
Drifting Between Choices to Speak Up or Keep Silent: Bystanders' Behaviour Towards Harassment Incidents at Bus Stops in Lahore, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of bystanders in harassment incidents at bus stops in Lahore, Pakistan. Employing a phenomenological qualitative approach, in-depth interviews with five participants were conducted to explore their lived experiences. Along with patriarchal theory, Latané and Darley's bystander effect model was used as theoretical framework for thematic analysis. Results indicate that harassment can be effectively prevented when bystanders overcome fear and apply appropriate intervention strategies, providing support to victims. The study also outlines practical approaches for bystanders to reduce harassment and highlights the importance of public awareness, empowerment, and consideration of cultural and societal factors in enhancing the effectiveness of bystander intervention.

Keywords: Bystanders, Harassment, Bus Stops, Public Places, Victim, Women Mobility, Interventions, Patriarchy

Introduction

Harassment has been extensively discussed and documented across different cultural settings and regions (Rass et al., 2021), but research that focus on the role of bystanders who witness harassment is limited. In this study, sexual harassment refers to any unwelcome sexual act, comment, or gesture directed at someone due to their gender, in any setting, that may cause offense, embarrassment, or fear (Fitzgerald, 1990; Mason & Chapman, 2003).

Sexual harassment is a common and recurring phenomenon in the public transport services. The incidence rates of sexual harassment of women and girls on commuter rail range from 15% to 95% globally, according to a study reviewed by Gekoski (2017), women in underdeveloped nations are more likely to have encountered such misconduct during travelling.

Women in underdeveloped countries often rely on public transportation to engage in their daily activities, including commuting for work, education, and social responsibilities. However, they frequently face sexual harassment in these spaces, such as catcalling, following, stalking, and unwanted sexual advances, which are commonly reported at bus stands and terminals (Fileborn, 2013; Salman, Abdullah & Saleem, 2016). Such experiences compromise women's sense of safety and self-worth, leaving them feeling vulnerable in public spheres (Kaufman, Polack, & Campbell, 2018). Despite these threats, many women remain silent, often due to low confidence, fear of social stigma, potential retaliation, and the normalization of harassment within

domestic and societal settings (Hlavka, 2014). Public transport is an essential facilitator for accessing the public sphere, yet harassment significantly restricts women's mobility and participation in everyday life (Nayak & Benazeer, 2017). This silencing of women not only impacts their psychological well-being but also limits their social and economic engagement, highlighting the pervasive and systemic nature of sexual harassment in public spaces (Fileborn, 2013).

Women must engage with the public transport services in urban centers for accessing the male-dominated world. They need these services to engage in employment, leisure and educational activities (Smith, 2008). The global discourse is shifting towards a collective accountability (Olvera, 2008), so it is important to understand bystanders' response to instances of harassment in public places. The bystander is often invisible in the binary of victim and harasser. The dynamics behind the actions of bystanders also remain underexplored. Latané and Darley (1968; 1970) presented the model of bystander effect and outlined, for the first time, the role of others in a situation of harassment. Berkowitz (2009) extended this model and emphasized on sociocultural factors of behavior. There is a need to explore how the bystanders make sense of, attach meaning to, and then act in situation they witness. Using the lens of bystander effect model, this study contributes towards filling this gap.

Review of Literature

Bystanders are the people who are not part of the situation but are present nearby any situation of emergency, any crime scene or other such high-risk situations. Their presence at the specific place allows them to step forward and intervene in the scenario of the problem to help the victim or choose to silently witness this social event (Banyard and Moynihan 2011). Latané and Darley (1968, 1970) suggest that for bystanders to intervene, they must first notice the incident, recognize it as an emergency, accept responsibility, and possess the necessary knowledge or skills to act effectively. Bystanders witness an act of violence but are neither the direct perpetrator nor the victim in the situation. (Powel 2010).

Some studies focused on demographic characteristics and said that adolescents are more likely to help others in certain situations (Fissel and Bryson, 2024; Banyard and Moynihan, 2011). The involvement of bystanders can be differentiated into four formal categories. First is high immediacy, which includes low involvement. Second is intense immediacy that includes low involvement that is supporting behind the scenes. Third features high involvement with high immediacy that is the type of bystander intervention that includes strong involvement in a general situational perspective to stop and intervene in the act of harassment. Lastly, low immediacy with high involvement that means the attempt to prevent these acts from happening in the future by public involvement and intervention in the situation at a later stage. (McDonald, Charlesworth & Graham, 2015) Apart from the public situation of an act of violence or harassment, some individual factors can be undertaken to assess the bystander intervention. These factors include self-efficacy and enhanced moral and ethical development of the intervener (Youth Violence, 2001).

A study (Choi & Kumar, 2025) analyzed real-life accounts of 217 bystanders and concluded that there are three main response types; direct confrontation, indirect assistance and passive witnessing. Female bystanders empathize more as compared to male counterparts. Reviews of multiple studies suggest that many bystander intervention programs are limited by a lack of follow-up and insufficient attention to institutional hierarchies (Chen & Zafar, 2025).

Some studies suggest that peer pressure and rape myths as preconceived notions are essential factors in analysis of the behavior of bystanders in the incident of harassment (Banyard and Moynihan, 2011). Some researchers worked on adults to identify reasons and characteristics about the willingness to intervene or not, the results suggested insightful findings e.g., lack of skills to secure the situation etc. Others argued about the norms which are prevalent in society, for instance, domination on and devaluation of women along with high violence rate as compared to low ratio of active bystanders who help the victim (Ingram et al., 2019).

Sexual harassment considerably affects women's mobility, although the degree and nature of its impact vary

across contexts. In some cases, women modify their travel behaviors to avoid harassment, such as refraining from traveling alone, avoiding nighttime commutes, or bypassing routes considered unsafe (Hsu, 2010). Conversely, in other situations, women continue to use public transport despite harassment due to financial limitations or the absence of feasible alternative transportation options (Asian Development Bank, 2014). These findings indicate that while harassment can restrict women's mobility, structural and economic barriers often limit their capacity to adjust travel patterns, underscoring the complex interaction between social risks and practical constraints in public transit systems.

Theoretical Lens

In this study we focused on patriarchal theory as theoretical lens or guiding tool to understand and analyze the bystanders' behaviours. The structural and systematic supremacy of male is always supported and promoted by patriarchal mindset and instances of harassment work as a tool to control women and undermine their abilities (Walby, 1989). Bystanders' behaviour usually reflects the social and cultural norms of that society. Based on social norms, primary socialization and moral codes, bystanders decide their actions either to take the role of mere spectator or courageous helper to handle the situation by helping the victim. In some extreme situation bystanders choose the role of victim blaming too (Yule et al., 2022).

A spectator is somebody who watches an incident but decides not to get involved in prevention and resolution (Flake, 2021). The bystander effect, formulated by Latané and Darley (1968, 1970), describes the phenomenon in which witnesses of an incident may remain passive, even when intervention could prevent harm.

They employed the following five-step decision-making approach:

1. Note the occurrence
2. See the circumstances as requiring intervention
3. Assume accountability
4. Decide how and when to assist
5. Interfere i.e., implement the help decision

Bystanders do not interfere due to pluralistic ignorance, fear of reaction and being uncertain about the perspective of victim (Latané & Nida, 1981).

Based on this paradigm, Berkowitz (2009) also outlined a four-stage procedure for turning a witness into an involved participant. Compared with Latané and Darley's bystanders' effect, Berkowitz's (2009) Bystander Intervention Model integrates the socio-cultural contexts and moral identity. The first three phases of Berkowitz's model align with those described by Latane and Darley (1970), but the final phase implies that spectators must possess the appropriate abilities to intervene. Stages of Berkowitz's model are as follows:

1. Note the occurrence
2. Considering it a challenge
3. Feeling accountable for handling it
4. Having the aptitude to do so

In public transport settings like Lahore bus stops, recognizing harassment as unacceptable is often challenging due to social norms, lack of intervention skills, and fear of consequences. Finally, a spectator who wants to help must know where and how to act, keeping their own protection and safety in mind. (Rowe 1996).

There are few studies that examine bystander behavior in public transport contexts, particularly in South Asian cities. The current study focused on the real experiences of bystanders at bus stops in Lahore during harassment incidents. Understanding these behaviours can inform prevention programs and policies, and help law enforcement and community actors develop strategies to support bystanders as responsive agents in stopping harassment.

Methodology

Setting the Context: Lahore as a Cosmopolitan City

This study examines public bus stops in Lahore, a major urban center where street harassment and harassment at transit points are frequently reported. These locations offer a setting to investigate bystander behavior in real-world public spaces, highlighting how such incidents can affect women's mobility and sense of safety.

This research is qualitative and it adopted the interpretivist–phenomenological approach, aiming to uncover the lived experiences and perspectives of bystanders at bus stops.

The ontology of this research is based on subjectivism, according to which the social phenomenon is created from perception and have multiple realities that are socially constructed. The epistemology of the current research is based on interpretivism which holds that the realities are uncovered through the perspectives of people. According to Creswell (2017), it is a valuable model since it takes place in a natural environment and enables the investigator to gain a high degree of information via direct participation in the events. This model focuses on a collection of interpretive actual actions that represent the outer world.

By following the phenomenological research design, this study carried out and gained in-depth insights of the bystanders who encountered sexual violence incidents at bus stops, focusing on the fact if they decided to react or not as a bystander. Phenomenological research design helps to attain the emic perspective and lived experiences of people in their own words.

Snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants because it was difficult to find participants who easily claim that they had witnessed any incident of harassment in front of them as mere bystanders. This sampling technique works best with smaller numbers that are hard to reach because they are locked off, such as secret societies and exclusive occupations (Theodros 2016). After a small survey, two people were identified who were potential participants and willing to discuss the behavior as bystander, then they identified others who were able to add to this study. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather data from recruited participants. In-depth interviews allow participants to express experiences in their own words and provide more comprehensive insights than questionnaires (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020; Lucas, 2014).

After collecting data, the data was organized and verbatim transcript was prepared. Data was then coded to derive themes. Technique of thematic analysis was used to analyze data. Thematic analysis is one of the more accessible qualitative approaches to understand the data (Nowell, 2017). Also, participants were properly informed, and their consent was taken formally. The procedure for obtaining information and understanding can be seen as an agreement between the investigator and the subjects (Fleming, 2018).

Table 1
Participants' Profiles

Sr No	ID	Gender	Marital Status	Education	Income level (PKR)	Work status	Interview Mode	Take on Harassment
1.	P1	Female	Unmarried	B Com	Nil	Working	Face to face	Retaliated verbally
2.	P2	Female	Married	MA English	30000	Working	Face to face	Walked away
3.	P3	Female	Unmarried	Bs Hons	Nil	Student	Telephonic	Retaliated verbally
4.	P4	Male	Married	BSc	50000	Business person	Face to face	Asked others to help and retaliated
5.	P5	Male	Unmarried	MA	Nil	Working + Student	Telephonic	Retaliated

Findings and Discussion

Bus stop environment

All the participants indicated that the bus stops were usually swamped and crowded, where everyone is busy with matters of life. Nobody pays attention to what's happening since all the passengers want to reach their desired location as soon as possible since roads in Lahore are full of traffic all the time. One crucial factor to note here is that there are no proper public transport terminals or waiting areas excluding Lahore's metro service. Describing the poor conditions, a participant (P2) pointed out,

Inside the metro station, there are sitting areas, but if you need to ride on a speedo or other vans, there is no sitting area. There is no provision of sitting area. Even if you find one, you will find drug addicts there

Another participant (P5) told during the interview that,

Yes, there is sitting area near gate 2 (Punjab University). I am not sure about the separate portions right now but when I used to go there, the trend was first come and first sit.

Another male participant said, "At terminal there is sitting area but not that much neat and clean in terms of infrastructure and not in terms of people."

In Lahore, the bus stops and public stops are not designed to secure and facilitate the passengers. Most of the stops are dirty and unmanaged. Many people's sole purpose is to stand there and abuse the women passengers. According to the responses, it was clearly seen that the bus stops are male dominated. Also, most of the times men are just sitting and hovering around the bus stop with no plan to commute. The participants expressed that there is usually no trend of gender segmentation as far as waiting areas were concerned.

These accounts highlight that in public spaces, there is lack of proper infrastructure and safe waiting areas, which contributes to male-dominated environments. According to the theory of bystander effect, chaotic or unstructured spaces can lead to diffusion of responsibility, where potential helpers may assume others will intervene, reducing actual bystander action.

Bystander's perception of harassment

Initially, all the participants were clear on the definition of the subject. One participant (P1) said that,

Nowadays, females are like *sadqay ka gosht* which we throw and animals snatch it; to eat it. So, for me, harassment is everything that is disturbing you emotionally, physically, and also unwanted actions from someone.

The term *sadqay ka gosht* refers to the ritual of throwing and offering meat to the birds. It is believed that this ritual helps people to get rid of problems and misfortunes. When it is thrown the birds snatch it and cut it into pieces in a barbaric way. According to this participant, it explains what women are for men; merely sexual objects who must be subjected to harassment. Upon asking about the definition of harassment, the participants clearly explained the range of actions which include harm to victim. A participant (P4) defined harassment as:

Harassment is...(pause)...I can say every action which is against moral values of our society. To touch someone in public place, to disturb them, and to look in a way that makes them feel distressed.

On asking if harassment is gender specific, the participants agreed that harassment is for women since they are considered weak in Pakistani society. In addition to that, participants also mentioned that the intersex community are also a victim of harassment in Pakistani society. One participant (P5) said that males are not subjected to this kind of treatment since they are powerful and above the social norm and standards of accountability anywhere. Likewise, a participant (P3) said, "I perceive harassment a threat to vulnerable segments of society, like females, transgenders, and children."

Participants perceived harassment as both a social and gendered issue, corresponding to the initial step in Latané and Darley's model, which involves noticing an event and acknowledging it as a problem. While

identifying victims represents the first stage of intervention, mere recognition does not necessarily lead to action.

Personal Experience of Witnessing Harassment

The participants' answers indicate that they always identified harassment when they saw some female being uncomfortable in public settings. They mostly look afraid, embarrassed, or numbed by the situation since they mostly don't know how to respond. But in a few cases, the participants reported that girls did ask the harasser why he was doing so. Lastly, responses suggest that all the participants wanted to help, yet they were unclear about whether it was some personal matter between the harasser and the victim or not.

A participant explained an incident as,

Obviously, a shameful experience and dirty aspect of the society. Once or twice at gate 2 and 8 (bus stop names near University of the Punjab) I witnessed.....(pause) the rickshaw driver groping and staring at the females standing there for their buses. I was told about this type of harassment back in (thinking)..... 2017 or 2016 by my class fellows but I never thought of witnessing this.

This type of harassment is an extreme case, which has been observed near such a crowded institute. A study in Chennai concluded that more than half of the women using public transport experience harassment during their commute or on public bus stops (NASEM, 2011). In a research in Karachi, women were interviewed about public transport and harassment, many of them said males on different vehicles (bikes, cars etc.) came near them to throw some paper with their phone numbers, and sometimes asked about joining them on their transport (Asian Development Bank, 2014).

Action/ Take on Harassment Incidents by A Bystander

For many young women, including students, harassment is not an isolated incident, but a recurring challenge tied to broader social and cultural norms. The participants' take on harassment as a bystander reflected upon how patriarchal attitudes and the normalization of such behavior make reporting and confronting harassment uncommon. A women participant stated that when she saw incident of harassment at bus stop, her reaction was very normal to the patriarchal expectations she said, "Simply I walked away as my van arrived, maybe I was guilty, but I was compelled to go."

On asking how they decided to act or staying silent, all the participants replied that their actions depended on their assessment of that situation at that time. Some of the obstacles that prohibit onlookers from deciding to intervene have also been identified by the study. These are described by Banyard V. L. (2004) in terms of social impact, which includes the dissemination of responsibility. Females also indicated that they might put themselves in danger while helping the victim. Likewise, a participant replied,

The main insecurity was time constraint and fear too. I was in fear that if I asked something, maybe he will harm me...(Pause). And you know ...(sigh)... this is more difficult to bear

The participant, a girl, was afraid of herself being at a vulnerable position with the fear of facing harmful consequences. So, she decided not to interfere as it is not her own issue. The participants' responses indicate a fear of harm while responding to such a situation; especially when the bystander is the only female at the bus stand surrounded by many males.

One participant said,

In one case, me and my friends responded together one time, but in the second case, nobody was around. People in vehicles were passing by, and maybe did not notice. And in my opinion, people always or most of the time avoid these scenarios. It is because they do not want to waste their time by getting involved in someone else' issues.

While another male participant said, "Yes, I remember I was the first to notice and went to that girl to ask what happened. It attracted two or more people like me, who went toward that male."

In this scenario, the male participant asked others for help and they came for helping when he called, not by

witnessing the situation on their own. Lastly, none of the other participants reported that they did not see any other bystander taking the initiative, which motivated them to intervene in the situation.

Bystander's Insights from the Incidents

There are immense psychological effects of harassment, the bystanders witnessed at bus stops. Most participants said that it frightened them and kept coming to their minds afterwards for many days. One of the participants said, "I remained in the thought of this incident many days and was afraid that it could happen again." Moreover, participants said during the interview that the situation became normal and comfortable quickly when they consoled the victim. Therefore, it projects that a bit of help is needed to uplift and encourage the other person.

The government of Pakistan launched a helpline to report such events to improve women's situation at bus stops, but it's not being utilized effectively. Especially when the complainant is a female, the response is not encouraging. Female sufferers of harassment frequently find themselves disappointed by the ineffective and insensitive activities of authorities, such as the police, when they attempt to pursue retribution and vengeance (Ali, Wajahat & Mohammad, 2021). They misbehave and do not take things seriously by making shoddy inquiries, inappropriate remarks and not acknowledging the case. According to a study by Asia Society, including both urban and rural settings, women frequently experience discrimination when fighting for justice from law enforcement agencies (Abbas, 2012). One of the participants said,

Yes, there are laws against harassment, but the implementation is zero. I know there is a helpline too, but I do not know how effective it is. And sometimes your mind does not work like this that you think of using a mobile when in a situation.

Causes and Reasons of Harassment at Bus Stops

While discussing the reasons for harassment in our society, all the participants were highly vocal that men are solely responsible for it and are not taught at homes to respect people, especially women. One participant also discussed the patriarchal mindset, and she explained that,

The male hegemony and patriarchal thinking make men think that they can do what they want on the roads. We do not tell boys their limits, so they are limitless. The dress has nothing to do with harassment; the cases I narrated happened with *Abaya* wearing girls.

While discussing the laws and behavior of society towards harassment, all the participants' responses denoted that they did not witness any implications, practicality, and the role of government for the betterment of people and society. Lastly, the community does not bother to address these dark realities in our society. A participant argued that,

Yes, the role of government is zero in these scenarios. However, I do not think policymakers ever believe that these problems are ground realities. Societal behaviors are marked with unbearable coolness. They say we do not have the time and energy to help someone.

The analysis of all participants indicates that bystander behavior at bus stops in Lahore is strongly influenced by gender, social norms, and environmental conditions. Women participants consistently recognized harassment but were hesitant in situations to intervene due to fear of physical harm, social repercussions, and uncertainty about the proper way to act, reflecting their socially constructed vulnerability in male-dominated public spaces. In contrast, male participants were more likely to approach victims or call for assistance, demonstrating how social and physical power enables men to act with lower perceived risk. Across all participants, decisions to act or stay silent align with Latané and Darley's Bystander Effect model, where noticing an incident, interpreting it as a problem, feeling responsibility, and evaluating personal capability and risk shape intervention. Structural factors, such as patriarchal norms, ineffective government enforcement, and the normalization of harassment, further constrained female intervention while reinforcing men's relative agency. Nonetheless, even limited acts of assistance such as consoling a victim or calling for help had positive

effects on both victims and bystanders, emphasizing that context, gendered power, and perceived risk are central determinants of bystander behavior in public spaces.

Suggestions to Overcome These Incidents

One of the participants said in this regard,

I think people around bus stops can play the leading role in preventing such incidents because they can act immediately as it happens and rescue the victim. It will make the abusers and perpetrators afraid that the people nearby can respond anywhere and any moment they will do something wrong. It must be taught in family and educational institutes that we must help others in distress and keep our selfishness aside. The proper training system of how people react in these scenarios can change the culture.

The participant was clear in understanding that these incidents can be avoided when the people around that incident place play their role. One of the participants suggested a more applicable way to stop these incidents.

I think the solutions are not effective because the population is outnumbering the basic infrastructure and you cannot teach everybody. Government can provide proper bus stops everywhere and circulate some awareness through TV ads that you must respect the girls/females on road and will be punished if you disturb someone...

One participant argued that,

Bus stops should be neat and clean. So, the environment could change. Government can make laws and, they can use dolphin force and traffic wardens to have a check and balance on nearby stops so that any doubtful and suspicious people around the stops must be afraid. Yes.... through proper awareness and discussion, we can change the societal behaviour. People who ignore these incidents are equally participating in this scenario to make it worse. We must sensitize people and friends around us at every forum that we must not be among those perpetrators and, civic sense/responsibility must be there in case of any emergency.

In a study in Karachi, sensitization of security personnels is also suggested so that they can help the needy victims is need of the hour (Asian Development Bank, 2014).

Conclusion

Burn (2009) argued that usually women are more behaviorally inclined towards helping others than men (Diamond-Welch, Hetzel-Riggin & Hemingway, 2016) because they know about sexual violence more than men due to their prior experiences. But in the current research, one woman clearly said that she walked away due to arrival of her van and, she could not afford any harm to herself by the harasser. On the other hand, male participants sometimes did intervene, reflecting social power differences. The results indicated that all participants were aware of the boundaries and dignity of a person, especially of a female, on public premises. Although the overall environment of the bus stops in Lahore was found below average, it was not even properly suitable for males, so we could imagine what it holds for females.

In Pakistan, other than males, every other gender is considered weak. Therefore, social power lies at the disposal of men. This finding resonates with the arguments reported and discussed by Walby (1989) in her theorization of patriarchy. This disposal of power is given to males initially at home for various reasons. There is no balance of power or a mechanism to support members of society who are vulnerable and need extra protection. In Pakistan, social power largely lies with men due to patriarchal norms and their financial control of the household. This concentration of economic and social power often leaves women, intersex individuals, and children more exposed to harassment and less able to defend themselves. It highlights why males often remain unchecked in society, while women are considered the weaker gender in terms of societal authority and protection.

Another angle to the picture is the complete negligence of authorities. Like most third-world countries, there

exists a gap between the public/masses and the rulers/administration of the country. The general welfare of people and the protection of citizens' dignity are always out of the plan for the authorities. The results also revealed that people do not possess the quality of dealing with uncertain situations, especially the female gender. However, there was also a hint of acceptance as a part of female life in Pakistan since they couldn't do much about it. Similarly, study findings revealed the minimal levels of civic responsibility among bystanders, which may be inculcated among youth as a component of global citizenship education (Rubab et al., 2020) or civic and community development component through revised curriculum development.

Bystanders play a critical role in preventing harassment, as harassers often act knowing that no one will intervene. Creating fear in the harasser's mind is essential, but this is complicated by women's own fear of speaking out due to social and cultural pressures. Even though emergency numbers exist on buses and policies have been established, in a society like Pakistan, women may hesitate to report harassment for fear of blame, gossip, or social judgment. Overcoming these barriers requires both cultural change and public awareness, alongside vigilant and supportive bystander intervention. When bystanders actively intervene or show concern, it can send a strong message to harassers and help shift social norms toward accountability.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

To address public safety and empower individuals against harassment, several measures should be implemented. Firstly, incorporating social responsibility and bystander intervention into educational curricula is crucial. Individuals in schools or professional settings should be trained to recognize and respond to signs of harassment, support victims, and report incidents to the proper authorities. A significant barrier to intervention is often a lack of societal responsibility, so fostering a sense of communal duty toward fellow citizens is necessary.

Furthermore, equipping females with self-defense skills can be helpful, not only for physical protection but also to maintain mental and emotional stability in threatening situations. Training should focus on empowering individuals to make clear decisions and act effectively under stress. Self-defense programs should also teach how to protect others, promoting a broader culture of public safety. This approach recognizes that individuals can be both victims and bystanders in different situations and prepares them to act proactively. Technology can also play a critical role in deterrence and accountability. CCTV cameras at bus stops, emergency numbers, and systems for filing complaints via text or online platforms serve as preventive measures. However, the effectiveness of such tools depends on zero tolerance from victims and prompt action; policies alone are insufficient if incidents are not reported and addressed. Structured enforcement, clear oversight, and swift response are necessary to ensure these measures genuinely promote safety and discourage harassment.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

Future research on harassment should expand beyond bus stops to encompass a variety of public spaces where individuals are likely to encounter such incidents. This broader approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of harassment across different environments, allowing for more nuanced policy recommendations. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of victims could shed light on how they perceive the role of bystanders during incidents of harassment. Understanding victims' expectations and experiences with bystander intervention could guide more effective strategies to encourage bystander support.

An important area for future study is how women themselves perceive their role as bystanders. Research could examine how women assess their ability to intervene, the factors that influence their decisions, and the effort they put into supporting others or ensuring policy implementation. This insight would clarify the practical and psychological barriers women face and the degree to which they feel empowered to act in public spaces.

Another key focus should be the experiences of transgender individuals, who often face unique challenges in public spaces, including bus stops. Studying bystander behavior in relation to transgender individuals would

provide valuable insights into the specific obstacles this community faces and how societal support mechanisms might be improved. Finally, conducting multi-city studies on harassment trends would allow researchers to identify patterns and regional differences, offering policymakers detailed information to craft location-specific strategies aimed at reducing harassment across Pakistan.

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