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HOW TO EASE WOMEN'S FEAR OF TRANSPORTATION ENVIRONMENTS

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Women represent an important share of the transit consumer market, but fear and concerns over their safety often influence their travel decisions. Women register higher levels of fear of victimization in transit settings than men do, which affects their travel patterns and modal choices, and it often makes them prefer the security of private automobiles over the unpredictability of public transportation. This study assesses how research and practice have responded to women's travel safety concerns and discusses best practices from the U.S. and overseas that respond to such concerns.

Study Methods

The study reviewed the literature on women's concerns about transit safety, surveyed 131 transit agencies in the US, interviewed 16 representatives of women's interest groups, and examined model programs and practices (domestic and international) addressing women's fear of transit environments. The study responds to the following:

- How is fear obstructing women's movement in the city?
- What are the perspectives and needs of women regarding safety from crime in transit environments?
- Are these needs met by transit operators in the U.S.?
- Which are promising research and policy directions for addressing women's fear of transit environments?

Findings

Women have distinct safety/security needs and are fearful of certain transit settings.

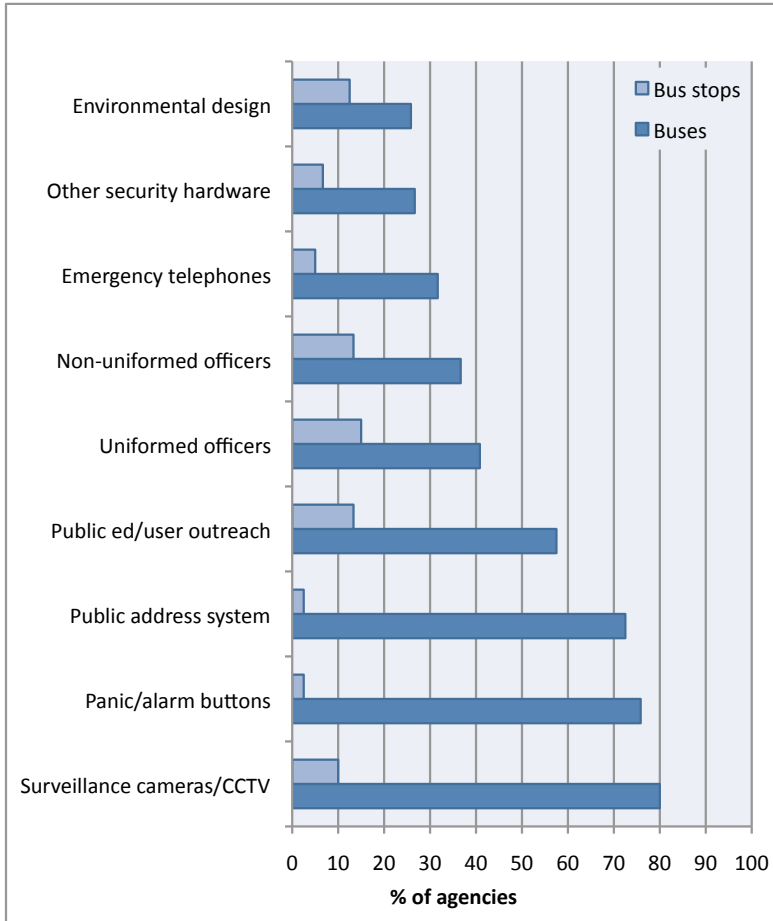
This leads some women to avoid using public transit at specific times or at all. The situation is more acute for particular groups, who because of age, income, type of occupation, sexual preference, and place of residence feel more vulnerable to victimization and harassment than others.

Certain measures help ease women's fear.

The women interviewed outlined a series of design, policing, security technology, education and outreach strategies that would make them feel safer in transit settings, such as lighting bus stops and streets, location of transit stops and design of bus shelters that allows natural surveillance from adjacent establishments, good maintenance and upkeep of transit settings, request-stop programs during late evening hours, real time information on transit vehicle arrival times, public awareness campaigns against violence, and public signs denouncing sexual harassment. Women generally preferred the presence of staff to technological solutions such as CCTV cameras.



Some countries have adopted specific measures and policies tackling women's transit safety needs.



Security Strategies Employed by US Transit Agencies on Buses and at Bus Stops

Very few agencies in the U.S. have programs that specifically target the safety/security needs of women riders. Two-thirds of the transit agencies surveyed stated that women have distinct needs, but only one-third believed that they should initiate programs to address them, and only three had initiated specific programs.

There is a mismatch between the safety/security needs and desires of female transit riders and the types and locations of strategies that transit agencies use. Train platforms, trains, and buses are the focus of security efforts, while the use of safety/security strategies is low at bus stops, even though most women riders report higher levels of anxiety waiting at the bus stop than they do when riding on the transit vehicle.

Policy recommendations:

The study proposes: 1) researcher-practitioner dialogues; 2) incorporation of women's voices in the transit planning process; 3) collaboration between

transit agencies and nonprofits that have women's safety as their mission ; 4) concentration of resources on crime hot spots; 5) safety/security initiatives tailored to the needs of communities; 6) multipronged approaches to safety that utilize environmental design, policing, security technology, education and outreach strategies, and policy initiatives; 7) a "whole journey approach" that considers the safety of all the elements of the transportation system; and 8) pilot programs and policies with the goal of enhancing the safety of women riders.

About the Author

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For more details about the study, download the full report at <http://tiny.cc/2tqmz>