There are large income differentials in society, further increased by the tax system. Scandals involving power holders are usually covered up.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do men have more power – physical and political- that enables them to perpetrate violence and emerge with impunity? 2. Wealthy, powerful or educated men are not subject to violence and may perpetrate harassment or violence against the poor or weak. 3. The men have an unwritten privilege over women. 4. Our family and society gives power and privilege to men to escape consequences of sex crimes perpetrated by them. 5. Poor and socially less privileged women are subject to sex crimes on public transports, and their poor income precludes them to use safer modes of transport. 6. Police, the society, religious and legal system actively help the perpetrators to cover up their crimes.

Note: The content for the comparison between Small Power Distance and Large Power Distance Societies from *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2010).

Hofstede and Hofstede's ideas also give us the occasion to explore the Key Differences Between Feminine and Masculine Societies as depicted by

them and find the implications of their ideas for the Bangladeshi society:

Table 4

Key Differences between Feminine and Masculine Societies (in terms of Gender and Sex) Vis a Vis Male Female Power Distance in Bangladesh

Feminine	Masculine	Issues/Questions Spun off for Bangladeshi Male-Female Power Distance
Being responsible, decisive, ambitious, caring, and gentle is for women and men alike. Girls don't cheer for boys. Women's liberation means that men and women take equal shares both at home and at work. Single standard: both sexes are subjects. Same norms for showing male or female nudity Explicit discussion of sex, less implicit symbolism Sex is a way for two persons to relate. Sexual harassment is a minor issue.	Being responsible, decisive, and ambitious is for men; being caring and gentle is for women. Women's ambition is channeled toward men's success. Women's liberation means that women are admitted to positions so far occupied by men. Double standards: men are subjects, women objects. Stronger taboo on showing male than female nudity Taboo on explicit discussion of sex, but implicit erotic symbolism Performance for a man can be exploitation for a woman. Sexual harassment is a big issue.	Women who use public transport are not gentle and caring. Women should stay home and help men do their work outside. Women driving a car, or a bus is a novel and new phenomenon. Female bodies are there for enjoyment and ogling. Men look at women in most cases sexually, and with the eyes of desire. It is impolite to discuss sex; but sexual looks or gestures are accepted and ok. Virility of men are exhibited when a sex crime is perpetrated. Sexual abuse victims have fallen, and are unclear.

Note: The content for The comparison between Small Power Distance and Large Power Distance Societies from *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2010).

The issues/questions raised around Hofstede's Power Distance and Feminine Masculine society dimensions were utilized in the survey, the in-depth interview questions and FGDs to explore the issue of Power Distance as it influences aggressive and criminal sexual behavior of male users of public transport in Bangladesh. Masculine societies like Japan where Power Distance between male and female are quite apparent also experience harassment in public transport like groping, petting, and verbal abuse (Peronne, 2018, p.514). Therefore, extant literature, news reportage from Bangladesh and similar cultural context attest that Hofstede's cultural dimensions pertaining to Power Distance and Masculinity maybe invoked to shed new light on such phenomenon.

Sex Education

The drawbacks of not offering explicit sex education are manifold in Bangladesh: young people are acquainted in school or educational institutions only with the specific aspects of sex, the biology as in the depiction and nomenclature of reproductive organs, and how the act of sex is instrumental in procreation. The formal curricula, however, does not discuss the social or emotional side of sex or sexual relations. The issues pertaining to respect for the opposite gender, limitations on personal intimacy-good touch vs. bad touch, high risk sexual advances-are not broached at school, and hardly ever broached by family members. In the United States the issue of teaching young adults and students about sexual consent and respect has been widely debated. The focus had been invariably on sexually transmitted diseases and the benefits of abstinence. The assumption in the US and a few other developed countries have always been that the teenagers at the school are going to be sexually active anyway, and the protection from harm constitutes education about

the outcomes of unprotected sex (Barth, 2005). However the 'abstinence and protection only' sex education are being found by most states in the US as inadequate and there is a lot of pressure to include sexual ethics in the curriculum (Barth, 2005). The negative emotional effects of sexual abuse and sex without consent had been hitherto absent. As recently as in the latter part of 2018, eight states in the United States have mandates that some sort of sexual consent education be given to high school students over there. The focus, they say, should be on healthy sexual relationship, consent, empathy and what constitutes 'sexual violence'(Tatter, 2018). A 2017 survey in New England found that 65 percent of young-adult respondents wished they had talked about relationships at school (Tatter, 2017).

In Bangladesh sexual initiations happen through informal channels such as friends, elderly acquaintances and often in oblique or with derogatory references to the feminine gender. As mentioned in Hofstede and Hofstede, implicit erotic symbolism is quite pervasive in this culture (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2010, p.159). Vindicating Hofstede and Hofstede indeed women or their physical attributes are often indicated in pejorative terms or via abusive notions as a way of indicating men's superiority over women, particularly their bodies, and blatantly objectifying women. The issue of sex education becomes more problematic when it comes to underprivileged men, and men with no education or subpar education. Their understanding of sex or gender relations- equality, respect etc.- comes almost exclusively from religious teaching or families, in most cases from peers.

Owing to ill perceived notions about sexual intimacies, derogatory or raunchy ideas about sex and feminine encounters- it is this cohort- males in between 20 and 40, who are the key perpetrators of sexual offence and harassment in the public

transports of Bangladesh. A sex education program typically administered to underprivileged youths in the US aims to impart knowledge on basic information and ideas about sex, sexually transmitted diseases, and legal or medical consequences of improper and unsafe sexual behavior. A typical question set in such cases are the following:

1. "Any thing that make me to wait for having sex"
2. "How not having sex makes a relationship stronger"
3. "What should teens do besides abstain from sex to protect themselves"
4. "Why birth control methods do not work sometimes?"
5. "I would like to know how not to get a girl pregnant"
6. "How to use condoms I would like to know if when you have sex usingK, you can protect yourself from becoming pregnant"
7. "I would like to learn about how to be safe for the future." (Smith et al, 2011, p.280)

In Bangladesh such cases of sex education for the underprivileged and potential sex offenders are highly uncommon. But reality is such that a program like this could not only create awareness on the consequences of aggressive or predatory sexual behavior, but also sensitize participants on the needs and limitations of the feminine gender. Gender stereotyping is another issue that coalesces around lack of sex education or ill education regarding sex, and serves to further degrade the status of women in Bangladeshi society, especially to young male learners in school and outside schools. A recent study on textbooks taught in high schools of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia- all Muslim countries, confirmed that there was a pro-male bias in the school textbooks of these countries. The aggregate female share is 40.4% in textual and pictorial indicators combined. Female occupations are mostly traditional and less prestigious while the characters are predominantly introverted and passive in terms of personality traits. Women are also shown to be mostly involved in domestic and indoor activities while men have a higher presence in professional roles (Islam and Asadullah, 2018, p.1). This also lends credence to our earlier assertion on Power Distance between male and female and the masculinity that is pervasive in Bangladeshi society. Thus the socio-economic status of women in these countries, particularly Bangladesh, if presented in a favorable, and not traditional and pejorative light, would bolster the status of women, and help the male members of society appreciate the presence of women less as sexual objects and more as humans.

Findings from In-Depth Interviews and FGDs

The four major themes that emerged from the analysis are being presented below.

Perceived Power Differences Are Very High Amongst Women Who Use Public Transport

Women invariably maintained both during in-depth interviews and FGDs that the fear of embarrassment, pain, and the importance of saving face in front of other passengers were paramount in them, and hence they silently bore some of the

physical or verbal harassment while on a public transport. The statement made by an in-depth interview respondent was rather common:

I feel sorry for other women and not only about myself. I am particularly grief stricken when I see teenagers and college students being groped and touched and not being able to scream or make any scene to turn in the culprit. How can she? She has friends riding with her. And tomorrow her friend might share the story at school and make her a laughing stock. They may even give her a nickname to ridicule her. (F, 25 Years, IDI)¹

Women in public transports appear to believe that they are powerless to reverse the tide of ridicule or accusations levelled at them if they make their victimhood explicit. They also believed that men would go without any punishment when an act of unwanted sexual advance or harassment was perpetrated by them in this sphere.

They will not have any problem. Why? They will boast and declaim amongst their friends how they squeezed a breast and touched a woman while they were going to school. (F, 32 Years, IDI)

The poor and socially less privileged women had it worse. Women who were visibly poor owing to plainer dresses or makeup were typically targeted and harassed. When asked about her experience of daily commute via minibus across Dhaka, a readymade garments worker replied:

I have to go to work and earn a living before I can think of raising my voice and creating a scene inside the bus. Even if I did not care for my honor I would not have the time to react and argue with the man on the bus who had groped me from behind. (F, 22 Years, IDI).

The urgent nature of the work which they must attend makes readymade garment workers even more powerless.

There was also almost unanimous agreement from the FGD that men who were more affluent, powerful or in a better position in society could get away with such crimes easily. Regardless of the fact that the crime was committed on a public transport of public space, such men get away from this, and often enjoy the thrill. The following comment is noteworthy:

Some men enjoy such activity: teasing women on buses and assaulting them physically. I think such men are powerful or more affluent, and get a thrill out of such actions. They later boast about their exploits to their friends. (F, 32 Years, FGD)

Men Using the Public Transport System Do Not Feel Responsible or Want to Help the Victims

An overwhelming majority of male respondents to our questions were either indifferent or felt not responsible in any way for the sexual harassments or abuses. Typical response seemed to confirm the gendered masculine expectation that are ingrained:

Women who use public transport are tough! Such incidents may not often be avoided, after all men are men, and some of these young folks cannot

control themselves when it comes to close contacts with women. (M, 34 Years, IDI)

The bus crew interviewed responded in the following manner trying to sidetrack the issue of common petting and groping on public buses that are often witnessed by them:

Such incidents are wrongly described or attributed frequently, mainly because the buses are too crowded and men are often tightly pressed against women. There may not have been any intention to illicitly touch or harass female passengers. (M, 44 Years, IDI)

Both the bus crew and the male student interviewed apportioned blame on women by referring to the modern or casually dressed women users:

Some women are very provocatively dressed, and their gestures or ways of bearing themselves incite men to act in lewd ways! I think the women should be conservatively dressed, maybe wear a *Burkha*² to protect themselves. (M, 23 Years, IDI)

The pride and power of men are often exhibited by lurid gestures, and violence. They hardly think that they are committing a crime or acting in a wrong way! (F, 22 Years, FGD)

During the four FGD sessions, it came about that men should not allow women to move in the bus beyond the seating area for females, and if they do because the bus is crowded then any resulting harassments would be the women's fault.

The above somehow indicate a blatant apathy, and a lack understanding about the respect the females deserve as fellow passengers. The fact that they need to be looked on as fellow human beings and not women – just sexual objects- seem not to register.

Religious, Social and Law-enforcement Condones Public Transport Sex Offenders

Society leaders, religious views and the police were generally colluding to condone sex offences on public transports.

I do not trust that the police will support me or help me apprehend the culprit! They simply think a woman is equally responsible for the crime for she had provoked the animal in the man. (F, 33 Years, IDI)

Public transport users who are religious often crassly maintain that a woman should not use a public transport for it is crowded, and not conducive to the maintenance of dignity of a woman.

A woman should buy a taxi ride or a baby-taxi ride at least. If she cannot find a chaperon who will safely conduct her aboard a public transport she should not venture outside. (M, 44 Years, IDI)

Women are at times too immodestly dressed, and they provoke men by their attitudes and attires to accost them or make lewd gestures at them. Women

who must go outside to work should be religiously attired (or wear a *Burkha*) so that men are obliged to leave them alone. (W, 30 Years, FGD)

Some of the FGD participants voiced their concern that sometimes religion or social norms can empower and embolden the man. This can lead to a righteous stand in harassing women:

Religion increases the power and influence of men, and sometimes from a self-righteous stand they persecute woman who they deem to be forward and advanced. Such attitudes can actuate them to harass women on a bus. (M, 26 Years, FGD)

Obsolete and backward ideas pertaining to women's place in society, their education, and the profession that they may choose still exists. I think these old fashioned notions are the main hindrance to the journey towards equality. (F, 24, FGD)

The masculine, and quasi-religious ideas supporting that a woman's place is at home, and her ambitions ought to center around the needs and wants of a man are given voice through statements such as the above. The patriarchy that is entrenched in society has been discussed while discoursing on 'power distance', and from these comments it would seem that the power of patriarchy is very much at play in the background that condones sexual offence.

Pornography and YouTube Influences Behavior of Public Transport Culprits

Across all FGD sessions this issue resurfaced time and again: easy access to pornographic content, and raunchy YouTube videos through smartphones are exacerbating the problem of public transport offences against women. The readymade garment workers, students, and the bus crew who were present in these sessions agreed that many young men were obsessively indulging in consuming sexually explicit content from the internet, and that led them to behave in the manner they did on public buses:

Cheap smartphones allow young folks to watch pornography and see bad things on YouTube. (M, 40 Years, FGD)

Men are not responsible when they absorb these content; and such films make them mad. (F, 30, FGD)

While the advancement of technology cannot be stemmed, it remains to be seen whether policies regarding information and communication technology in the government can stop widespread consumption of pornography.

Sex Education's Positive Side is Accepted While Current State of Affairs are Deemed not so Inadequate

When it came to sex education curricula and the rolling out of programs that made young people more conscious about gender roles, respect and sex, both the FGD participants and In-depth interview respondents signaled their concerns in the following manner:

1. Sex education is confined to describing the scientific aspects of reproduction only.

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2. Informal sex education should be explored further, and ways should be found to use informal channels effectively to instruct the young.
3. Gender sensitivity and respect for women should be taught to the target groups of men who are susceptible to perpetrating sex crimes.

There was also widespread agreement about the source of sex education. A public transport crew, several female students agreed fully with the NGO worker who voiced her view in the following manner.

Sex education or training on how to respect and behave towards women should come from quarters which are respected: parents, teachers or religious leaders. Instructions given by people who are not looked up to or respected will not work. (F, 32, FGD)

They also maintained that YouTube and content available from internet, or certain TV programs make the young too much interested about sex, and induce them to do the act to find out more. One of the FGD participants concurred with a few others in deciding that the objectification of women in

Table 5: Question Items for Measuring “Power Distance and Reaction to Sexual Harassment Experience on Public Transport” and the Scores Received Against Each Item

#	Question	Average Score
1	In our country men are more outgoing than women, and enjoy more freedom outdoors.	6.25
2	Women are typically wary when it comes to using public transport compared to men.	5.90
3	Women’s ability to use public transport without hesitation is impaired by men who are indifferent to the special needs (i.e. more personal space) of women who use public transport.	5.61
4	‘Touching’ and ‘Groping’ are common experiences of women who use public transport in Dhaka.	6.22
5	Public transport sexual harassment perpetrators are condoned, and are not prosecuted.	6.01
6	Women of younger age are usually targeted on public transport by proponents of harassments (including transport workers).	6.03
7	Society’s unequal treatment of men and women contributes to the harassments on public transport.	6.06
8	Men are usually disrespectful and contemptuous of women who use public transport.	5.10
9	Attitude towards women can be changed through training and awareness campaigns.	4.92
10	Sex education should include the psychological aspects of sexual behavior especially, psycho-social consequences of unwanted sexual advances.	5.94
11	Sex education is adequate in school and colleges.	4.43
12	Legal consequences of sexual harassments are not broadcasted by media, and there is not enough awareness!	5.57
13	Incidences of sexual harassments on public transport are likely to reduce in future.	4.13
14	Effects of harassments will lead the government to install laws and newer amenities that mitigate the problem.	4.44
15	Male-female power distance will continue to increase in future owing to increase of more conservative attitudes towards women.	4.49

Whether the survey conducted on female students of Brac University was reliable or not was determined by Cornbach’s Alpha (Tavakol, 2015). The Cornbach’s Alpha test is particularly useful in finding out surveys that are conducted by means of a Likert Scale or questions that might elicit more than one answer (Tavakol, 2015). The high reliability would mean that the test measures well what it should. In case of the above, the Cornbach’s Alpha was, $\alpha = 0.71$. If the result of Cornbach’s Alpha is $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$,

Bangladeshi society would be even more intensified if proper sex education and gender education were not formally rolled out in schools and institutions.

Both from the in-depth interview and the FGD sessions, the transport crews’ views on training on sex education and gender sensitization revealed that such initiatives would be better received, and accepted if they were managed and disseminated by respective labor unions and labor organizations instead of government agencies like the Police or the Ministry of Social Services and Welfare:

We think the government should venture to unroll these (gender sensitization) training and education programs through the transport labor unions to which we belong, not by any of their own agents. (M, 44 Years, FGD)

Findings from the Survey

79 female students were surveyed through the survey instrument. The questionnaire had 15 questions that recorded responses through a 7 point Likert Scale. The average scores gained from each question or item are depicted in the table that follows:

which is the case in this case, then it is assumed that it is acceptable (Takavol, 2015). Therefore the instrument reliably measures Power Distance and Reaction to Sexual Harassment Experience.

The questionnaire items were organized in a manner so that the respondents could see a logical flow of the ideas when they would be responding to the questionnaire. The key themes of the research were incorporated in the questions in the following manner:

Table 6: Analysis of Received Scores Across Research Themes in Questionnaire

Theme	Pertinent Questions & corresponding total average score received	Number of Questions	Summation of Total Average Score	Ultimate Score= Summation of Total Average Score/Number of Questions
Male-Female Power Distance	Q#1=6.25, Q#2=5.90, Q#3=5.61, Q#7=6.06, Q#8=5.10 Q#15=4.49	6	33.41	5.56
Sexual Harassment Experience	Q#4=6.22 Q#5= 6.01 Q#6=6.03 Q#12=5.57 Q#13=4.13 Q#14=4.44	6	32.4	5.40
Sex Education	Q#9= 4.92 Q#10=5.94 Q#11=4.43	3	15.29	5.09

Upon analyzing Table 6 we can see that the ultimate score received on the theme titled Male-Female Power Distance is 5.56. This falls between 'agree' and 'strongly agree' on the Likert scale of the questionnaire suggesting that respondents overwhelmingly agree that the male-female power distance in Bangladesh is a real issue that exists.

The questionnaire had questions couched against the backdrop of public transport usage, and the consciousness of male-female power distance contributing to women's precariousness. When it comes to using public transport in Bangladesh it is obvious across the scores received. Respondents despite their resonant agreement as to the persistence of the male-female power distance in the society seem to think that the distance is likely to reduce in future. The question asking directly whether the distance would increase (Q # 15) received a score of 4.49 which is 'neither agree, nor disagree' skewed a little toward 'disagree'. This means that respondents are not pessimistic. This indifference could be read as cautiousness about the likelihood of reduction in the male-female power distance on the ground in the future.

The survey confirms that sexual harassment is a fact of life for women who use public transport in the city of Dhaka, and the theme received an agree score: 5.40 which borders along "strongly agree". Q#4 was an obvious question related to the bad experience they have had on public transport, and it received an average score of 6.22- a very high 'strongly agree' score.

Sex education received an ultimate score of 5.09, which means although the respondents agree that training and sex education can make a difference, their faith in transformation potential of sex education is not great. The respondents faintly agree that sex education and training (Q#9) may change attitudes towards women. This assessment maybe due to the scientific and informative nature of sexual education that are imparted in Bangladeshi schools and colleges. This assessment is confirmed through FGDs and in-depth interviews where it was discussed that

sex education- formal or informal- are devoid of gender awareness or respect for women. The respondents also do not think that sex education is inadequate at school, but also they do not think it is adequate. This question (Q#11) received an "indifferent" score of 4.43. There is room for improvement in sex education, maybe its qualitative dimension has to be changed, but as it stands there is not much that needs to be changed, according to the respondents. Q#10 received a score of 5.94 which is a "strongly agree" verdict. The FGDs also revealed that gender relations aspects, psychological and social aspects of male-female relations must be discussed and incorporated into training or education programs in order for the situation to improve.

Policy Implications

There are long term and short term policies of the government that can be benefitted from the findings of the research. The long term policies are related to the question of male-female power distance that exists in society. The inclusion of more women in the workforce, especially in the non-traditional sector such as public transportation and law-enforcement is likely to reduce power distance. Female bus drivers, and taxi-cab operators, for instance, will not only reduce perceived power distance, but also create a safer and relatively egalitarian environment in which urban dwellers, especially women in cities like Dhaka, access various services (including public transport) in the city. The government has already introduced female only buses, and a number of NGOs have introduced apps that can alert law enforcement if any female public transport user is attacked while commuting ("Make Transportation Women-Friendly", 2018). But these measures are reactive, and do not create an atmosphere where women can find confidence to roam about in public spaces. The findings both from the FGDs and surveys conducted reveals to us the fact that women have no confidence on law enforcement forces to mitigate harassment in a timely and adequate manner. The government may think of deploying female transport police or simply more female law enforcement to mitigate the issues.

Such policies are yet to be seen. Therefore, new policies can be formulated by the government to include women in the transportation sector and law enforcement.

The gender sensitization of the people can be approached by recruiting religious leaders, and local politicians, and this is likely to gradually change traditional perceptions about women. When it comes to sex education- both formal and informal- it had also been suggested that the source from which education is received must be trusted by the recipients. To this effect, policies can be implemented which give responsibility to instruct and educate gender sensitivity to religious leaders, labor union leaders and other social leaders in various echelons of the society. Sex education, both informal and formal, should include gender issues, and sexual norms. The government can introduce policies that ensure inclusion of these topics in the school curricula. Sectors like the public transport sector ought to be instructed on gender sensitivity, customer service and sexual norms. The study revealed that public transport labor are more obedient to their labor leaders, and the government can mobilize the labor leaders, and invest in nationwide awareness campaigns to significantly eradicate sex crimes and harassments on public transports.

Finally, the issue of pornographic content and easy access to such content have been implicated for the rise in sexual violence and harassments on public transports. The Bangladesh Government has already blocked access to all pornographic websites to stem the sex crimes that are increasing (Nabi, 2018). The results also implicate YouTube videos. The government can do further by monitoring YouTube videos of a lewd nature originating in Bangladesh.

The government can address the issues that are discussed in this paper by rolling out policies that include more women in non-traditional sectors and law enforcement, that entrusts religious and labor union leaders to impart positive sex education, and regulate lewd YouTube content that are originating from Bangladesh.

Limitations

The research had to be carried out within limited budget and time constraints. The number of FGDs carried out could have been more, and a greater variety of participants constituting a larger group could have been assembled for each session. The results thus obtained could have been more generalizable and valid. The convenience sampling technique, while amenable and useful for carrying out a mixed method research where both qualitative and quantitative techniques have been used, has its limitations. The sample thus obtained is not entirely representative of the population although the most significant part of the population (with respect to the theme of the research) was endeavored to be represented. The sample size for survey was just adequate at 79, and a larger sample size would have enabled the research to achieve a better confidence level. Future research should be conducted with a

larger sample size, larger budget, and more time so that more generalizable and reliable conclusions can be arrived at.

Conclusion

From the findings it is safe to assert that Power Distance emerged as a key phenomenon that negatively affected male-female interactions and common usage of public transport systems. If public transport can be taken as a surrogate of the common public utilities, spaces and facilities, that in a democratic society all citizens deserve to have access to and use, then Power Distance between male and female in a masculine and collective society like Bangladesh, can pose as a significant impediment. It is giving form to unabated sexual aggression, double standards in society and government, and making way for apathy to entrench when it comes to gender understanding and relations. Gender studies, sensitization and sex education are ways to build bridges, promote meaningful and scientific understanding and mitigate differences that are giving rise to unwarranted sexual behavior such as harassment and violence against women on the public transports of Bangladesh. The young adults and teenage students in schools of Bangladesh should also be taught the ethical sides of sex. What constitutes consent and amounts to sexual violence must be instructed. The fact remains that sexual misconduct goes beyond the act of unlawful sex or sex without consent- the act itself, and does encompass eve teasing, verbal abuse, dirty looks etc. Of all the sexual transgressions, groping, foul language, lewd gestures- acts that are common in Bangladesh, especially in public places and public transport, must be codified and incorporated in sexual ethics education.

In order to create a just, safe and democratic society, it is of paramount importance that the power distance and overt masculinity that exist today are mitigated and toned down.

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Endnotes

1. Data Label: F- Female, M- Male, IDI- In-depth Interviewee; FGD: FGD Participant.
2. Burkha: A conservative Islamic attire (usually black) that covers women from head to toe.