

“GTALK Report Series: Safer Cities in Asia”

Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam



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GTALK Report Series: Safer Cities in Asia

**Gender and Transport Assemblage of
Learning and Knowledge**



The **Women in Transport Leadership Knowledge Network (WITL)** is an international community of transport scholars with the ambition of encouraging more women and girls to take up careers in transport and foster women's leadership in the transport sector. In partnership with transportation domestic societies in Asia, and the regional transport peak body Eastern Asia Society for Transport Studies (EASTS), we collectively aim: 1) to increase the profile and global presence of women leaders in transport; 2) to strengthen women's voice to be able to advocate their distinct transportation needs; 3) to acknowledge and celebrate female leadership; and 4) to employ research to gather evidence base to better address the gendered dimension of transport planning and design, strategically supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 (make cities inclusive and safe, resilient and sustainable) and SDG5 (empower women and girls). www.witl.info

The **Gender and Transport Assemblage of Learning and Knowledge or GTALK** is a unifying framework an online, open-access knowledge database on gender and transport (e.g. information, research publications, webinar presentation materials, interviews of women transport leaders, including case study initiatives on pandemic response in transport settings across the several cities), to be shared nationally and internationally. These materials are developed to raise awareness and support the embedding of planning and policies that will help advance the shared regional opportunity of shaping a more gender-inclusive and responsive transportation sector in Australia and Asia-Pacific.

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(<http://unsplash.com/photos/LnrK-yOPmMU>)

Summary

This report presents the results and findings of the survey implemented in Ho Chi Minh City in 2021. The report is drawn from literature review and online survey response of 311 tertiary students attending a university in Ho Chi Minh City. This documents their perception of public transport safety. The study was undertaken from November 2020 to January 2021. The Ho Chi Minh City was an output of the GTALK Research conducted by the Women in Transport Leadership Knowledge Network.

1

Introduction

Vietnam is located in South-East Asia. The country has a land border with China to the North, Laos and Cambodia to the West, East Sea to the East. Ho Chi Minh City, with a population of 13 million people, is the largest city in the southern part of Vietnam.

It is expected that the total population of this city will grow to 13.8 million by 2025 (Hoang and Okamura, 2020). Because of its tropical climate, healthy economic condition, advanced healthcare system and education system, Ho Chi Minh City has attracted around 130,000 domestic migrants per year. Most of these migrants are higher education students attending universities and young employees working in the city (Le and Trinh, 2016).

The relatively younger population of Ho Chi Minh City still prefer to use private transport such as motorcycles than take public transport. The number of motorcycles in HCMC has reached approximately 7 million motorcycles in 2014 (Le and Trinh, 2016). Considering that public transport is a sustainable mobility option that can help reduce traffic congestion and air pollution in cities as well as contribute social and economic benefits (Le and Trinh, 2016; Damart and Roy, 2009; Goldsmith et al., 2006), strategies have been put in place to improve the public transport system, particularly in terms of onboard services and bus fleet. However, public transport ridership remains limited (Le and Trinh, 2016).

In Vietnam, the Research Center for Gender Family and Environment in Development (2014) highlighted that sexual harassment posed the highest risk to women and girls in urban public places. This is followed by traffic accidents, robbery and pick-pocketing.

Female students attending schools and universities in Vietnam frequently experienced gendered violence. And this occurred at any time of day. More importantly, most Vietnamese males and females did not take action when witnessing or experiencing acts of harassment.

Besides parks and streets, public transport was among the infamous places where non-verbal and physical harassment occurred in Vietnam. Allen et al. (2019) revealed that sexual harassment commonly occurred on the journey to or from public transport. Gradually, it did not only have a negative effect on females' ability to work, their confidence, their mental and physical health (Research Center for Gender Family and Environment in Development, 2014), but it also increased gender inequality in society as a whole (Allen et al., 2019).

Study results show that although there was a significant number of LBGTIQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual) who are users of transport, there has been scant scholarly work that focuses on their lived experience of violence in public transport environments. However, several anecdotal evidence show that they experience significant harassment while using transport (UNDP and USAID, 2014).

In Vietnam, there were efforts in the past to empower members of the LBGTIQA+ community through education, healthcare, work and other living aspects during the past few years (Luong and Pham, 2015; UNDP and USAID, 2014), yet little research was devoted to better understand their perceptions about and experience of sexual harassment when travelling by public transport. This may, in part, be explained by the difficulties in approaching the group as they tend to hide their sexual orientations due to limited social acceptance, the lack of trust and the limited safe space to discuss about their experience. They also worried

about upsetting their parents and they perceived that they will receive a negative reaction from their parents, families, friends, and colleagues (UNDP and USAID, 2014).

The participants in the current research were students who were attending universities from 16 cities in Vietnam. Although 326 students participate in the survey, only 311 students completed the questionnaire. Therefore, this was the data that was analysed. Respondents include 37.9% males, 59.2% females and 2.9% LGBT. A majority of respondents have bachelor's degree (76.5%) and came from the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (78.5%).

Detailed data is found in the Appendix.



2

Empirical Findings

2.1 Method

This report communicates information that was gathered from the research which explores: 1) the nature of women's transport and mobility experience and their mobility shift to active transport during COVID19; and 2) Perceptions of safety (by gender) among college students in Ho Chi Minh City.

This study is part of a wider comparative research led by the Women in Transport Leadership Knowledge Network (WiTL) which examines transit safety among college students in six Asian city-contexts, namely: Bandung (Indonesia), Bangkok (Thailand), Cagayan de Oro (Philippines), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), and Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) and Tokyo (Japan).

The online survey was implemented between January 2021 and December 2021. Participant recruitment was based on convenience sampling by strata (gender) to ensure equal gender representation. Potential participants were sent an email and asked to complete an online perception survey.

By completing the survey, participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study. Eligible participants must be currently enrolled in a tertiary-level course or program in a university in Ho Chi Minh City, including the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City and other universities within the city.

The survey probed information on the nature of travel before and during COVID; the ecology of crime within transit environments, particularly on their self-reported experience of victimization, sexual victimization and perceived safety, and the nature of reporting; their use, participation and the shift to active transport (i.e. walking and cycling) or public

transport; and about the respondent's socio-demographic attributes (age, gender, ethnicity, etc).

This study targeted around 300-350 participants in each location. By exploring baseline issues and country-specific scenarios and insights, and by understanding the nature of travel and the ecology of commuting in a COVID and post-COVID world, we gathered scientific evidence to come up with collective strategies and solutions to pandemic recovery in the transport sector and advance more gender-responsive transport design, and planning as we prepare for 'COVID-normal' futures.

However, there were several limitations to the ho Chi Minh City component of the international study. There was no differentiation between local and international students, and did not ask which tertiary institution they attended. The study did not probe on information on disabilities.

As this was an international comparative study, another limitation of the international survey, is the lack of information regarding transit safety on local, prevalent modes of transportation.

Data analysis took the form of descriptive and correlational analysis.

Reporting of survey results will be published on the GTALK digital platform, supporting the dissemination of more gender-inclusive transport.

2.1

Victimization

Figure 1 illustrates the type of sexual harassment experienced (i.e. verbal, physical and non-verbal) while riding or taking the public transport; waiting at the public transport waiting area, bus stop or terminal; and walking to the waiting area for public transport.

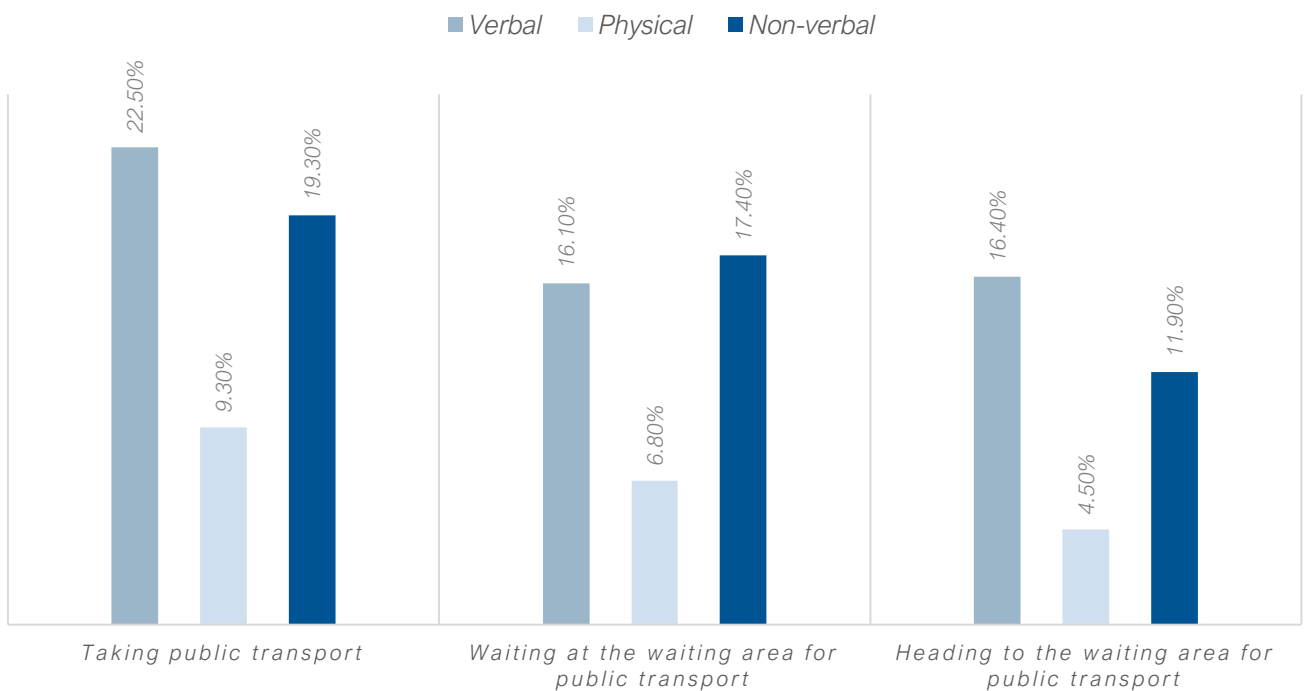


Figure 1. Types of sexual harassment in public transport

2.1.1

Riding/taking the public transport

A total of 22.5% of respondents report that they experienced verbal harassment (*examples include receiving lewd comments, whistling, making kissing sounds, asking them personal questions about sexual life, sexual comments about clothing, looks, asked to have sex, using obscene/abusive language, calling you babe, honey, sweetheart*) while riding or taking public transport

While approximately 9.3% of respondents reported that they experienced physical harassment. This type of harassment refers to *touching inappropriately, groping, pulling or playing with your hair, stalking or a stranger following the victim*. In addition, there are 19.3% of students self-reporting that they experienced non-verbal harassment. Examples of non-verbal harassment include *staring, leering, gesticulating, unwanted sexual looks or gestures, indecent exposure, showing pornographic images, masturbating in public* (Figure 1).

In terms of verbal harassment, up to 29.35% of females report experiencing verbal harassment while riding/taking public transport.

While a lower proportion of verbal harassment was reported by the LGBTIQ+ subgroup (22.2%), this proportion is still relatively higher when compared with those reported by the male cohort (11.9%). Study results also showed that LGBTIQ+ reported the highest proportion of individuals experiencing physical harassment (33.3%). This is followed by females (9.2%) and then males (9%). Reporting of non-verbal harassment experience was highest amongst the LGBTIQ+ (44.4%). About 23.4% of females reported being non-verbally harassed, while only 11% of males reporting having experienced non-verbal harassment.

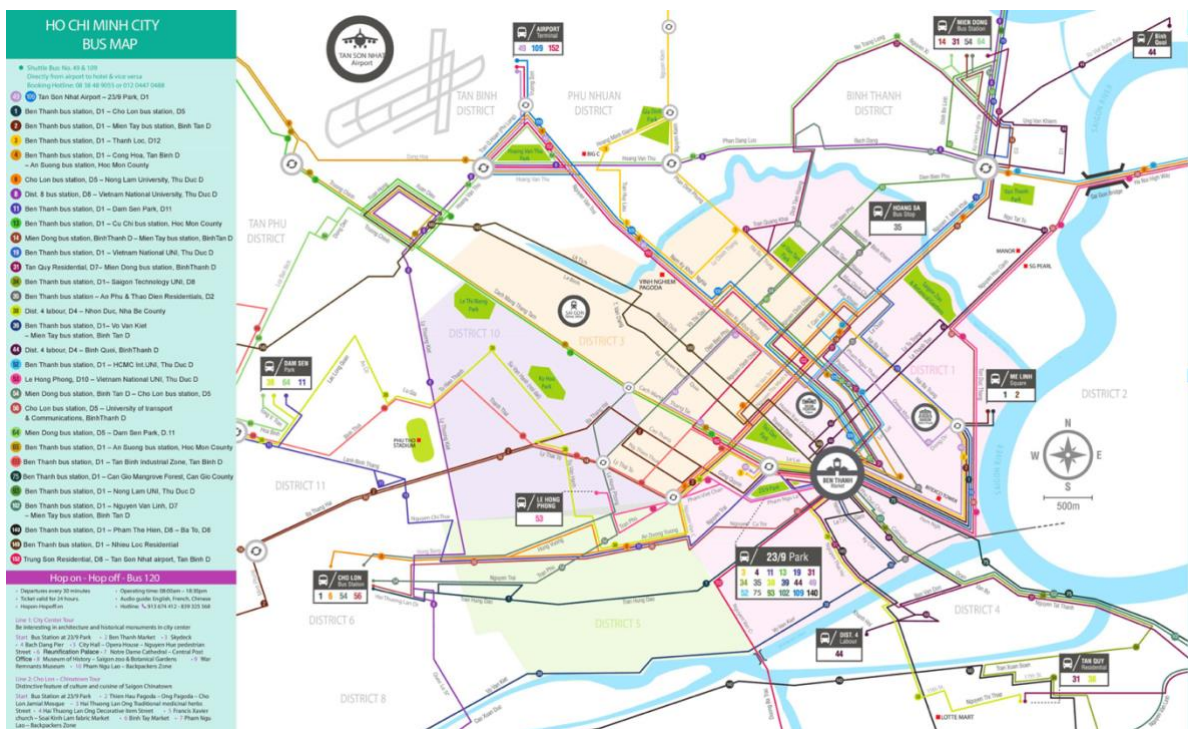


Figure 2: Ho Chi Minh Bus transit map.

Source: <https://ontheworldmap.com/vietnam/city/ho-chi-minh-city/ho-chi-minh-city-bus-map.html>

2.1.2

Waiting at the waiting area for public transport

While waiting for public transport, the results showed that a total of 16.1% of respondents witness or experience verbal harassment; 6.8% of students experience or witness physical harassment and 17.4%, for students who experience non-verbal harassment.

With respect to verbal harassment, a total of 22.2% of LGBTIQ+ are verbally harassed. A lower proportion of female reported being verbally harassed. Only 12% of males reported having experienced verbal harassment.

The results showed that one in five LGBTIQ+ respondents (22.5%) experienced physical harassment. Lower rates are found in the group of females and males, 7.1% and 5.1%, respectively. For non-verbal harassment, around 44% of LGBTIQ+ reported having been non-verbally harassed, while around 21% of females and 10% of males experienced the same issue.

2.1.3

Heading to the waiting area for public transport

In relation to accessing or heading towards the waiting area for public transport (*Walking to public transport*), 16.4% of students reported having experienced verbal harassment, 4.5 % of students reported being physically harassed, and 11.9% of students experienced or witnessed non-verbal harassment. Females reported the highest rate of experiencing verbal harassment (20.7%). Comparatively lower proportion are that of LGBTIQ+ respondents (11.1%) and 10.2% (males).

In terms of physical harassment, 11.1% of students reported experiencing this, with the highest reported by LGBTIQ+ respondents. The lower rates are found in the groups of females and males (4.3% and 4.2%, respectively). For non-verbal harassment, 15.8% of female students reported having been non-verbally harassed. This is followed by 11.1% of LGBTIQ+ and 5.9% males.

2.1.4

Sexual harassment and unsafety

When experiencing harassment, about 57.9% of the respondents indicated that they took action. However, they chose to take action in different ways. The key actions were: 1) dressing in an 'appropriate,' more conservative manner; 2) not wearing jewellery when taking public transport; and 3) avoiding carrying a purse or wallet (59.8%). Other strategies were: asking for help or support from people around (47.3%), waiting for transit only if other people were around or during daytime (30.9%), avoiding specific public transport stations or stops (22.5%), confronting the harasser (20.9%), and calling for help from the police (19.9%).

In terms of confronting the harasser, approximately 34.7% of male respondents indicated that they confront the harasser if they experienced or witnessed harassment. Instead of confronting the harasser directly, more females and LGBTIQ+ opted to make adjustments to how they dress as a way of dealing with sexual harassment (71.2% and 77.8%, respectively). A total of 39.1% of females chose to wait for transit only if other people were around or waiting for transit during daytime, to deal with acts of sexual harassment., the strategy of asking for help from other people was shared on an almost equal proportion among males, females and LGBTIQ+ (48.3%, 46.7% and 44.4%, respectively).

Only 37% of respondents reported that they received help from others when they were being sexually harassed. Other have advised them to ask for help from others, to dress in a certain way and confront to the harasser.



Image 5: By Jaromir Kavan, Unsplash, 2019
(https://unsplash.com/photos/l2_5m1RG0Ac)

2.2

Perception of safety

2.2.1

Safety while taking public transport during daytime & after dark

Figure 3 presents the distribution of respondents in terms of gender while riding or taking public transport. Before COVID19, there were 81% of students felt safer while using public transport during the day. About 83.1% male respondents report feeling. Slightly lower are female respondents reporting feeling safe (79.9%) followed by LGBTIQ+ respondents (77.8%).

After dark, using public transport becomes unsafe for students.

While majority feel safe during the day, the number of participants who feel safe during evenings significantly drops from 80% (day) to 62.4% (night). Perception however varies by gender. Male participants perceive evening safety differently from female and LGBTIQ+ respondents.

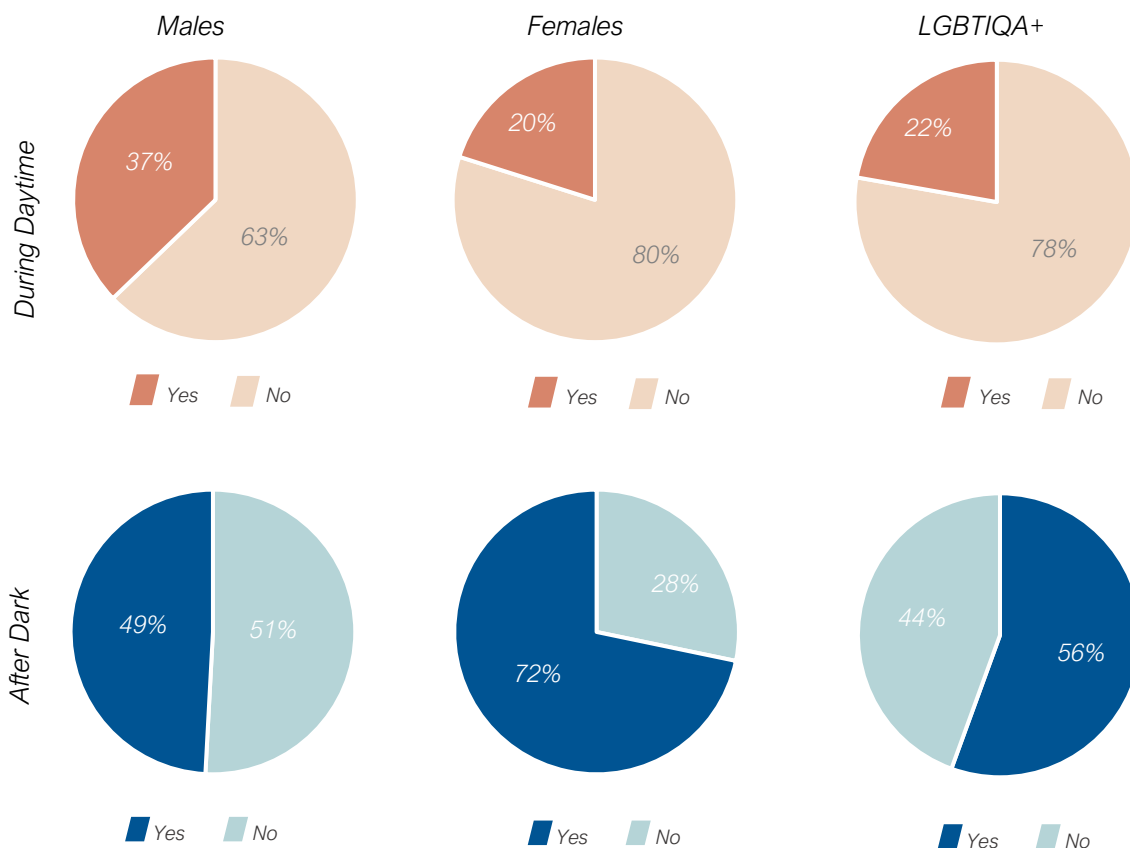


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents in terms of gender while taking public transport.

2.2.2

Safety while walking to the waiting area for public transport during daytime & after dark

Figure 4 the shows distribution of respondents in terms of gender while walking to public transport stops or stations.

Students feel safe walking to the bus stop during the day but they feel unsafe when walking to the bus stop after dark. During the day, around 70% of students feel safe. In terms of gender, most males (78.8%) feel safer than their female counterpart during daytime.

This rate was a little bit lower female (65.2%) and LGBTIQ+ cohorts (44.4%).

After dark, around 36% of female respondents, 33.3% of LGBTIQ+ respondents and 26.3% of male respondents refuse to walk to the bus station because of negative perception of safety. While 44.4% of LGBTIQ+ still feel safe, 51.1% of females and 39% of males feel unsafe.

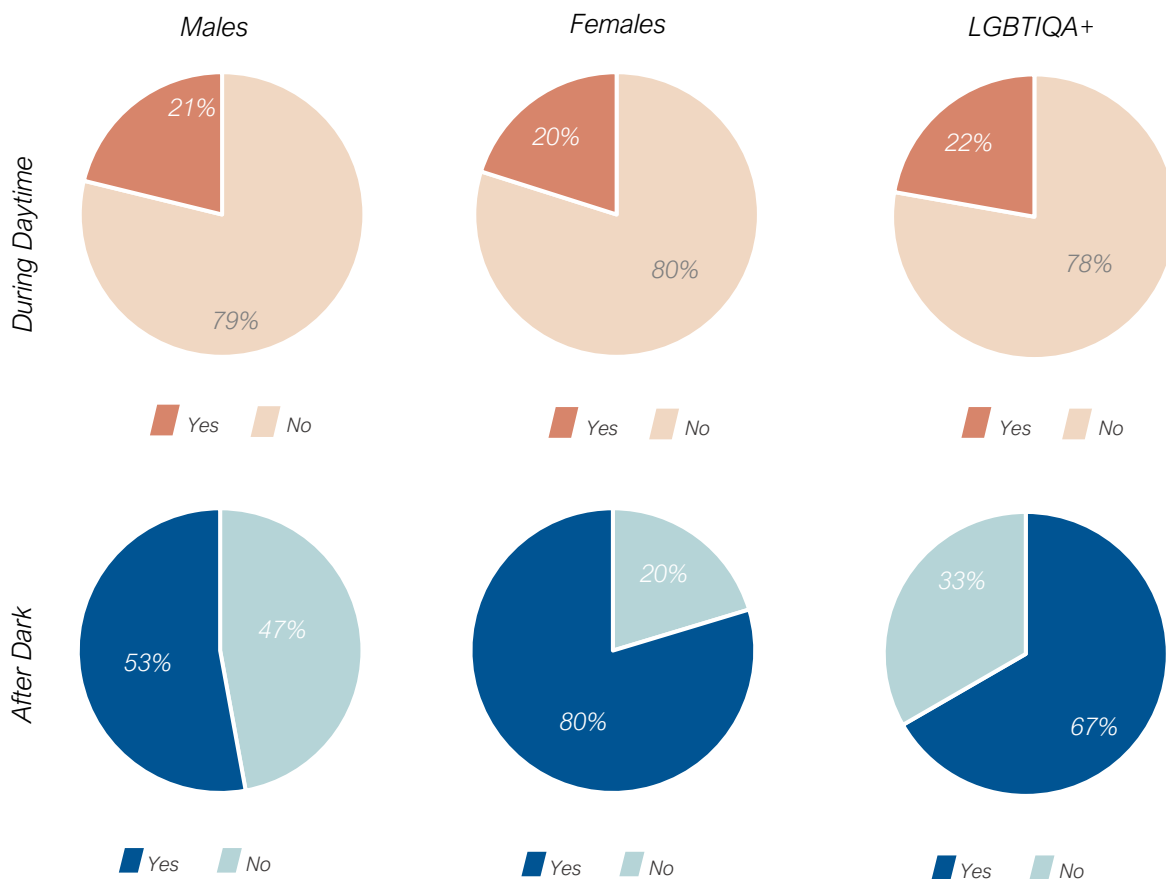


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents in terms of gender while walking to public transport

2.2.3

Safety while waiting at the public transport during daytime

Figure 4 shows distribution of respondents in terms of gender while waiting for public transport during daytime. While waiting at the bus station, the safe feeling exists among a majority of students (66%). The highest rate is for the group of males (74.6%), followed by the group of LGBT (66.7%) and the group of females (60.9%).

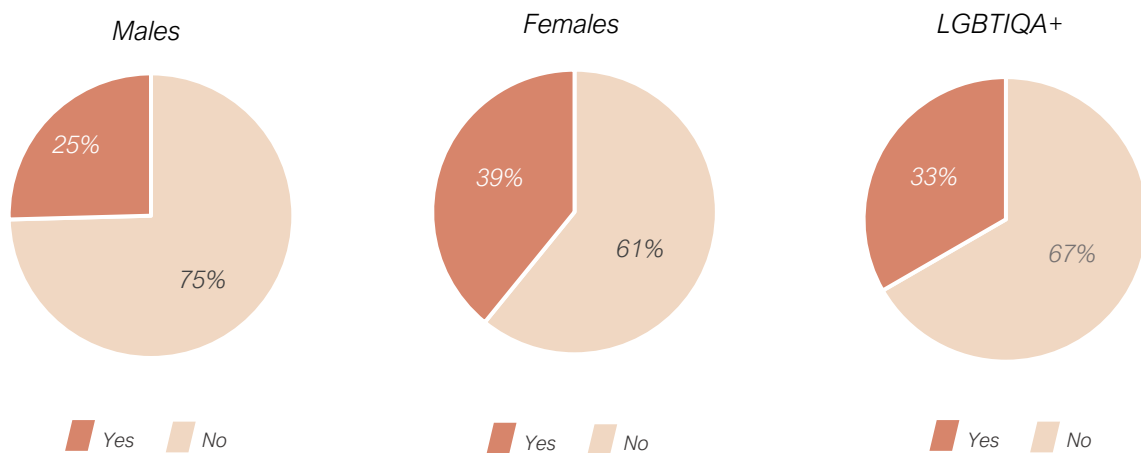


Figure 4: Distribution of respondent in terms of gender while waiting during daytime.

2.3

Challenges and recommendations from users

Personal safety, multiple transfers, health risk and poor facilities are among the most commonly perceived challenges encountered by students using public transport.

Survey results revealed that 1 in 7 respondents (70%) felt that personal safety risks such as assault, crime, harassment, and violence continue to be significant challenges that are present in Ho Chi Minh's public transport environments.

Around 61% of student respondents found inconvenient, multiple transfer, fare, travel time and delay as significant challenges. At an almost comparable proportion, both female (61.4%) and male (61%) respondents reported, inconvenient, multiple transfer to be a key concern. While a lower proportion of LGBTIQ+ respondents (44.4%) also indicated similar sentiments.

About 60% of students considered health risks such as air pollution, COVID19, and noise as key concerns. A slightly higher proportion of female respondents as compared to male respondents (57.1% and 55.1%, respectively) reported this concern, compared with LGBTIQ+ (44.4%).

In addition, about 40% of students indicated that poor physical infrastructure in public transport environments still remains a key challenge. Poor facilities was ranked as amongst the most challenging by 44.4% LGBTIQ+, 40.7% male and 39.7% female respondents. There is an opportunity to address these issues by improving lighting, improving ventilation, and maintaining cleanliness.

A significant proportion of respondents reported that sexual harassment remains a significant concern when using public transport. Around 78% of females reported the prevalence of this issue. Male respondents and LGBTIQ+ respondents were also concerned but at a lower proportion, with 60% of male respondents and 44% of LGBTIQ+ respondents, respectively, reported sexual harassment as an issue.

To make travelling by public transport safer, surveillance cameras, police presence and lighting improvement are the three most important things that are suggested by students.

A total of 80% of students agreed that surveillance cameras can help them feel safe when travelling by bus.

Besides that, 72% of students believe that police presence, inspections and patrolling at the entrance of public transport stops could also help address safety risk. In addition, 60% of students think that the government needs to improve lighting in waiting areas or public transport areas.

3

Conclusions and Recommendations

Personal safety, especially sexual harassment is still existing in public transport in Vietnam.

Gendered violence remains a significant issue in Ho Chi Minh City. While male respondents report that they have experienced sexual harassment in transport environments, a higher proportion of female and LGBTIQ+ respondents reported feeling unsafe in public transport environments. Earlier studies show that vulnerable groups, including women and LGBTIQ+, suffer more from gendered violence (UN Women 2017; Lee 2017). Moreover, the lack of a regulatory framework and clear legal definition about gendered violence is a key hurdle in addressing sexual harassment in Ho Chi Minh City (MOLISA Vietnam and ILO 2013). Therefore, the need to review existing legal frameworks and examine the level of comprehension about gendered violence are important first steps in the process of preventing and protecting victims.

When sexual harassment occurred in public transport, males, females and LGBTIQ+ respondents took on different ways of behaviour change, indicating that the onus continues to be carried by the victim. Besides taking action, well-equipped facilities are believed to reduce the unsafe feeling as well as the likelihood of sexual harassment in public transport.

Results in the current research shed a positive light on improving personal safety for females and LGBTIQ+. More research on LGBTIQ+ safety in public transport needs to be conducted in the future to gain a better understanding of this subgroup. The results are of interest to policymakers who seek for better insights and understanding about males, females and LGBTIQ+ perception and experience of sexual harassment for several years now.

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Image 3: Unsplash (2021), Unsplash. <https://unsplash.com/photos/d7BruzCAAdPU>

Image 4: Ho Chi Minh bus transit map. <https://ontheworldmap.com/vietnam/city/ho-chi-minh-city/ho-chi-minh-city-bus-map.html>

Image 5: Unsplash (2019). Unsplash. https://unsplash.com/photos/l2_5m1RG0Ac

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Appendix

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents in terms of gender while taking public transport

			Using during daytime		Total
			Yes	No	
Gender	Male	Count	98	20	118
		% within Gender	83.1%	16.9%	100.0%
	Female	Count	147	37	184
		% within Gender	79.9%	20.1%	100.0%
	LGBT	Count	7	2	9
		% within Gender	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	252	59	311
		% within Gender	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%
			Using after dark		Total
			Yes	No	
Gender	Male	Count	60	58	118
		% within Gender	50.8%	49.2%	100.0%
	Female	Count	52	132	184
		% within Gender	28.3%	71.7%	100.0%
	LGBT	Count	5	4	9
		% within Gender	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	117	194	311
		% within Gender	37.6%	62.4%	100.0%

Figure 3: Distribution of respondents in terms of gender while walking to public transport

			Walking during daytime			Total
			Yes	No		
Gender	Male	Count	93	25		118
		% within Gender	78.8%	21.2%		100.0%
	Female	Count	120	64		184
		% within Gender	65.2%	34.8%		100.0%
	LGBT	Count	4	5		9
		% within Gender	44.4%	55.6%		100.0%
Total		Count	217	94		311
		% within Gender	69.8%	30.2%		100.0%
			Waking after dark			Total
			Yes	No	Never	
Gender	Male	Count	41	46	31	118
		% within Gender	34.7%	39.0%	26.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	24	94	66	184
		% within Gender	13.0%	51.1%	35.9%	100.0%
	LGBT	Count	4	2	3	9
		% within Gender	44.4%	22.2%	33.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	69	142	100	311
		% within Gender	22.2%	45.7%	32.2%	100.0%

Figure 4: Distribution of respondents in terms of gender while waiting during daytime.

			Waiting during daytime		Total
			Yes	No	
Gender	Male	Count	88	30	118
		% within Gender	74.6%	25.4%	100.0%
	Female	Count	112	72	184
		% within Gender	60.9%	39.1%	100.0%
	LGBT	Count	6	3	9
		% within Gender	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	206	105	311
		% within Gender	66.2%	33.8%	100.0%

