

## Written submission from Dr Jackie Gray (SPP0103)

In considering the research evidence regarding the sexual harassment of women and girls on public transport (hereafter referred to as SHPT) the following are the key points to arise:

*Women's experiences – what happens, what are the consequences, how are they targeted?*

- All women and girls can be targeted, but women in the 18-24 age bracket seem to experience SHPT at a somewhat higher rate (around one third).
- Behaviours vary, including being stared at, propositioned, followed, pictured, rubbed against, touched, or raped.
- The context of public transport can facilitate these crimes (e.g. crowded spaces or isolation).
- Women and girls can experience a range of different negative consequences such as: mental health problems; reduced self-esteem; perceptions of vulnerability; being angry, disgusted, upset, anxious, humiliated; experiencing sleep disturbance etc.
- Of particular concern is that the risk of SHPT can cause women and girls (whether or not they have been victimised) to be fearful of travelling, and in some cases this can lead to them changing or constraining their travel behaviour. For example only travelling at certain times, not travelling alone, being aware of where they sit or stand and trying to place barriers between them and other travellers. Where such limits on behaviour are not available, women and girls may have to use public transport whilst being fearful of it.
- There is currently no clear research evidence regarding the decision making of offenders and how they choose targets. It is likely that for some offenders it is entirely opportunistic whereas others may look for a particular type of victim. A PhD currently being undertaken at Middlesex University is looking at this, but as yet the analysis is still being conducted.

*Who has responsibility for women's safety on public transport?*

- Government – Through legislation and concern can set the agenda and require professional bodies to take action to increase safety.
- Professional - Transport operators, transport police, transport authorities. These organisations can provide a range of safety related measures such as safe environments (e.g. lighting, design of stations/stops and the surrounding areas etc), infrastructure such as CCTV and emergency call points, visible staff presence, plain-clothed staff).
- Public – There should be development towards a shared public responsibility to keep all transport users safe. See below.

*What do we know about how to prevent sexual harassment on public transport? Is there evidence regarding what does or does not work?*

The main types of initiatives that have been implemented worldwide are:

- Formal surveillance (visible and under cover)
- Technological – e.g. CCTV
- Natural surveillance through environmental design, lighting, ensuring sightlines are good, keeping external areas clear.
- Advertising to increase rates of reporting, raise awareness of issues and to challenge attitudes.
- Grassroots action – community led campaigns, demonstrations to raise awareness.
- New technologies – apps for reporting, tracking, sharing experiences. Can facilitate reporting, and allow for a clearer understanding of where SHPT is occurring.
- Women only carriages – these tend to be in countries where women are less prevalent in the public space/ have a higher level of gender inequality.

What works:

- There is no fully robust evaluation of prevention measures on which to base this. A Randomized Control Trial type evaluation would be necessary to provide clearer evidence.
- The evidence that exists is based upon: pre and post intervention assessments of reporting, arrest, conviction and suchlike; surveys and interviews with female users of public transport; surveys and interviews with representatives from the relevant professional bodies; experimental, questionnaire based or interview based academic research.
- The evidence regarding what works in preventing SHPT therefore has to be pieced together from multiple sources.
- There is evidence from various transit authorities that their interventions have led to greater reporting and arrest. Unknown whether there is any impact on conviction.
- Women and girls report feeling safer when there is visible staff and/or police presence.
- Transport professionals give positive ratings of CCTV. Women and girls less confident in it, as they do not know if it is staffed in real-time – so may not be a source of help in case of an assault.
- Advertising posters have had some positive evaluations, e.g. Massachusetts Bay transit Authority found increased reporting arrests and higher clear-up rates.

*How useful are current policy solutions?*

- The most effective interventions include a combination of the approaches identified above – for example Report It To Stop It, and these schemes used by NYPD and in Vancouver.
- It is not possible to identify the unique contributions of the individual elements to the overall effect, but it is likely that it is the combination of approaches that makes it harder for potential offenders to offend, gives victims the means and confidence to report, and moves towards a culture of intolerance towards SHPT.
- An important consideration in interventions, and the design of the materials that contribute to them, is to avoid either explicitly or implicitly blaming victims for their harassment.

*What else is needed?*

The priorities in this area are:

- Encouraging bystander intervention. Police and staff cannot be everywhere, all the time. Other travellers are therefore another potential source of protection and support to those experiencing SHPT. Research into how to encourage safe intervention in this context is needed, but it is likely that awareness campaigns would be a reasonable starting point (following the type of model seen with social issues such as wearing seatbelts and drink-driving).
- Rigorous evaluation of interventions, and the elements within them.
- More research into the decision making of SHPT offenders, looking at their reasons for the choice of target, and the various other decisions and behaviours that they perform in the commission of SHPT. This will help to refine prevention efforts.

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