

Research Article

‘Women come out for less important tasks’: Understanding the reality of the gendered transport sector in Karachi through Key-Informant Interviews

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This paper studies the perceptions of transport experts towards the state of transport and mobility barriers faced by women in the context of Karachi, Pakistan, a representative megacity in the global South. It is based on the data gathered by ‘conversations with purpose’ with key informants or experts in the transport sector to understand their attitudes towards transport provision and operation. Such interviews can attempt to understand the cultural and behavioural foundations of urban transport planning. It was found that poorly coordinated planning, lack of effective governance structure and investment have allowed the growth of an almost unregulated and ungovernable informal transport sector in Karachi. Apart from these issues, most experts displayed a patriarchal mindset that manifested itself by demeaning women’s importance and their contributions. Due to the lack of female representation, such views remained unchallenged, and the majority of the informants did not express a desire to integrate women into decision-making or consultation processes. It can thus be argued that improving women’s mobility require changing the mindset of transport planners, who consider women as mainly responsible for household tasks and therefore beneath their consideration. The paper also suggests some preliminary recommendations to address the issue of breaking away gender stereotypes in the transport sector.

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1. Background

Since, 2013, Pakistan has been ranked as the world's second-worst country (ranked 148 out of 149 countries) on the gender gap index ^[1]. This illustrates that the status of women and their rights in Pakistan are still not prioritised, despite Pakistan being a signatory of many of the international treaties to safeguard human rights and to minimise gender discrimination ^[2] (56), including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions. There have been no attempts to overcome the gender wage gap in the country ^[3] or to increase the labour force participation of women as compared to men. Although half of the population in Pakistan consists of women ^[4] (57), however, the labour force participation rates show that 79% of men, but only 26% of women are formally employed in Pakistan ^[5] (p. 11).

The lower female labour force participation rate in Pakistan applies to Karachi. In a household survey, conducted in 2010, it was revealed that from a total of 40,000 households, only 3.7% of women compared to 59.4% of men, were employed during 2010 ^[6] (p. 84). Their non-work trips showed even more gender differences, which was mainly due to the fact that Protecting women becomes vital to safeguard families' honour. This is often done by restricting their non-work trips, as 'nobody wants to be dishonoured for an 'unnecessary' activity ^[7].

The transport sector is heavily male-dominated in Pakistan with zero representation of women ^[5]. This indicates the social and cultural attitudes dictating women's employment options. Such attitudes can be seen in the way in which transport is designed and organised, and the lack of support or interest in women's mobility issues. The lack of gender equality, interest in women's needs and lack of representation contribute to a poor understanding of women's mobility barriers in most cities. According to the Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (2017), females in major cities of Pakistan are almost 30% more likely than males to use public transport because men usually opt for motorbikes or cars. Another study based on the Time Use Survey (TUS) data, gathered similar results, showing that females make more public transport trips including buses, rickshaws, Qingqi, which accounts for 4.7% of mean daily trips by females as compared to 3.2% of trips by males in Pakistan ^[8]. Despite the high dependency of females on public transport, gender differences are not given any consideration, and their transport needs, as well as travel patterns, are neither thoroughly documented nor translated into policymaking ^[9] (p. 23).

Very few efforts have been put into increasing the freedom of movement for women, and their needs still remain to be prioritised as noted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) Asia: ‘transport problems are especially acute for women (in Karachi)’ ^[10] (6). A Household Interview Survey conducted in Karachi to assess the needs of transport users could not represent the needs of women ^[6] (p. 2) since ‘sometimes, the head of the house did not allow (us) to interview their wife and children and answer(ed) the question about the trip information of their family’. Thus, the data to inform future projects was provided mostly by men and women’s voices were not heard. As a result of this social silencing of women, there is a lack of awareness and practical guidance on devising gender-inclusive transport.

However, it is important to understand the structure of transport planning and operation before suggesting any context-specific recommendations. This section will thus elaborate on what constitutes public transport in Karachi, how is it governed and operated, as well as what are the possible loopholes and roadblocks to improving transport in Karachi. This includes informally owned public transport and unregulated pocket of interventions proposed by the governed, as discussed below:

1.1. Informal transport

The public transport system forms only 4.5% percentage of the total vehicle fleet in Karachi, with a small number of buses/minibuses serving 42% of passenger demand ^[11] (Ahmed, Lu and Ye 2008: 133), as shown in Table 1. Private cars and motorcycles, form roughly 84% of all vehicles and, provide transport for 40% of the total passengers ^[12] (8). Paratransit vehicles (i.e. three-wheeler rickshaws and Qingqis) carry 8% of the passengers while contributing to about 10% of the modal distribution. Fares for these vehicles are arbitrarily decided and even buses are not equipped with an electronic payment system. Private vans are also popular in Karachi which are hired on a monthly basis to cover fixed routes and help 10% of the mobile population in commuting every day.

Vehicles	Share in modal distribution	Share in passenger distribution
Public transport	4.5%	42%
Paratransit	9.9%	8%
Contract carriages/ privately hired vans	1.7%	10%
Motorcycle	47.3%	19%
Private cars	36.5%	21%
Total	100%	100%

Table 1. Modal distribution of vehicles and passengers (Source: Hasan and Raza 2015: 8)

It was also clear that the quality of service provision was also poor since drivers are not adequately trained with ‘underage drivers, especially in private rickshaws and Qingqi’ ^[13] (p.5). This lack of accountability and training of drivers is afforded by police corruption since transport is only partially regulated. This is because ‘individual owners such as drivers, conductors, time-keepers, etc., run 95% of the public buses in Karachi’ ^[14] (p.78). It is estimated that approximately 200 bus operators in Karachi have not registered their vehicles and operate simply by paying additional sums to traffic police ^[9]. These private bus owners can create services on their own terms, being given exclusive rights to schedule the bus timings ^[15] (p.1). Consequently, public transport comprises privately owned, nonregulated buses and mini-buses, running on routes that have not been revised or increased since the 1970s ^[16].

Since vehicle inspection is rudimentary, passengers sit in ‘old (vehicles) with faulty brakes, worn tires, and high emissions’ ^[17] (4). The regulation of traffic is also poor, so much so that ‘the major problem in Karachi is how to organise a transport system around a situation where each bus is not only individually owned, but sometimes has more than one owner’ ^[18] (75). The informal nature of transport undermines the quality of service as bus operators chose when and where they run a service. They can also set fares independently and not run to an agreed service timetable ^[12] (Hasan and Raza 2015: 15). To save time and maximise profits, drivers often ask the passengers to get off buses while

they are moving (ibid), leading to fatal accidents (ibid). Buses are driven recklessly and unsafely, with drivers, ‘intimidating, cutting off or racing with vehicles; not stopping completely or stopping without a bus stop in sight and double parking at bus stops in the presence of traffic police than in their absence’ ^[19] (p. 331). In many cases, road accidents are either not reported or are hidden from the records to safeguard the drivers from any charges (ibid).

1.2. Sectorial approach to transport

Transport is mainly run by the informal sector in Karachi. Not only is it partially governed, but there are overlapping and segmented governance structures in Karachi ^[20], which has invited corruption due to the lack of accountability ^[21]. The different transport agencies that operate in silos with no co-ordination. For example:

- The Transport Union, formed in 1989, deals with administrative issues related to day to day operations. It forms an intermediary between the government and private transport operators ^[12] (p. 36).
- The Traffic Engineering Bureau (TEB) works at a provincial level under the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) and is responsible for planning transport projects in the city as well as installing controlling traffic signals ^[22].
- The Regional Transport Authority (RTA) works within the Commissioner’s office and is responsible for vehicle registration and route permits ^[12] (p. 15).
- The Karachi Municipal Cooperation (KMC) works with the Transport and Communication Department at the city level, responsible for the maintenance of roads, traffic signal and flyovers ^[6].

Although these bodies are operating at different levels, there is no coordination between them, which has weakened the institutions, allowing corruption ^[23] (p. 40). In this environment, the informal transport economy in Karachi uses bureaucratic corruption to get things done and often ‘bribes in money and kind are used to bypass or bend government rules’ ^[24] (Hasan 2013: 149). Deliberate delays in the construction of transport infrastructure projects result in increasing the overall cost of transport projects, delivery failures ^[25] (p. 39) ^[26] and in reducing the impacts of the efficiency of completed projects, through lax maintenance and policing ^[27].

Due to such maladministration, transport policy-making and sustainable planning have received little attention in Karachi ^[28]. Instead, transport has been treated as a business venture for politicians and operators. In summary, the 'city life more commonly pulsates with frustrations around chronic traffic problems, extreme wealth inequality...corruption and illegality, and the intrusive patina of fear' ^[29] (p. 2).

2. Introduction

Transport plays a key role not only in fostering economic development, but it can also contribute to an equitable society ^[30] (p.33) through its fair provision. The complex relationship between gender and transport has not received sufficient attention until this century when there has been a shift in focus away from positivist theories in transport to the politics of mobility ^[31]. This ideological change, that began in the social sciences popularly called a 'mobility turn' ^[32] is now seen at policy and operational levels in developed countries, in the development of socially just and environmentally sustainable initiatives e.g. Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans ^[33] (p. 20). It can thus be said that the mobility turn has paved the path for an emphasis on 'mobility justice' which allows exploring the extent to which mobility is defined by class, gender, race, and other social constitutions ^[34] (p. 208).

In Pakistan, access to education, employment, and urban experiences are dependent on the accessibility offered by public transport ^[35] (p.10). Although access to these opportunities is important for both men and women, it can particularly disadvantage women due to social/gender inequality which further perpetuates their inaccessibility to resources ^[35] (p. 4). This is because the historically established social norms (e.g. restrictions on the spatial mobility of women in a patriarchal setting) can limit their agency or cause fear of coercion and violence, which can induce social exclusion despite economic prosperity. Alternatively, although expanding women's access to economic activities plays a role in advancing their rights to mobility; the decision to travel is itself based on social norms, which not only limit their movement physically but also serve as a means to control and display power over women ^[36]. Therefore, there is a need to understand 'gendered meanings and power relations embedded in various forms of mobility and immobility', that varies with different social and geographical contexts ^[37] (p. 52).

A few recent studies have focused on the politics of mobility in the context of gender-based seclusion too ^[30]. Taking a social constructivist approach to mobility, transport, and gender can reveal why

women might suffer more due to their socially constructed gendered roles. For Levy, the 'interrelationships between a biased transport system, the social and unequal position of transport users, and socially constructed inequality in urban environments take on a particular form in the restructuring of contemporary cities, where transport is a central sphere of action' ^[37] (p. 52). These relationships can be brought to the fore-front by addressing the 'deep distributional' issues in transport by building the transport on an understanding of the 'articulation of power relations in public and private space at the level of the household, community and society' (ibid). Feminist economists also acknowledge that individuals and groups make choices within limits 'imposed by the structural distribution of rules, norms, assets and identities in their society' ^[38] (p. 12). This is because 'structures of constraints' ^[39] in the form of these social norms that are exercised in the public and private spheres, dictate power relations and influence an individual's ability to exercise agency ^[37] (p. 52). Therefore, individuals holding different positions in the gender power hierarchy have different access to transport, which affects their ability to access socio-economic capital and social justice ^[40] (p. 50).

Feminist interventions in transport research have helped in understanding the link between gender and mobility and the power imbued with both concepts. Inflicting immobility on women is considered a way to 'keep women in a subordinate position' or 'sustain gender traditional gender relations' ^[41] (p. 1530). However, such social behaviours constructing gender are mostly overlooked in the existing literature on transport, and a deep distributional approach to transport policy is never implemented. As a result, a very narrow understanding is displayed in ill-guided assumptions made after a household study conducted by JICA (2010). It has thus attributed women's lower mobility in Karachi with religion ^[6] (14) without recognising the complex set of disadvantages faced by them. The aim of this paper is therefore to assess the attitudes and perceptions of key informants regarding the state of public transport in Karachi and women's ability to be mobile. This can be useful for not only understanding their views/ practical actions regarding reducing the gender gap but also for understanding the complex power relations that are manifested in transport in Karachi.

3. Materials and Methods

The interviews conducted with the key informants can be considered conversations with purpose, a "controlled conversation," tending towards the interests of the interviewer ^[42]. Open-ended

interview questions were used to allow a better understanding of respondents' views. This interview technique was employed because it allowed for the discovery of more than what [was/is] anticipated [43].

Interviews were scheduled for 20–25 minutes, mostly in the offices of the experts. The discussion was tailored according to the profile of each respondent, allowing them time to speak about their forte, but was based on three questions, which served as prompts for the discussion:

1. What is your role in the urban transport sector?
2. How do you feel about the provision of transport in Karachi?
3. What is being done or can be done to make transport user-friendly?

As part of the fieldwork, the researcher attended relevant transport-related events and actively made contacts with transport stakeholders such as policy-makers, social activists (from NGOs), academic experts, field experts, urban planners and engineering professionals. The participants were opportunistically identified as those attending transport-related public events in Karachi. One advantage of the study is that the interviews were conducted during the period when there were numerous discussions and speculations regarding future improvements related to transport. As a result, five initial interviews were scheduled, which led to more recommendations using the snowball sampling approach. In total, 11 KIs were interviewed (Table 2). They were mainly (6) government employees in different capacities while academic or social sectors independently employed the remaining. Most of the informants were men, and it was very difficult to find a female KI. The conversations with the KIs revealed the political influences on transport, in the form of the lack of transparency, integration and corruption.

Identifiers	Sex	Position
KI1	M	A senior official from the Road Traffic Authority, Karachi
KI2	M	President Karachi Transport Union for transport workers
KI3	M	Project Director of a new transit line under construction
KI4	M	Founder of a local NGO working on improving urban infrastructure in partnership with government agencies
KI5	M	Senior Researcher at an NGO called Urban Resource Centre
KI6	F	Social activist (NGO)
KI7	M	Chief Consultant of the authority working on the mass transit project
KI8	M	Dean at a local university
KI9	M	Local bus driver
KI10	M	Chief Engineer, involved with governmental projects
KI11	M	Young architect and urban planner

Table 2. List of Key Informants interviewed for the study

Most of the participants were briefed about their roles as well as highlighted the reasons behind the current state of public transport in Karachi. Some of them also discussed the recent initiatives in transport planning or made suggestions about what needs to be done. The researcher avoided imposing the gender theme on the respondents and asked them only limited questions about their roles and thoughts about making transport user-friendly. This helped in letting the respondents share and emphasise the points they considered to be important. The interviews were transcribed and coded using NVIVO.

4. Results

The results have been pooled from all respondents. These mostly triangulated well, apart from KI5 and KI6 who expressed less traditional and more critical beliefs. Emphasis has also been placed on

comments that relate specifically to macro-level issues such as policy failures and lack of gender mainstreaming which have a bearing on understanding the gender-based needs of transport users. The following themes emerged after the analysis of the findings:

4.1. Lack of integrated planning or intermodal support

Lack of intermodal support due to the poor integration between transport agencies falls under this category since it reduces transport accessibility. Slightly more than one-third of the KIs confirmed that there is a lack of organised regulatory framework. However, they shared different reasons behind this lack of integration. KI2 blamed the government for not subsidising public transport, causing its downfall:

Previously the government used to allocate funds for public transport in each of its Five-Year plans, but then the government shifted the responsibility of transport to the private sector since the 1970s. At present, we are not being given any incentive from the government (KI2).

KI7, the chief consultant on the upcoming mass-transit project called Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), shared that there is no master plan for the city and no transport model to facilitate its economic growth:

There is no transport model for Karachi. I have been working for two years now. Never have I seen a land-use plan for the city. There is no public transport in Karachi. There has never been any integration between land use and transport planning. Transport works like blood in your body; if blood is not circulated, your body is paralysed. Karachi is currently paralysed (KI7).

This lack of coordination and integrated planning was linked with poor governance and the inability to integrate transport services under one department as hinted by most of the non-governmental representatives. The informal nature of public transport resulted in not only poor accountability but also a lack of coordination between civic agencies (KI6). Thus, it was difficult to understand the roles of different authorities or identify the scope of their responsibilities, making them less accountable. One-third of the KIs expressed dissatisfaction with how the agencies worked in silos, for example:

There are separate agencies working for the construction of roads, authorising route permits, and planning for new transport projects, which have affiliations with federal,

provincial and city-level governments, with no coordination between them. No surprise then the mess we are facing here (KI4).

The lack of holistic planning gave birth to unsustainable urban trends including increased car ownership (KI4) and constructing expressways or dislocating illegal encroachments (KI5) and therefore failed to resolve urban issues that cut across disciplines.

4.2. Disregarding women's struggle

The transport sector is visibly male-dominated [44] (p. 39). As a result, there is poor awareness, and little concern relating to the gender-based mobility needs of women, e.g. when the KIs discuss gender segregation inside the buses as a solution to harassment (KI1, KI2, and KI10). Several KIs implied that sexual harassment was something that women needed to 'tolerate' as it was part of the culture. KI10 criticised women for not being hypervigilant in removing themselves from sources of harassment and not being sufficiently assertive in demanding their rights or reporting harassment. They were blind to these unmet mobility needs of women and displayed a tokenistic commitment to women's safety only through segregation inside the buses. This not only failed to protect women from harassment but was implemented in such a way as to reinforce gender inequality. Their overt gender bias not only deprived women of equal job opportunities but also reinforced their caregiving roles and led to a poorer quality of life.

4.3. Lack of female representation

It was seen that all of the transport-related positions, were occupied by men, and even the locations of their offices were not designed to accommodate women. As a result, 1/3rd of the experts repeatedly overlooked the needs of women or displayed insensitivity towards the issues faced by them. For example, the data on accidents that was provided by E3 was not only underreported as he himself agreed but lacked sex-aggregated records too. Moreover, his emphasis on the increased number of motorbikes does not show any consideration towards women who cannot be dependent on motorbikes:

'The number of motorcycles has increased many times. The real reason is that these are economical and are now available at very low rates, especially those that are manufactured in China. So now everyone can afford a motorcycle.' (KI3).

KI10, who was employed in the technical capacity for an under-construction transport project, believed that the transport sector needs technological improvements for now:

This gender element might come after 30-40 years and cannot be integrated with current planning (KI10).

Thus, KI3 and KI10 ignored that living in an unequal society; not everyone will be able to feel socially inclusive through technological advancement in transport. These factors displayed the absence of women in the current decision-making and planning processes. On the other hand, KI5 was able to relate the difficulties that women face on transport with the cultural setup:

We have to understand that we had a feudal society that fostered patriarchy. Now, although we have moved to a new economic system, the social aura has still not altered completely. So the economic system has changed, but now the social structure has to be changed, and we need to bring equality in transport so that we can support women (KI5).

4.4. Lack of gender mainstreaming/ Sexual harassment

It was not easy to focus the discussion on the more social aspects of transport since technical matters dominated the discussion with most of the experts. Nevertheless, there were instances (45%) where they pointed out the issues related to sexual harassment of women. KI1, KI2, and KI10 purported that women's safety is ensured through legalising gender segregation inside the buses:

We don't grant a route permit to an owner if they don't have a partition between the men and women's compartments since it is mandatory as per the Motorway Ordinance (KI1).

(RULES 65 (1)(1) OF THE WEST PAKISTAN MOTOR VEHICLE RULES, 1969,
GOVERNMENT OF SINDH
PERMIT IN RESPECT A PARTICULAR STAGE CARRIAGE
PART 'B'
SUMMARY TO BE CARRIED ON THE VEHICLES

Regional Transport Authority, Karachi P. St. P.N. _____

1. Name and Address of holder. _____
2. Registration Mark _____
3. Date of Expiry _____
4. Conditions: (a) Route No. _____

 (b) Maximum number of Passengers _____
 (c) Fares: _____
 Rate as prescribed by Government _____
 Whether fare table is to be displayed YES
 (d) Whether time table is to be _____
 i) Observed YES
 ii) Displayed YES
 (e) Carriage of goods Subject to Rules.
 (f) Use as contract Carriage No
 i) Within the region Karachi
 ii) Outside the region.
 (g) Other special conditions:-
 i) The permit holder shall pay to the passenger as compensation.
 a) In case of death, a sum of rupees sixteen thousand to the legal representatives of the deceased passenger: and
 b) i) In case of injury, the amount specified in the thirteen schedule of the ordinance.
 ii) First to box shall be carried in the vehicle in the public interest
 iii) Maximum halting time at a terminus in respect of buses is 10 minutes.
 iv) There shall be closed partition in buses between ladies and gents compartment.
 v) The bus in question shall be equipped with fire extinguisher.

5. (Here paste receipt from the Regional Transport Authority for payment of fee for the permit) Rs. _____ Paid, pay book S. No. _____ Dated _____

Secretary
Regional Transport Authority, Karachi.

Dated: _____ Renewal
Renewed upto _____

Note in terms of the provincial
Ombudsman (Mohtasib) Sindh
Karachi order NO. POS/ 105/93-
G-203 dated 29.9.2001.

Figure 1. A sample of the route permit application

The template of route permit was shared by him too as shown in Figure 1. sex-based segregation inside the buses was thus projected as a solution to harassment and was heavily implemented. It was also realised that gender segregation had been promoted widely in the existing system as well as in future projects:

Even in these new buses, it will be impossible to eliminate harassment. Women don't work in most cases, and if they face harassment, they don't take a stand. (KI10).

Thus, he criticised women for not being hypervigilant and assertive in demanding their rights related to their safety while travelling on public transport. The gender pattern of social disadvantage was not recognized by the policymakers leading to new projects being planned without considering gender-inclusivity. There was a tendency to justify the current failure in understanding and incorporating females' voices by blaming women for not being persuasive and active in demanding their rights. There was a lack of gender sensitivity, which was manifest in the insensitivity shown towards sexual harassment and the view that females' journeys were purposeless or unnecessary. The male experts (27%) repeatedly questioned the purpose of trips for women and the need for them to be outside. It was evident that most of them were assuming that what women do is less important than men and therefore does not need to be facilitated:

In my opinion, men have a lot of responsibility in the family, and somehow women cannot perform so many tasks. Women, on the other hand, come out for less important tasks as the nature of their work is mostly related to the household. (KI).

Apart from stigmatising the movement of women, another popular argument for controlling women's mobility regards their lack of safety in public spaces due to the chances of being exposed to unknown men, which can become a source of shame for families ^[45]. This was recognised by KI5:

Females' mobility imperatives define their jobs, not their credentials. When they are not able to find transport, they settle for underpaid jobs.

4. Discussion

This study has attempted to gather and understand the perspectives of transport stakeholders with regard to the transport problems in Karachi. The interviews were conducted with a small sample of experts who either worked in transport planning or were involved on the operational side. Only a few

of them were urban social activists and academics. The expert interviews provided critical entry points for building on the understanding of factors causing ignorance towards mobility barriers faced by women.

Transport is not a part of larger urban planning and therefore is not integrated with other related sectors as narrated by the representatives from both the non-governmental as well as governmental organisations. The future of transport did not appear promising, and half of the experts highlighted that these projects are not sustainable since they do not consider the impact on land use or traffic management. Not only has this resulted in a spatial mismatch requiring long, potentially unsafe walks to bus stops ^[16].

Although the key informants could not agree on the number of buses, they all agreed that their number has declined, despite a continuous increase in population, causing a reduction in route coverage and an increase in the use of paratransit and private vehicles. However, their impact on day-to-day life has not been sufficiently explored in the literature. The limited number of routes (and vehicles) leads to poor access to basic amenities. KI7 noted the effects of this on the economy. However, comprehensive research identifying the routes that need to be covered by public transport is still lacking and even the relevant data showing mobility trends is either missing or do not show a gender breakdown

Generally, there was an acute lack of awareness with regard to the issues faced by females which was evident from the dominance of males in all the decision-making positions. This trend not only reduces the employment opportunities for females but also results in their needs not being reflected in the transport planning resulting in gender-exclusive provisions and also an attitude of criticising females for not reporting the cases of sexual harassment as done by KI10. Thus subtly, there was a tendency to blame females for not being cooperative, although most of the time, they are the ones who undertake the most tiring and unsafe journeys ^[46].

The burden of care that falls upon females due to the cultural setup was also not understood by any of the experts. for example, understanding women's care responsibilities during urban planning, '...can make it easier for women to engage fully in the paid workforce... when we account for female socialisation in the design of our open spaces and public activities, we again save money in the long run by ensuring women's long-term mental and physical health' ^[47] (p.66). Unfortunately, discussions regarding altering power relations and improving women's access to resources/ capital by offering them safety as well as equal rights to make decisions has not gained much attention in policy

circles ^[4.8]. Therefore, the reforms made in the transport sector are mostly rudimentary in making an impact on the lives of people, particularly those facing disadvantages ^[4.9].

This can be a clear example of Levy's understanding of ignoring 'deep distributional' issues in transport by negating or overlooking the socially constructed gender and power relations in public and private space ^[37] (p.52). The challenges or barriers in acknowledging deep distributional issues in transport can be discussed using the case of Karachi. This is evident in a general lack of gender equality, interest in women's needs and lack of representation contribute to a poor understanding of women's mobility barriers, despite the country's commitment to sustainable development initiatives. It can thus be argued that the existing policy and organisational frameworks do not follow a deep distributional approach which is much needed to overcome the transport inequalities and adhere to international standards of human rights. Thus, implementing any changes in the transport sector, requires engagement with the debates on the attitudes towards women's mobility held by the policy-makers and operators of public transport.

The results showed that most experts agreed to the fact that public transport is rudimentary in Karachi, considering the city to be 'paralysed' by the lack of an integrated transport system. Added to this was the complete lack of integration between different bodies working on transport at the municipal, provincial, and national levels, which was evident in widely varying estimates of the number of buses. This allowed corruption to flourish due to the lack of transparency and clarity of roles.

Moreover, the male KIs, occupying powerful positions in the transport sector, repeatedly questioned the purpose of women's journeys and the need for them to be outside (e.g. KI2). For them, women's lives are, and should be centred in the home and therefore, their mobility was beneath their consideration. One hinted that the preferential treatment given to men was justified based on their more extensive responsibilities. Due to this mindset, women are not facilitated in becoming independent, as it jars with the firmly upheld belief in men's superiority. Going forward, this means that new projects will also prioritise the needs of a male traveller and support gender inequality which justifies smaller compartments for women in buses since they are also led by a group of conservative men.

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

This section is not mandatory but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex. New policies and projects in Karachi will not create an impact without focusing on the unique personal and socio-cultural disadvantages faced by women since many of the problems alluded to in the above sections relating to 'macro-level' issues are caused by cultural restrictions on women, poverty and poor governance. Thus, the following policy recommendations can be made:

- There is a need for a governing body that can integrate the various levels of planning, operation and management of the transport system and bring the new initiatives in line with existing land use planning.
- Reliable data to show the impact of poor traffic regulations or poor governance, on the incidents of road accidents, and crime is also needed.
- There is a need to conduct a gender impact assessment of current and future policies and practices, which must be a joint effort between public and private bodies. Transport planners and decision-makers need to understand more about the multiple inequalities that women face besides the structural issues of transport since 'urban journeys are not ends in themselves but are tools that women may use to improve their chances of participating in society and perhaps enhancing their quality of life' ^[50] (p. 73). Policy initiatives informed by (cultural, social and economic factors influencing) commuters' preferences, perceptions and travel behaviour can lead to measures towards social inclusion ^[51] (p. 2014). However, this requires a nuanced understanding of the long-term effects of the lack of gender-inclusive measures. Some of the key efforts can be to create more acceptance for females' use of public spaces by making sure that the use of transport is not heavily gendered, and females can also benefit from heavily male-dominated motorbikes. Such initiatives can encourage female representation both in the transport industry as well as in transport users.

Conclusively, there have been no attempts to incorporate gender differences in mobility patterns and behaviours into transport planning in Karachi, which prevent females from benefiting from the cultural and economic opportunities offered by the city. Therefore, there is a need to address this gap in scholarship by evaluating the barriers faced by females using the case of transport in Karachi. Their social exclusion needs to be considered in the transport policy-making process, and there is a need to consider more innovative indicators to on breaking away from the gender stereotypes at organisational levels and create equitable policies to bring social justice.

Statements and Declarations

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