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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of female domestic workers in the case of Karachi who use bus as their mode of commute. The key objectives of the study include; (a) to assess the mobility attributes that women experience in their daily working life in Karachi (b) to assess the challenges faced by the female domestic workers in Karachi during typical bus rapid transit trips, and (c) to address the recommended strategies on improving the mobility for female domestic workers in Karachi. The research design selected for this study was primary qualitative research and the data collection technique chosen was interview. Total 6 questions were asked to the participants and total 8 interviews were conducted. The participants selected for interview were domestic workers from different locations and areas as well as having different years of experience travelling in bus. The data analysis technique was thematic analysis and three themes were formulated i.e. challenges faced by domestic workers, the mobility attributes, and Strategies for improving transportation for female workers. The findings of the study revealed that the challenges faced by female domestic workers include high fares, harassment, abuse as well as exploitation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In under developing countries, women encounter more limitations in mass urban transportation/commutability. Under the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 by the UN, provision of sustainable, accessible, economical, and safe transport systems is articulated, specifically for the disadvantaged groups (UN SDGs, 2015). Around the globe, several cities have been facing mobility issues in their infrastructures and have been working on resolving their urban mobility problems with greater mass transit modes, specifically bus rapid transit (BRT) considered as the high-speed bus system for dedicated routes. For developing countries like Pakistan, the urban mobility of women in general and working females is specifically crucial since the country has been subjected to gender inequality, experience alarming rates of rapid urbanization, and have constrained resources for building mobility infrastructures (Iqbal, 2019). Around 90% of the urban population in the world have seen growth and is predicted to develop more till 2050 in the developing countries, with the growing trends in Africa and South Asia (UN DESA, 2018). Pakistan is among the list of 9 nations on the 3rd rank where more than 50% of this estimated increase in population is projected. Across major international indices, the global ranking of Pakistan has been low in terms of gender gap, urban mobility issues, and traffic problems (Malik et al., 2020). For an overarching view, the global average scores also revealed that Pakistan is one of those countries that face with offering good mobility support to their public as well as a traffic issues are also on the rise.

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It is indicated that if all nations could complement the development/progress towards gender gap, it may give rise to 11% increase (equating to around 12 trillion US dollars) in 2025 in the annual global GDP (MGI, 2015). Approximately 55 million women which is nearly accounting for about 26% are working as labour forces, having a age in between 15 to 16 years, which is around 36% of the overall population of the country, leaving as a contributor to the economy (UNWP, 2016). According to the World Economic Forum's data for 2020, out of 153 countries, Pakistan is ranked at 147 in the list with respect to gender gap in labour force engagement (WEF, 2018). The gender proportion with respect to literacy rates i.e. male and female is however improved, but yet needs to improve more which is accounted for 0.65 in comparison with global ratio of 0.89 (WEF, 2018). These educational and economic gaps for women can be lowered by the incorporation of gender-sensitive approach in public transportation systems, ultimately elevating the contribution towards economy of the country as a whole (WDD and UNWP, 2018). Considering the situation given in the background of this article, this research aims to assess the mobility attributes that women experience in their daily working life, the challenges faced by the female domestic workers in Karachi, Pakistan during typical bus rapid transit trips as well as recommended strategies on improving the mobility for female domestic workers in Karachi.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact Female Workers Disproportionality and Mode of Transportation

Female domestic labour is one of the main vulnerable and marginalized groups in urban areas of Pakistan. Due to lack of legal social safety rights given to female domestic workers in Pakistan, they face mobility issues, work hours and salary constrains set by their company, leading to more causes of facing exploitation and abuse (Malik et al., 2020). Around thousands of domestic labour in Karachi, particularly females travel on regular basis for working purposes and spend around 10%-50% of their salary on the transportation separately in a month according to the research survey by Haq (2023). The research also found that these female domestic workers lives in low-income neighborhoods and dense areas for example; Shah Rasool Colony offers a balanced line of labours for upper-class households in DHA and Clifton. These are particularly considered as low-income neighborhoods' with lack of resources and accessibility to sufficient transportation infrastructures for easy commute. However, the transportation policies have been offered to female workers in Pakistan. The free transport policy in 1971 was established in Karachi which implied that any individual have the opportunity to by a bus and request for the route allowance subsequently (The Urban Resource Centre, Hasan and Raza, 2015). This has led them the drivers to buy their bus on loans which resulted in increased expenses due to maintenance and risks of the loan, switching to crowded routes, charging high fares, and overloading of passengers in order to make profits.

Infrastructures are relational and gendered, which implies to the disconnected accessibility to women can be sensed as a kind of 'infrastructural abuse' by social exclusion from both their city spaces and their homes (Ahmed and Datta, 2019). This is more suitable to commute, considering that the female workers from low-income households depend more on unprotected mini buses that usually disembark from or arrive at bus stops in a certain distance from their workplace location. Mobility is frequently projected through the lens of empowerment, independence, and agency. It was presumed that the mobility is crucial for full social and economic citizenship (Legacy, 2013). However, in the case of local female workers who are forced to use unsafe transportation services, wait, and walk, i.e. considered as forced mobility, tend to be more coerced, involuntary, and stressful for female domestic workers in Karachi (Haq, 2023). In addition to this, it is also found that use of public transport such as wagons or buses is more common is women in Lahore approximately 30% in comparison with men who travel beyond walking distances (Anwar and Tahir, 2020). In addition to this, the other modes of public transportation such as Qing is (motorcycle rickshaws) or auto-rickshaws are also considered as the most used public transportation medium by women in comparison with men, particularly for female domestic workers Qing is (motorcycle rickshaws) is considered economical in addition to public bus. It was also indicated in the survey by Anwar and Tahir (2020) female domestic workers tend to coordinate with other workers from their neighborhoods to share auto-rickshaws with the them in order to lower the costs of travel to and from the workplace.

Challenges Faced by Female Workers

Several research studies have been carried out on assessing and exploring the challenges faced by female domestic workers linked to bus transportation and mass transit usage such as harassment issues and personal safety concerns, which are considered higher in women in comparison with men (Allen et al., 2018). In addition

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to this, similar findings have also been indicated in the research study by Mejía-Dorantes and Villagran (2020) in which gender equality is found to be a key concern for commute. Moreover, the study by Loukaitou-Sideris (2016) have also shown the issues linked to gendered transport and mobility which impact on the women more as compared to working men. Gekoski et al. (2017) in their study also indicated that rates of harassment for female workers who travel in public bus or other modes of transportation publically available accounted for about 15%-95% with greater levels for developing economy, most probably because of gender norms and male dominating culture. The research study by Fontal et al. (2019) also found that women faced with challenges i.e. violence or harassment when travelling in a public transport. In addition to this, the harassment experiences have also been show in higher rates faced by working women in African and Asian cities (WDD and UNWP, 2018; Gautam et al., 2019).

Women in Pakistan commonly have to face issues of hindrance, harassment, and safety towards education and work, poor accessibility, social reputation, and constrained spaces in stations and buses (Hoor-Ul-Ain, 2019). In addition to this, the research studies by Sajjad et al. (2017) and JICA (2017) have also indicated that safety and harassment are the key challenges reported by female workers who travel in public transports. Because of harassment fears, females' workers tend to refuse or lower their use of public commute form travel and prefer using private modes of commute for safe travel and reduce harassment issues (Gallup Pakistan, 2017). The study by Anwar and Tahir (2020) also indicated the harassment fears have been heightened due to non-lighted bus stops and stations in Pakistan and their need of walking long distances. In addition to this, the survey also found that women who travel through public transports in Pakistan face with challenges such as physical touch, follow women to their destination, pass comments, and men stare while passing through the bus stop. This implies that mode of transportation i.e. bus have found to be still a challenge for working women to travel safe since they feel insecure, prone to harassment, commentary, stare by men, and physical abuse which makes them uncomfortable during their working days. This can be due to the rush hours, since more traffic and crowd on the bus stops as well as in public transport give rise to harassment experiences by women and this impact on their memories and left permanent mark in their memories (Ceccato and Paz, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Different types of research designs can be included in a study, however, the research objectives, research questions, and the nature of the study are significant factors that leads to selection of research design particularly. Since the research aims to assess the perceptions of female domestic workers and the issues of bus transport in the case of Karachi, the most appropriate research design was primary qualitative research. The primary qualitative research design provides comprehensive information and valuable insights through non-statistical form of data generated through the real experiences and stances of participants (Sileyew, 2019). Therefore, the qualitative nature of the study helped in getting more thorough understandings on the challenges faced by the female domestic workers in Karachi during typical bus rapid transit trips, the mobility attributes that women experience in their daily working life and suggestions on the strategies which assist in improving the mobility for female domestic workers in Karachi. The quantitative research design and secondary qualitative research design are not included in this study since the research aimed at assessing the perceptions of female domestic workers in Karachi, therefore perceptions can be feasibly studied by using a qualitative research design (Jeffer, 2022).

Data Collection Method

The data collection method is one of the most crucial aspects of a research since it assist in gathering more useful and valuable data to answer relative research questions and find meaningful conclusions to research objectives. Since the research aims to assess and investigate the perceptions of female domestic workers in Karachi with respect to key challenges faced by them during typical bus rapid transit trips as well as the mobility attributes that women experience in their daily working life, the interview approach as data collection technique was more feasible and reasonable (Houston, 2021). The interview approach is one of the most useful forms of qualitative research data collection since it assist in obtaining comprehensive data on the research questions and assist participants in understanding each question appropriate and reduce any uncertainties in their mind (Bhat, 2018). Open-end questionnaire form was used to ask questions to the participants and a total of 6 interview questions were formulated for this study.

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Sampling technique and Size

The sampling technique found useful for this study was convenience sampling technique since it is a non-probability sampling method which enable researchers to involve participants in the data collection process that are easily and readily available for their participation in interview session (Fleetwood, 2018). Since the research aims to assess the challenges faced by the female domestic workers in Karachi, the interview participants were 8 who were domestic workers from different locations and areas as well as having different years of experience travelling in bus. This type of demographic factor was considered feasible in assessing the emerging trends in the mobility attributes and challenges faced by the female domestic workers in Karachi.

Data Analysis Technique

There are different kinds of data analysis techniques used by investigators based on the research questions, nature, complexity, and objectives of the research that are classified into non-statistical and statistical methods (Taherdoost, 2020). However, for this study non-statistical data analysis was used i.e. thematic analysis since it assist in formulation of code patterns and themes that help in gaining meaningful and valuable insights on the research subject. Since the research was focused on assessing the mobility attributes as well as the challenges encountered by female domestic workers in Karachi, thematic analysis assisted in forming different themes based on the re-occurring codes and patterns in the transcripts (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition to this, thematic analysis also offered a comprehensive understanding on the useful responses gathered through the participants to identify the most re-occurring challenges in the mobility of female domestic workers and what mobility attributes contribute to these.

Ethical Consideration

Certain ethical considerations were taken into place since the primary data collection method was chosen for this study. First and most crucial one was confidentiality and privacy of each individual involved in the data collection process, which implies to privacy of personal information and identity of every individual in the interview process and after the research. For this purpose, only general demographic data was involved for instance; location of working and experience of travelling in bus in order to make sure that only those participants were involved who had a significant years of experience travelling in public transport.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Thematic table

Themes	Author	Aim of study	Methods	Findings
Theme 1: Challenges faced by domestic workers	Faiz et al. (2020)	To understand the changing gendered motilities, spaces as well as subjectivities	Longitudinal ethnographic study	There are relational reconfigurations of the gendered motilities, subjectivities and spaces in the community which are contoured through the subsequent shift in the system of the local mobility, as per which the vehicular mobility tends to replace walking considering it a means for accessing the highway.
	Iqbal et al. (2020)	To find out different aspects of the gender transport poverty that are through the young working women in Karachi	Qualitative study	There is a poor systematized public transportation service in Karachi, having less number of buses. This leaves the private bus owners, run the poor-quality decontrolled services.
	Amber et al. (2020)	To study impact of providing better public transport to females	Qualitative analysis	The mass transit provision in Pakistan is poor and works without regulatory bodies.
	Moulabuksh et al. (2022)	To study the issues of female mobility in Pakistan	Interviews	Female labours face issues in traveling due to cost and long distances. The bus stops are far from their place and this results into long walk for them

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Theme 2: Assessment of the mobility attributes	Cook and Butz (2021)	To discuss the gender-disaggregated impacts of the poor design of transport, as well as lack of the personal agency on the mobility, to emphasise on the social including the cultural attitudes which are faced through the female employees	Qualitative study	In Karachi, there are poorly linked urban planning, ineffective structure of governance as well as investment in the transportation system. This has let the growth of unregulated as well as ungovernable poor transport sector.
	Hoor-Ul-Ain (2020)	To assess the opinions of public, attitude as well as travel behavioral choices of the residents regarding bringing improvement in the public transport difficulties in Karachi	Qualitative analysis	Karachi is a megacity which faces many transportation issues that range from the extensive urbanization as well as inefficient infrastructures.
Theme 3: Strategies on improving transportation for female workers	Malik et al. (2020)	To discuss the challenges in women mobility and measures for it.	Qualitative analysis	The findings revealed that the system needs to bring change and plan better infrastructural changes in the city
	Khan et al. (2023)	To discuss the strategies regarding women safe mobility in Pakistan	Qualitative analysis	Strict law enforcement is important to ensure that the use of minibuses in Karachi must meet the traveling standards.

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Challenges faced by domestic workers

This is the first theme of the study in which the researcher has discussed about the significant challenges that are faced by the domestic female workers in terms of disconnected mobility and lack of transportation. One of the participants stated,

I live in Shah Rasool Colony. I have a family of 5 members-two daughters, one son, me, and my husband. Only I and my husband earn. I go to Clifton daily by bus. However, my house is very far from the bus stop. My husband takes me there on the bike then I take the bus and reach my workplace. It is such a heavy burden since much of my salary is spent on traveling. Fares are high now, we already live hand-to-mouth, and traveling issues are really troublesome.

The female domestic workers refer to one of the highly marginalized as well as vulnerable groups in the Karachi. As they do not have the lawful social protections, the salaries of the female domestic workers as well as their work hours are set through their employers. This tends to render much vulnerable to the probability of abuse as well as exploitation. Moreover, in Karachi, various female domestic workers tend to travel regularly to their work for which they have to spend almost 50% of the income on the transport solely (Faiz et al., 2020). These workers live in highly dense, and low-income areas like Shah Rasool Colony. In this area, many workers are employed in the upper-income areas such as Clifton as well as DHA for household work. Verily, the low-income areas having limited accessibility to the sufficient physical infrastructure is a big issue.

Another participant was aged and shared her experience that,

I have been here for years and problems of mobility have not changed. We are poor and getting even poorer because of the extra cost of traveling. You know, these bus drivers take risks in our lives. They ask us to stand at the door and even at times, give offer to sit in the men's area. Over there, we get harassed. We are tired of it but no solution to it.

In the year 1971, there had been a free transport policy in Karachi. It referred that anybody can purchase a bus, as well as apply for the route permit. The drivers chose to buy reasonable minibuses on loans that time. As they had to bear the risks of loans as well as expenses of maintenance, most of the bus owners maximize their

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profits while overloading the passengers (Iqbal et al., 2020). They even charge extra fares, as well as switch to the crowded routes. The drivers want a maximum number of people to be on buses. Hence, men take advantage of it and harass women in crowds. This has become a really common practice.

We do not trust this bus system. There are no regulations for better transport services. We, the underprivileged, have no other option but to use these unsafe minibuses. There is poor transportation infrastructure. We have to stand and wait for buses as men are sitting at the bus stops, gazing at us. All political parties failed to bring change for betterment.

Limited regulation as well as accountability is there for the bus routes. There is no fixed timing, even the behaviors of the drivers as well as conductors are very rude. Moreover, a lack of regulation is also found in the architecture of the bus stops which never featured any of the information regarding the schedules, maps, routes, or even fares related to the buses on stop (Amber et al. (2020). Thus, the bus stops are completely disconnected from the organizations of the bus, their drivers, conductors, as well as the official regulations. Hence, the domestic workers tend to learn regarding the bus routes totally from their experience.

The infrastructures are found gendered which means disconnected accessibility to them is felt in the form of the infrastructural violence through the women by the social exclusion from their houses as well as the city spaces (Moulabuksh et al., 2022). It is relevant to the transportation; as the women belonging to the low-income households are dependent upon the unsafe minibuses which usually arrive at debark from the bus stops which are distant to the work stations. Mobility is also framed by the lens of the agency, individuality, as well as empowerment. It is considered that the movement is needed for the complete economic as well as social citizenship. However, forced mobility, like the domestic workers are having, bound to walk and wait long, later use the unsafe transportation, is stressful, instinctive, as well as pressure. The respondents also blamed the political parties, higher inflation rates, moral policing, as well as inaction by the local police for their views regarding the security of the public buses. However, the respondents were intimately dependent on the similar public system of transportation.

Theme 2: Assessment of the mobility attributes

This theme discusses the mobility attributes in Karachi. One of the participants said,

Karachi bus stops are poorly made without any planning. They are really at a far distance from the central point. If we have to walk that much, then what is the use of such bus stops. That is why, people ask to stop the bus at any point as per their convenience. Some of the bus drivers do so, whereas others just continue driving till the stop comes.

Two types of the bus stops are there in Karachi, one is built having a standard bench as well as shade under a big advertisement board (Cook and Butz, 2021). On the other hand, there are the ones having no structure, just an understanding that it is a bus stop where the bus usually commons and stops for passengers. The respondent reported that they stand on the road side, wave the buses to slow down, and then get over the bus. Built bus stops are generally located near the main roads (Cook and Butz, 2021). They are at a distance from low-income areas where the domestic workers live. For reaching a built bus stop, the females have to walk over a long distance from their houses to find the bus stop over their routes. The domestic workers usually walk for 30 minutes however, have to wait for 45 minutes for the bus. In addition, no guarantee is there that a bus will come on time, or space will be available for them to sit or stand.

One of the respondents said,

I am a 45-year-old lady who was about to alight from the bus. However, the bus driver had braked hardly and I fell on the road. I even got an injury on my knee.

This shows that there are no laws followed regarding facilitating the public through better transport service.

Another participant explained,

We cannot walk here, or sit at bus stops as there are security concerns. Urban planning is pathetic. We get robbed on overhead bridges. Thus, we cross main roads running and putting our lives at risk.

The reliance of women on the buses is inextricably linked to the state of the sidewalks. Moreover, walkability refers to a measure of having a friendly-walking area regarding having access to the shades, clean as well as clear sidewalks, pedestrian bridges, and public toilets. However, these things are absent in Karachi bus stops (Hoor-Ul-Ain, 2019). Considering the urban planning which caters to the needs of the private cars,

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pedestrian bridges and sidewalks, are almost impossible to get. This renders most of the women susceptible to the fast-moving cars for saving their time as well as crossing the busy roads. The public spaces are animated through the factors of time, environment, location as well as people. When the bus stops are made as intensely lit, reachable, as well as safe spaces, the women are able to use them having a sense of security. Such common factors have an important role to improve the security while decreasing the crime rates.

Theme 3: Strategies for improving transportation for female workers

This is the last theme of the study in which, the researcher has discussed the strategies for improving transportation for female workers. One of the participants said,

We want to have safe buses, a large area for women sitting, and bus stops at nearby locations.

Karachi needs to have a better transportation infrastructure. For this, the Ministry of transportation must look into it and plan accordingly. The issues highlighted must be addressed with the formation of bus stops on the main roads but near to the underprivileged areas. This will help in reducing their cost, and walk (Malik et al., 2020). There is a need to have a system as per which, the buses come on time and they are driven safely instead of taking a risk on the lives of such workers.

We demand for safety and security to eradicate the mobility issues.

The women are deprived of this basic need of safe traveling. Hence, there is a need to have safer bus stops and buses in the city. Minibuses are broken yet are running on roads and no one is stopping it. All this shows poor planning and implementation of the governing bodies. Karachi must negotiate with World Bank and other funding bodies who can give it aid with which, it can change this poor traveling system (Khan et al., 2023).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are discussed in the context of the objectives of the study. The research has emphasized that the minibuses are highly used as well as affordable kind of the transport for the female domestic workers in Karachi. Bus stops tend to fit into a big geometric puzzle of the transit operations (Brohi et al., 2023). Moreover, the bus stops are places of facilitating the movement as well as mobility. As a matter of fact, Karachi is dependent upon cars, and the ordinary citizens who tend to have limited or poor accessibility to the personal vehicles. They suffer from the highly unsafe as well as poor public transport. Considering the various challenges of the public transport at Karachi, such broken bus stops are known as the minor issues, however for the female domestic workers, to walk for long hours but not having access to the public spaces as well as shaded areas, is problematic. Eventually, an extensive knowledge gap is there related to the transport needs of the ordinary citizens (Iqbal, 2023). There is a disconnect that begins at the bus stop because of the absence of the transport information, as well as feedback through the users to the transport planners regarding tackling the mentioned issues.

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper aimed at conducting an assessment of the disconnected mobility Infrastructures. For this, a Qualitative analysis was conducted using the perceptions of the female domestic workers as well as their problems regarding bus transport in Karachi. Interviews were conducted with the female domestic workers residing in different underprivileged locations. Their perceptions have helped the researcher in reaching to the conclusion that in Karachi, the low-income areas have limited accessibility to the sufficient physical infrastructure. Various female domestic workers tend to travel regularly to their work for which they have to spend almost 50% of the income on the transport solely. There is no lawful social protection for them. There is even a lack of regulation in the architecture of the bus stops which never featured any of the information regarding the schedules, maps, routes, or even fares related to the buses on the stop. In Karachi, there is forced mobility, like the domestic workers are bound to walk and wait long, and later use the unsafe transportation, which is stressful, instinctive, as well as pressured.

Karachi needs to have a better transportation infrastructure. Thus, the Ministry of transportation must look into it and plan accordingly. Karachi must negotiate with the World Bank and other funding bodies who can give it aid with which, it can change this poor traveling system. Women tend to spend much of their time as well as money on the transportation however they are not getting any of the benefits of the better-quality transport like timesaving, safer rides, and comfortable buses. Thus, it is suggested that the models of transport must

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consider the social exclusion of the women because of the forced decision-making being a factor in the social disparities in the transportation. Moreover, the lack of agency of women regarding mobility must be focused on the models of the transport poverty while understanding the overall barriers which the women. It can also be measured while considering changes in Master Plan of Karachi, introducing mass transits for all at reasonable rates.

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Interview Questions

- Where do you live and work? Do you have bus stop near your place?
- How much you have to spend on traveling? Is it affordable for you?
- What are the challenges faced by the domestic workers in mobility and transportation?
- Are there any regulations for having accessible transportation system?
- How are the bus stops made? Are they safe?
- What are the strategies to improve the transportation for the female domestic workers?