

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S MOBILITY IN PUNJAB

POLICY BRIEF

PUNJAB COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Introduction

Women's mobility outside the home in Pakistan is restricted by social norms and safety concerns. In particular, social norms against women coming into close contact with unrelated men and the discomfort, social stigma, and fear of harassment when they do so, limits women's movement and their use of public transport. This constrains their choices to participate in the labor force, continue their education, or engage in other independent activities. This challenge is particularly important for women of a marginalized social status who are less able to afford private transport.

Various transport interventions in Pakistan have attempted to address this issue, primarily by introducing 'women's-only' or 'women-friendly' transport services. However, there have been limited efforts to develop transport policies that holistically address women's transport needs. This brief lays out the challenges and policy options for the government through an analysis of existing literature, primary and secondary survey data, focus group discussions, key expert interviews, and the authors' experience piloting transport services for women in Lahore at the Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP).

The Issue

There are striking differences between men and women's access to and experience of public transport in Pakistan.

While there are variations in the degree to which women are mobile, depending on their age, marital status, class, ethnicity, urban/rural surrounding, gender continues to play a critical role in shaping mobility.

Key Messages

- ▶ Women's mobility outside the home in Pakistan is restricted by social norms, inadequate transport infrastructure, and safety concerns.
- ▶ Transport constraints restrict women's lives substantially and have direct implications on women's labor force participation, educational attainment, and ability to engage in independent activities.
- ▶ Many initiatives to improve women's mobility have been narrow in scope and focused on women's-only services.
- ▶ Carefully designed, feasible transport interventions can improve women's ability to travel safely. Incorporate gender in transport planning.
- ▶ Expanding the public transport network with high-quality mixed-gender services, and taking women's needs into account in planning is needed.
- ▶ Fix and publicize a schedule for all public transport services. Train drivers, conductors, transport staff on gender sensitivity and sexual harassment.
- ▶ Work with existing operators in peri-urban and rural areas to provide a reliable, low frequency public transport service on a well-publicized timetable.

Although women travel less frequently, as a proportion of non-walking trips, they are more likely than men to travel on public transport. When traveling beyond walking distance, women in Lahore, for example, are almost 30% more likely than men to use public transport such as buses or wagons.¹

This is in part because other options, such as riding independently on a motorbike or bicycle (common transport modes for men), are taboo for women: Men are 70% more likely than women to travel in these private transport modes.²

But travel on public transport presents significant challenges for women because of concerns about safety, harassment and social stigma. Most males say they strongly discourage their female family members from riding some modes of transport, such as wagons (Figure 1).

In addition, many women do not feel safe on any available transport mode, especially at night (Figure 2).

This is likely part of the reason why women who do not have a choice of private transport choose if possible, to ride on alternative modes such as rickshaws or qingqis (motorcycle rickshaws). In Lahore, women are 150% more likely to ride on these modes than men.³ However, safety and permission are a concern for a significant number of women even on these modes.

Women experience fear of harassment or crime while walking to bus or wagon stops, while waiting at stops and while travelling on vehicles.⁴

In order to access public transport, women have to first consider distance to the nearest stop, time of the day, and the degree of exposure to male strangers. Thirty-eight percent of respondents in a recent CERP survey of 50,000 households in Lahore said that they feel it is “very unsafe” for women to walk in their neighborhood. Women report that men stare, pass comments, and follow women to their destination, or physically touch women while passing by.⁵

This creates a general atmosphere of fear and stress. Many prefer walking with a male member of their household and

- ▶ Ensure women’s safety between the vehicle and their destination through sidewalks, street lighting, improved bus stops, public toilets, and police attention close to stops
- ▶ Conduct evaluations and cost and social benefits analysis of existing initiatives of women’s safety and mobility.

FIG 1: MALE OPINION ON FEMALE FAMILY MEMBERS TRAVEL

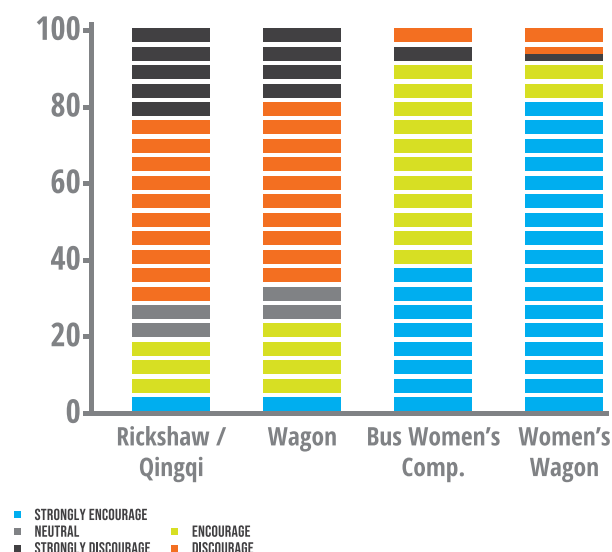
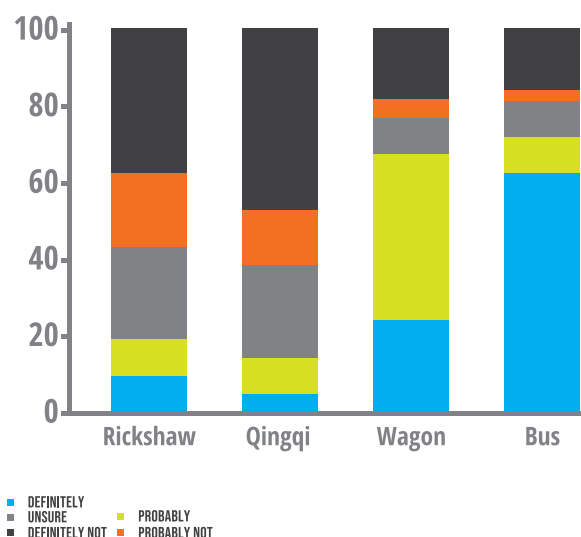


FIG 2: FEMALE OPINION ON SAFETY AT NIGHT



waiting with him at the stop. Sometimes those who cannot do so restrict their travel to a minimum, or take any other form of transport that is readily available without waiting.⁶ Delays and uncertainty regarding arrival times further exacerbate the problem.⁷

Although women have varying experiences travelling on public transport, with some traveling without any problems, many report encountering harassment from male conductors, ticket checkers, drivers and passengers.⁸ Occasionally, male conductors and ticket checkers touch female passengers unnecessarily when issuing or checking tickets. At other times, conductors behave rudely with passengers or may harass them.⁹ Most commonly, women highlight the problem of harassment by male passengers, who stare relentlessly and pass on their phone numbers, whistle or make comments to female passengers, particularly female students.¹⁰ Some women actively reprimand any misbehavior they encounter, but many stay silent and endure harassment or try to avoid it by changing their travel patterns.

Public transport vehicles routinely travel highly crowded and sometimes above their legal limit of passengers. Because of social taboos on close contact between the sexes, this creates discomfort even without harassment. However, crowding also exacerbates the problem of harassment, as it is easier for perpetrators to remain anonymous. Crowding is particularly pronounced on wagons – Low Occupancy Vehicles (LOVs), as they only have two front seats reserved for women, and women routinely experience discomfort and harassment while travelling on them. Men – who often play a critical role in determining whether and how female family members may travel – typically disapprove of women family members travelling on such vehicles.

Women living in peri-urban and rural areas face even greater challenges due to the limited availability of informal or formal public transport.

The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women's (PCSW) 2018 *Economic and Social Wellbeing Survey* (ESW) shows that over half (52%) of total surveyed women across Punjab do not have access to public transport, with lower accessibility in rural areas (38%) as compared to urban areas (64%). Even in the peri-urban areas immediately around large cities, where jobs, higher education and public services are within a short distance, women's ability to physically access these opportunities is limited by overcrowded conditions and unpredictable schedules.¹¹ In some areas, wait times for public transport range from one to two hours.¹² In rural areas, researchers show that women's mobility is limited to the spaces occupied by their *biraderis*, and is constrained by social norms, safety concerns, and poor transport infrastructure. PCSW survey finds that among the 5% women, who have never used public transport, 17% cite the distance and the non-suitability as the main reasons for not accessing public transport. While women are relatively mobile within their villages (or '*biraderi boundaries*'), mobility outside the village remains limited.^{13 14}

Surprisingly, the PCSW survey finds high satisfaction rates among the users of public transport services. Among the 48% women who have access to public transport, 89% women are satisfied with the facilities offered, that indicates a high percentage of women being content with the public transport.

Consequences

Difficulties with transport can restrict women's ability to carry out even the most basic tasks, such as going to the market, visiting the doctor or their children's schools.

These challenges cause stress and discomfort for all kinds of women when they have to travel: female students, working women, and housewives. Consequently, many women avoid using public transport, particularly on crowded modes such as wagons.¹⁵

Some switch to higher cost modes such as rickshaws and qingchis. Others adjust their travel timings and routes – but female students and working women often have no choice but to travel during peak hours. Some married women who would like to visit their own relatives more often cannot do so because they have to wait until a husband or in-law can accompany them.

Transport constraints can negatively affect women's lives and have direct implications on women's labor force participation and educational attainment.

In Punjab, the PCSW's 2018 ESW survey shows that a high 63% of surveyed 15-24 year old girls were not enrolled in school/never attended school. For 22.3% of these 15-24 year olds, distance/transport was cited as one of the main barriers to education. This was more pronounced in rural areas (28.2%) as compared to urban areas (10.3%). In rural Punjab and Sindh, Jacoby and Mansuri (2011) also show that primary school enrollment significantly decreases when girls have to cross hamlet boundaries to attend school – an effect not observed for boys.

Further, limited mobility and perceptions of safety influence women's participation in the labour force. Analysis of the Labour Skills Survey (2013) by the World Bank suggests that women who travel alone to local markets and feel safe walking outside their neighborhoods are more likely to participate in the labour force than those who cannot do so.¹⁶

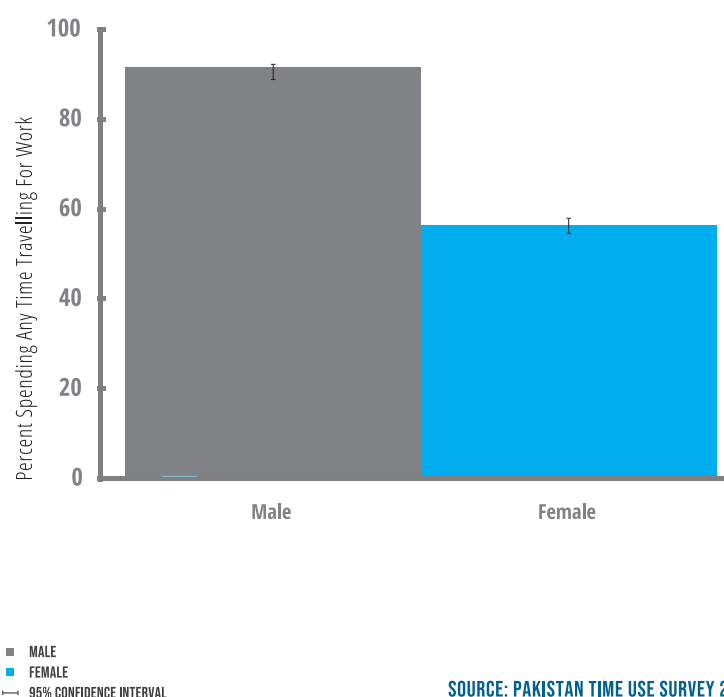
Evidence suggests that women who want or need to work often restrict their search only to employers that are very close to home, provide transport services, or in locations which are convenient for a male family member to accompany them to and from work (figure 3).

This means they have to give up better job opportunities that do not provide transport – or they may not find a job at all.^{17 18} Thirty-four percent of 15-64 aged female respondents in the 2018 PCSW survey cited transport as a barrier to work.

Lack of women's participation in trainings also adversely impacts their engagement in the formal sector. Employers find that female employees lack the skills appropriate for employment opportunities in the formal sector and proper training can help women learn valuable life skills and expand their capabilities. However, constraints to mobility hinder women from attending trainings. PCSW survey finds that 98% of women interviewed had never attended trainings and out of these 28,422 women, 7% reported lack of transport as a barrier to attending trainings.

FIG 3: TIME SPENT COMMUTING TO WORK

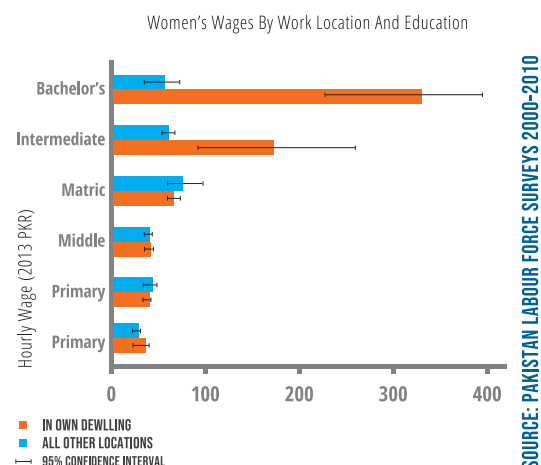
ANY TIME SPENT COMMUTING, CONDITIONAL ON EMPLOYMENT



SOURCE: PAKISTAN TIME USE SURVEY 2007

While home-based work is a good option for some women, it limits the remuneration that women can obtain and benefit from, particularly at higher levels of education (figure 4). This severely restricts scope for economic and professional growth.

FIG 4: WOMEN'S WAGES BY LOCATION & EMPLOYMENT



The need for rigorous evaluation of initiatives to improve mobility

In recent years, various transport interventions in Pakistan have attempted to facilitate women's mobility by creating safe physical spaces for women to travel (Pink Bus, Zong Tabeer Project), or changing norms around women's presence in public spaces (Women on Wheels, Pink Rickshaw).¹⁹ Yet the social and economic impact of such interventions has not been rigorously evaluated – in many cases these initiatives have not even been documented. While a number of initiatives have been discontinued due to financial reasons and others have been recently launched, the economic and social benefits to women have rarely been documented or studied systematically. To help determine whether to expand funding for such initiatives, or to change their design, implementers could work with researchers to study their effectiveness and quantify their economic and social benefits. Such evaluations should include pre- and post-data for the participants and a similar comparison group.

For example, the Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF) worked with researchers at Harvard and the Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) to study constraints to participation in skills training programs.

The researchers found that the most effective way to increase women's participation was by addressing their mobility constraint: group transport increased attendance substantially more than offering a stipend to participants.²⁰

To quantify the costs and benefits of transport on women's mobility and labour force participation in an urban context, researchers at CERP and Duke are conducting a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) in the Lahore metropolitan area. As part of this intervention, it will provide door-to-door pick and drop services from home to places of employment. These services will be compared across three groups of the sample. One set of routes will be offered women's-only pick and drop services, and another set of routes will be offered mixed-gender services. These will be compared with control areas where no new transport services will be offered.

In partnership with PCSW's initiative Job Asaan, the project will connect with a platform connecting women and employers to assess how much female jobseekers and firms that employ them benefit from transport services.

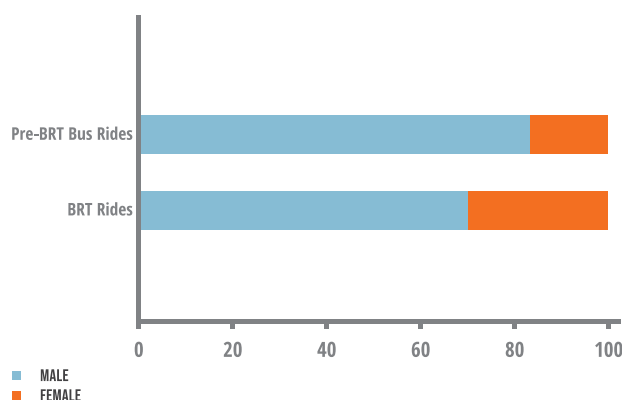
What can be done?

Immediate next steps

Continue expansion of public transport network, and fix and publicize a schedule for all services.

Provide high quality, integrated services with lower crowding, and work with operators to maintain consistent schedules. This will facilitate mobility, and reduce waiting times. In Lahore, Majid et al (2018) show that improved transport services, such as the Lahore Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) can encourage a greater percentage of women to use public transport (Figure 6).²¹

FIG 6: GENDER OF BRT RIDES AND PRE-BRT LARGE BUS RIDES IN SAME AREAS



Train drivers, conductors, transport staff on gender sensitivity and sexual harassment. The training should include the standards expected of them. Staff should be monitored and held accountable for meeting these expectations.

Work with existing operators in peri-urban areas to provide a reliable, low frequency transport service on a well-publicized timetable. These areas have limited public transport coverage, but informal operators provide some services for local residents.

Build sidewalks, improve street lighting and bus stops, construct public toilets, and provide police attention close to public transport routes and stops. Public transport alone is not enough. Women need to feel and be safe in public spaces, and getting to and from stops.

Conduct evaluations of women's safety and mobility initiatives. Evaluate all initiatives to avoid replication, document lessons, and study impact. To give a reliable estimate of the benefits, evaluations should incorporate a comparison or control group as well as collection of data before and after an intervention.

Incorporate gender in transport planning. Ensure that gender experts, women's groups are involved in the design and review of transport plans and policies.

Potential future interventions to be piloted and evaluated

Provide transport for girls in peri-urban and rural areas to attend school. In areas with poor transport infrastructure, transport services exclusively catering to female students can decrease drop-out rates and enhance educational attainment.²²

Initiate public campaigns to advocate for women's right to mobility. Provide information about existing laws, helplines, apps alongside bus and wagon routes and stops.

Train police staff on managing sexual harassment complaints, and involve female police. Evidence from other countries suggests that women feel more comfortable reporting harassment to female police staff.²³

Support for the government's promise to establish police stations and desks at different levels, and its policy to increase quotas for women in the police can create a safer environment for women.¹⁷

End Notes

1 Authors' calculations from 2010 JICA HIS survey, Lahore; 15% of women's non-walking trips were on public transport, while 12% of men's non-walking trips were on public transport. This difference and subsequent differences in women's and men's travel patterns mentioned in this paragraph are all statistically significant at the .01% level.

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 See FIA Foundation (2016) 'Safe and Sound: International Research on Women's Personal Safety on Public Transport' for categorization of the three stages of harassment

5 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with female conductors from pilot service, January 2, 2016; CERP Pilot Training Sessions, Feedback from Conductors and Drivers, August 2015; CERP Pilot Passenger Interviews, December 2015

6 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with female conductors from pilot service, January 2, 2016; CERP Pilot Training Sessions

7 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with female conductors from pilot service, January 2, 2016; This was also found in a more comprehensive study in Karachi, see: Asdar A., Kamran, (2012). 'Women, Work and Public Spaces: Conflict and Coexistence in Karachi's Poor Neighborhoods,' International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 36.3, 585-605

8 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with female conductors from pilot service, January 2, 2016;

CERP Pilot Training Sessions, Feedback from Conductors and Drivers, August 2015; CERP Pink Bus Passenger survey, May 2016

9 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with female conductors from pilot service, January 2, 2016

10 Interviews with Pink Bus female conductors, April – May 2016; CERP Pilot Feedback Recorded through Helpline, November 2015; CERP Pink Bus Passenger survey, May 2016

11 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with housewives, students, and working women in Halloki, Lahore, August 25, 2015; Focus Group Discussion with men in Halloki, Lahore, August 25, 2015; Peri-Urban Pilot Observations October 2015 – December 2015

12 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with housewives, students, and working women in Halloki, Lahore, August 25, 2015; Peri-Urban Pilot Observations October 2015 – December 2015

13 See: Mumtaz and Salway (2005). 'I never go anywhere': extricating the links between women's mobility and uptake of reproductive health services in Pakistan, Social Science and Medicine 60 (8): 1751-6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.08.019>.

14 Jacoby & Mansuri (2011). Crossing Boundaries: Gender, Caste and Schooling in Rural Pakistan. Policy Research Working Paper ; no. WPS 5710. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/3475>

15 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with housewives, students, and working women in Halloki, Lahore, August 25, 2015; Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with female conductors from pilot service, January 2, 2016; CERP Pink Bus Survey 2016; Phone interviews by authors with Pink Bus female conductor previously employed on route B1, April 18, 2016

16 World Bank (2018). 'Female Labor Force Participation in Pakistan: What do we know? Pakistan Gender and Social Inclusion Platform & Social Protection and Jobs teams

17 CERP interviews with women working in the banking, beauty, education, non-profit, manufacturing sectors, Lahore, February – March, 2016;

18 Focus Group Discussion conducted by authors with housewives, students, and working women in Halloki, Lahore, August 25, 2015

19 See PCSW policy paper by authors on Overcoming Barriers to Women's Mobility

20 See: Cheema et al (2017), 'Crossing boundaries: Experimental evidence on access constraints for rural women,' CERP Discussion Paper

21 Majid et al. (2018). 'Infrastructure investments and public transport use: Evidence from Lahore, Pakistan.' Working Paper; no. C-89231-PAK-1. IGC

22 See, for instance, Karthik & Prakash (2017). Cycling to School: 'Increasing Secondary School Enrollment for Girls in India,' American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 9 (3):321-50

23 Miller, A. R., & Segal, C. (2013). Do Female Officers Improve Law Enforcement Quality? Effects on Crime Reporting and Domestic Violence Escalation. SSRN Electronic Journal.

<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2335990>

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This policy brief has been prepared by Punjab Commission on the Status of Women with support from DFID and UNFPA under the project "*Generating Data to Advance Women's Social and Economic Wellbeing in Pakistan*".

The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women is a Special Institution of the Women Development Department, Government of Punjab, established through the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2014 as an oversight body to ensure that laws, policies and programs of the Government of Punjab promote women's empowerment; that efforts are made for expansion of opportunities for socio-economic development of women, and discrimination against women in all forms is eliminated. PCSW provides periodic feedback and status updates on international instruments affecting women and girls. PCSW is represented in all 9 divisions of Punjab through its Members and Divisional Coordinators.

