Nudging bystanders to combat sexual harassment in Bangladesh

Project report

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THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM

In Partnership With

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Executive Summary

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and BRAC formed a partnership in February 2018 to apply behavioural insights to BRAC priorities across Bangladesh. The purpose of this partnership, which is supported by the Global Innovation Fund, is among others to build up the capacity of BRAC's Social Innovation Lab to apply behavioural insights in future work.

The first project undertaken under this partnership aimed to **reduce sexual harassment on buses running in Dhaka**, Bangladesh's capital and most populous city. This project was conducted in collaboration with BRTC, the state-owned transport corporation of Bangladesh.

Policy objective

Sexual harassment on public transport is all too common around the world, causing victims direct harm and reducing their opportunities to participate in public life. According to recent research, close to 95% of women in Bangladesh have been sexually harassed while commuting. *Active bystanding* – where onlookers intervene in support of victims – offers a way to reduce the impact of sexual harassment on victims. The expectation of active bystanding might also encourage victims to speak out and deter would-be perpetrators from harassing in the first place.

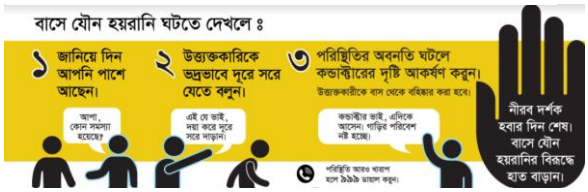
Given the potential benefits, and the proliferation of active bystanding campaigns globally, we designed and tested a scalable intervention to encourage passengers to intervene when sexual harassment occurs.

Intervention

During interviews conducted by BIT and BRAC, many people expressed a willingness and readiness to intervene. However, several behavioural barriers appeared to prevent them from following through, including not knowing how to intervene, and the fear of consequences.

After several rounds of interviews, observations and user-testing, we developed posters, to be stuck inside buses, which aimed to overcome these barriers. The posters used simple infographics to encourage people to intervene and provided them with simple steps to take so that they could do so safely and effectively.

Figure: *Posters designed and stuck on buses*



Trial design

We evaluated the impact of the posters by installing them on over 50 buses run by the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC). We trained enumerators to conduct structured observations onboard these buses and to survey passengers getting off them. We then estimated the impact of the posters by conducting statistical analyses on the data in the weeks immediately before and after the posters were installed.

*In total we observed more than 50 BRTC buses over 12 weekdays, amounting to **790 bus trips**. On these trips, enumerators recorded close to **950 incidents of sexual harassment**. We also conducted **3,518 surveys** with alighting passengers.*

Results

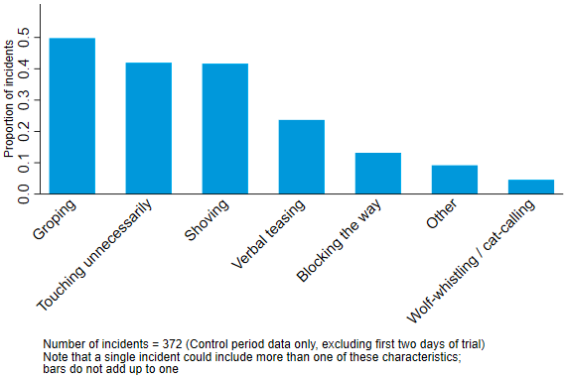
New facts about sexual harassment (pre-intervention findings)

- Overall, 60 percent of bus trips had at least one incident of harassment noticed by enumerators

- Close to one in ten women reported experiencing sexual harassment on the bus trip they had just taken
- Almost all victims of observed harassment were women, while virtually all perpetrators were men
- Over half of the cases reported by participants involved physical harassment
- 90 percent of survey respondents said they would take some form of action if they saw an incident, and around 75 percent agreed that we should reach out to victims
- Unfortunately, we observed active bystanding in only 1 out of every 5 incidents of harassment

These numbers hint to the scale of a problem already suggested by more subjective data collection exercises and confirm the existence of a large "intention-action gap".

Figure: *Proportion of observed incidents by form of harassment (incidents could include multiple forms)*



Number of incidents = 372 (Control period data only, excluding first two days of trial)
Note that a single incident could include more than one of these characteristics; bars do not add up to one

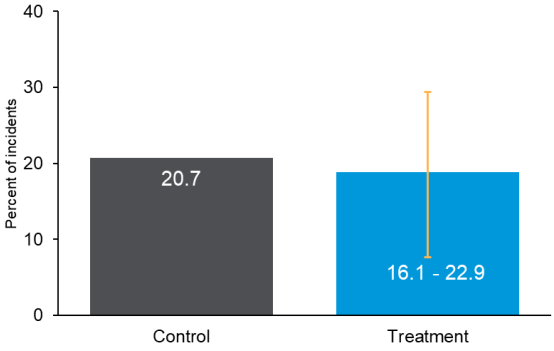
Estimated effects of the posters (post-intervention findings)

The posters seemed to positively impact awareness of sexual harassment and attitudes towards victims:

- The fraction of passengers nominating sexual harassment as their biggest safety concern increased significantly among men (from around 3.5 percent to around 8 percent).
- The proportion of passengers disagreeing with statements justifying or dismissing sexual harassment increased by over 10 percent after the posters were installed.

The change in attitudes did not, however, seem to result in an increase in active bystanding. This finding provides a cautionary tale for many interventions around the world which have been said to be effective based on proven changes in attitudes.

Figure: *Estimated impact of posters on likelihood of observed active bystanding*



Primary analysis, linear regression; N = 943
The treatment bar is labelled with the range of point estimates across models, while the bar height is determined by the median effect across models that control for enumerator experience effects. Error bars span the range of 95% confidence intervals across models.

Finally, we observed a significant decline in the frequency of sexual harassment. Though we cannot conclusively attribute this to the posters, this finding strongly invites further study of the promising deterrent effects of low-cost interventions like the posters we designed.

Recommendations

This project, the first collaboration between BRAC and BIT, demonstrated the feasibility of applying behavioural insights and an adaptive, user-oriented approach to tackle the challenge of sexual harassment in a difficult setting.

It led to three key recommendations:

- **Continue measuring sexual harassment and bystander responses** by refining the methods piloted in this trial. The methods we employed, despite issues linked to their novelty, allowed us to collect unique data on harassment behaviours. Further studies could deepen the understanding of barriers surrounding the fight against gender-based violence.
- **Conduct further testing of the posters** to verify their potential to deter harassment from happening in the first place.
- **Develop and test ways to tackle additional barriers to active bystanding**, for example by correcting misperceptions about other passengers' attitudes.

1 / Introduction

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and BRAC formed a partnership in February 2018 to apply behavioural insights to BRAC priorities across Bangladesh. The purpose of this partnership, which is supported by the Global Innovation Fund, is to build up the capacity of BRAC staff to independently apply behavioural approaches and rigorous impact evaluation through 'learning-by-doing'.

This report summarises activities and findings from the first project undertaken under this partnership, which aimed to **reduce gender-based harassment on buses running in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital and most populous city**. This project was conducted in collaboration with BRTC, the only state-owned transport corporation of Bangladesh.

Our project was conducted in three distinct phases, whereby we (i) conducted preliminary research with passengers to identify the extent of the harassment problem and the reasons why passengers might not intervene when they witness harassment; (ii) built upon insights from behavioural science to design interventions aimed at encouraging bystanders to intervene when they see harassment on their journey; and (iii) tested our intervention on selected BRTC buses across Dhaka to measure its effect on the occurrence of harassment.

2 / Background

Sexual harassment on public transport

In Bangladesh, there are generally no designated bus stops or ticketing booths for buses. Buses pick up and drop off passengers from busy intersection points, often onto running traffic. The crowded bus space during peak hours moreover makes it difficult for women to board the bus let alone to get a seat.

As a result, according to research conducted by BRAC University in Bangladesh, close to 95% of women surveyed reported having been sexually harassed either on the road or on public transportation - this was true across locations, ages, and income brackets.[i]

When they fall victim to sexual harassment, most respondents however reported not saying anything to the perpetrator, for fear of embarassment, or worse: further violence. Most also reported not saying anything to the authorities. Despite laws against sexual harassment having been in place for many years in Bangladesh, only very few cases make it to the courts. A lack of trust in authorities is partly responsible - news of a student murdered for reporting sexual harassment is a striking example. Inadequacies in the legal framework which do not protect victims and mean they carry the burden of proof also disincentivise reporting.

Interventions by bystanders can support victims and discourage perpetrators

Campaigns and interventions to encourage 'active bystanding' have proliferated globally as a way to combat sexual harassment when authorities are either not trusted or lack enforcement power.

Systematic reviews suggest that these interventions, by targeting key barriers to bystander action, can increase active bystanding, reduce sexist attitudes, and possibly also lead to a reduction in harassment

(though the evidence on this last outcome is limited).[ii]

But much of the evidence to date comes from relatively controlled settings (e.g. university campuses) in high-income countries. This project therefore aims to develop and generate evidence on the impact of a low-cost and scalable solution adapted to a new and challenging context - that of public transport in a developing country.

Many barriers can prevent people from being active bystanders

SIL and BIT conducted fieldwork to understand the behaviour of bystanders and what might prevent them from intervening. While a significant fraction of passengers reported being willing to intervene to support women, very few had actually ever done so.

Key reported reasons for not intervening included: 1) not seeing/recognising sexual harassment; 2) not knowing what to do; 3) fearing the reaction of the perpetrator or of other passengers; and 4) not wanting to alert the authorities, either because of fear of hassle, or simply because they did not trust them to be effective.

Most respondents were however able to list at least some of the behaviours that constitute sexual harassment on buses (whistling, eve-teasing, touching, groping, etc.). This suggests that awareness of what constitutes harassment might not be an issue.

Behavioural science suggests that passengers might also fail to intervene because of the so-called "bystander effect". This describes the finding that the presence of passive bystanders can reduce the likelihood of an individual helping a victim in a critical situation.[iii] Several explanations have been put forward for the bystander effect, including the diffusion of responsibility, apprehension about being judged by others, and pluralistic ignorance resulting from the tendency to interpret ambiguous situations using the reactions of others.[iv]

3 / Intervention

Out of the different barriers we identified as limiting the ability of bystanders to intervene, we decided to focus on:

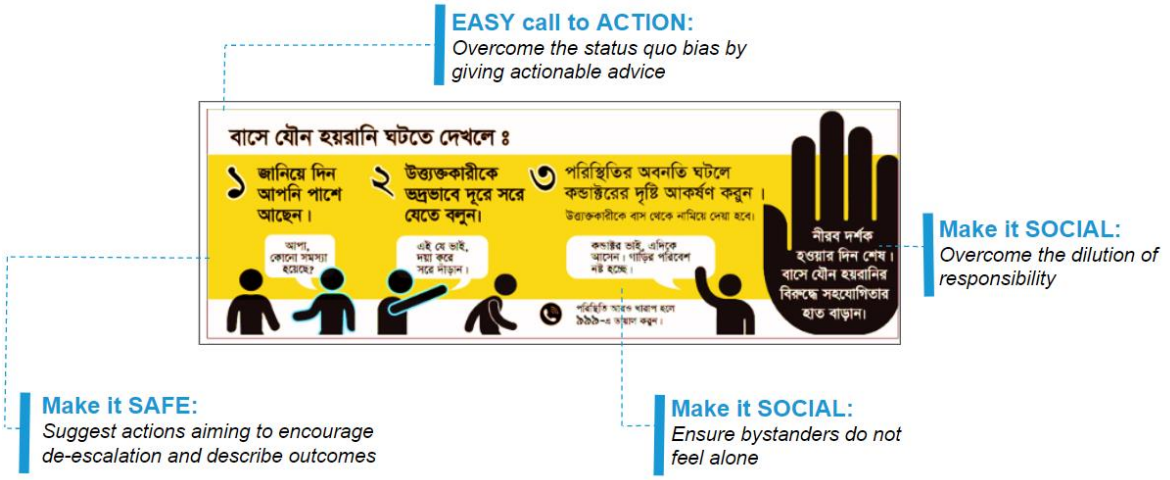
- **Addressing the "bystander effect"** by highlighting each passenger's role in ensuring all are safe on buses.
- **Encouraging bystanders to act by calling attention to harassment**. This is common to most campaigns targeting bystanders in public spaces (e.g. the "See something, say something" campaign in the US) and aims to raise the level of awareness among bus passengers.
- **Providing a clear, simple sequence of steps to follow** - this will make it easier for potential bystanders to know what to do (by going as far as telling them what to say). It will also serve to remove some of the uncertainty that might prevent them from acting, as this sequence clearly states what the consequence of each step should be and offers an escalation plan. This type of "chunking" of difficult, uncertain actions into small manageable steps has been shown to help encourage complex actions.[v]

Posters as a timely nudge

We tested the effect of posters placed on a selection of BRTC buses running in Dhaka.

Placed next to doors, next to the driver, as well as above seats, these posters aimed to provide

Figure 1: *Posters designed to be installed inside buses*



timely nudges to passengers, making sure they receive the messages at the time where they are most likely to witness sexual harassment.

The messages on the posters were designed to address some of the barriers identified during exploratory research. The posters were user-tested with approximately 20 bus passengers (both male and female) on the streets of Dhaka to ensure the text and design were as clear and attractive as possible.

4 / Trial design and implementation

To estimate the impact of the posters, we conducted a quasi-experimental pre-post evaluation over a three-and-a-half-week period in July 2019. We used both surveys and structured observations to measure sexual harassment, bystander responses, and passengers' perceptions before and after the posters were installed. Posters were installed on over 50 BRTC buses operating on three routes in Dhaka.

Why we didn't conduct a randomised controlled trial

While an RCT may have provided more certainty about the impact of the posters, we could not feasibly conduct one in this context. Since a single bus can run on multiple routes, we could not implement the posters on some routes but not others. In addition, since many passengers travel on multiple routes it was not possible to control or influence who was exposed to the posters.

Pre-post evaluations can be undermined by changes that occur over the trial period and might affect the same outcomes as the posters (like, say, a national campaign on harassment, or a strike that would mean that very few people ride buses).

We mitigated this risk by 1) comparing two relatively short periods separated by the weekend on which the posters were installed; and 2) limiting the trial to three routes, thus ensuring we would be able to monitor changes or events happening on these routes during the trial period. We also used controls in our regression analysis to account for differences in routes, trip times, observers, or other factors that could have varied between the 'pre' and 'post' periods.

Trial implementation

The implementation timeline is presented in the Annex. To measure sexual harassment and active bystanding, we worked with enumerators recruited by Dhaka-based market research firm D2 (see Section 5 more details on measurement).

Enumerators were trained to minimise the risks to themselves and passengers, for example by

only approaching passengers of the same gender for surveys. We only used male enumerators to conduct structured observations on buses, given the risks to women. In addition, BRTC drivers and conductors were made aware of the trial and trained to respond appropriately if they noticed sexual harassment or if an incident escalated.[vi]

During the trial, recording bus numbers and maintaining a consistent set of enumerators proved somewhat challenging - indeed, there are in general no fixed bus stops in Dhaka, no set times for buses, and no GPS trackers aboard buses. Moreover, a large protest also reduced the number of bus trips on one day in the trial period. We therefore had to rely on individual monitoring of buses, which we combined with data shared by BRTC (the bus company) to account for buses that were on the road. We have attempted to adjust for these issues in our analysis.

5 / Measuring sexual harassment

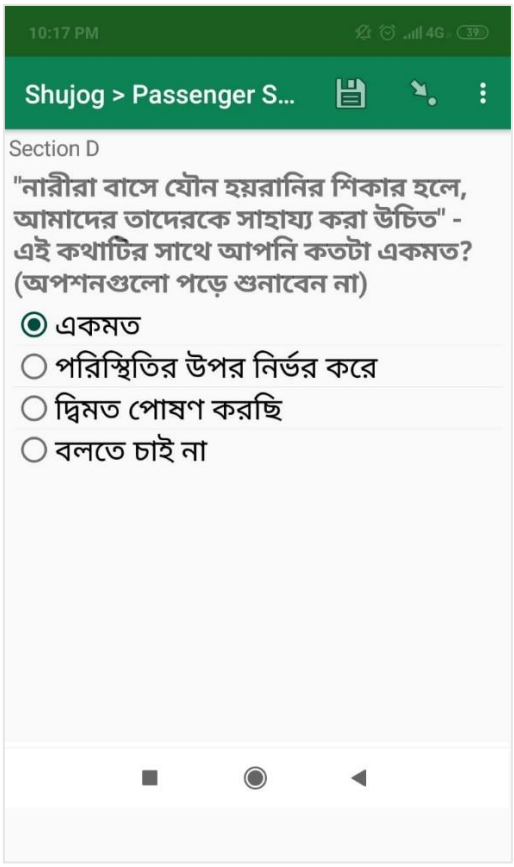
Measuring behaviour and perceptions around sexual harassment poses a major challenge. Harassment is often unreported, and victims and bystanders may be reluctant to speak about their experiences when asked. Individuals' perceptions of what constitutes harassment can vary considerably, and bystanders' behaviour can fall far short of their intentions to intervene.[vii,viii] A recent BIT trial encouraging active bystanding focused on recent experiences and behaviour, rather than intentions, but still relied on a self-reported survey.

We combined passenger surveys with structured observations

The structured observations on buses allowed us to measure the prevalence of harassment and bystanding without relying on self reports, while surveys of passengers as they got off a bus allowed us to measure attitudes, perceptions and reported experiences while they were still fresh in people's minds.

To collect this data, our partner, d2, designed online forms which the enumerators could access from the field to directly record information. For both measurement tools, we trained enumerators to recognise both verbal harassment (including whistling and catcalling) and physical harassment (unwanted touching, groping, blocking the way). Some enumerators rode buses in pairs and systematically recorded their observations of harassment incidents, including those where the harassment was brought to their attention by the victim speaking out. Others conducted passenger surveys at bus stops, encoding the open responses of participants as referring to specific types of harassment that they had witnessed or experienced. To ensure strong data quality, BIT and D2 designed a mobile phone app through which the enumerators entered details of their observations and the responses of survey participants.

Figure 2: *The app used by enumerators to enter observations and survey data*



Outcome measures

Our primary outcome measures were **the proportion of times bystanders intervened**

in support of victims during sexual harassment events observed by enumerators on buses, and the **proportion of passengers who i) said they would intervene** and **ii) agreed that women who experience sexual harassment on buses should be supported**. In addition, we collected several secondary outcome measures, such as the frequency of observed harassment and passengers' attitudes and perceptions of sexual harassment.

*In total we recorded observations on over 50 BRTC buses over 12 weekdays, amounting to **790 bus trips**. On these trips, enumerators recorded close to **950 incidents of sexual harassment**. We also collected **3,518 passenger surveys** (2,879 complete and 639 partially complete) across 17 weekdays, with enumerators placed at five locations along the selected BRTC bus routes.*

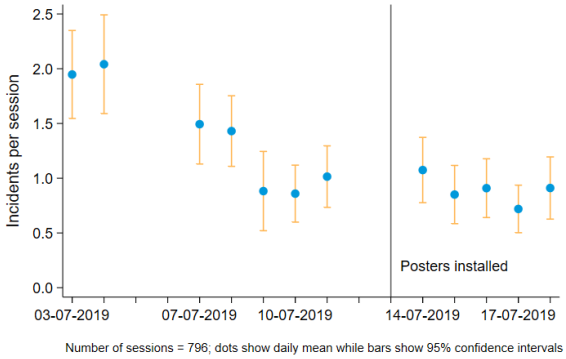
Unexpected challenges affected each measurement approach

While we expected each measurement approach to be limited in specific ways, we learned of additional challenges after collecting and analysing the data. Despite training and equipping enumerators to identify and record sexual harassment in a consistent way, we found substantial variation between enumerators in the number of events they recorded. While some of this variation reflected genuine differences in the bus trips they observed, some of it may have been due to different judgements about whether a given event constituted harassment. To address this issue, we controlled for enumerator effects when estimating the impact of the posters.

We also found that the frequency of observed harassment declined through the trial, particularly in the first few days (Figure 3). While we cannot know for sure what drove this decrease, we found that the number of events an enumerator recorded tended to decline with each observation session they conducted, particularly across their earlier sessions. This suggests enumerators' behaviour may have changed over time as they adapted to the task.

We also found that completion rates on the passenger surveys increased over the first few days of the trial, possibly for similar reasons. We therefore excluded the first two days of data when reporting outcomes in the pre-intervention period, and attempted to adjust for enumerator experience when estimating the effect of the posters.[ix]

***Figure 3:** Frequency of observed harassment by day*



Finally, while we were expecting self-reporting biases in the survey data, we were surprised to find that men reported experiencing sexual harassment at a similar rate to women. This was also inconsistent with the enumerator observations, which suggested that the vast majority of victims were women.

Despite piloting the survey instruments prior to launching the evaluation, we suspect that some male respondents misunderstood the question, possibly because the concept of a man being the victim of sexual harassment was novel. As a result, they may have reported sexual harassment that they saw rather than experienced or may have reported the experience of non-sexual physical harassment. Because of the questions this raises about data quality, we exclude men's responses when summarising the results from the passenger survey around personal experiences of sexual harassment.

6 / Pre-intervention findings: New facts about sexual harassment

Harassment occurred on 6 in 10 bus trips, with physical harassment being most common

In the week before we installed posters, **enumerators observed a sexual harassment incident every two hours and forty-five minutes on a single bus trip**, on average (including trips where no harassment was observed). Overall, 60 percent of bus trips had at least one incident of harassment noticed by enumerators. This may moreover be an underestimate, since the two enumerators on each double-decker bus may not have witnessed or noticed all incidents, particularly those where the victim provided little indication of being harassed.[x]

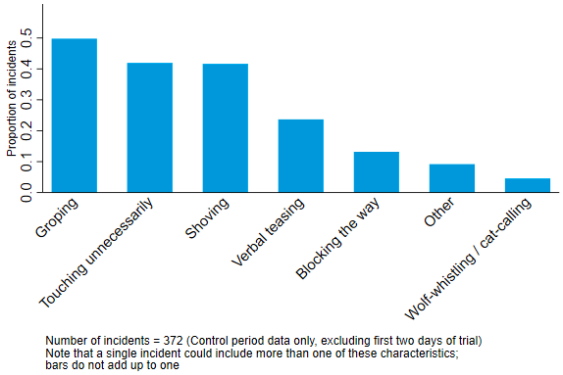
Given that the frequency of harassment on public transport in Bangladesh has so far not been measured objectively, we do not have statistics to compare this to. This number, though, hints to the scale of a problem already suggested by more subjective data collection exercises.

Indeed, while the structured observations shed light on overall frequency, the passenger surveys revealed the risks faced by a woman each time she travels on a bus : Close to **one in ten women reported experiencing sexual harassment on the bus trip they had just taken**, while around 14 percent of all respondents reported witnessing or experiencing sexual harassment. Women were also more than twice as likely as men to report that sexual harassment was the biggest concern for their safety on buses.

This reflects the well established gender dynamics of sexual harassment: almost all victims of observed harassment were women, while virtually all perpetrators were men. Perpetrators were also more likely than victims to be in older age groups, and in around 10 percent of cases enumerators observed more than one perpetrator.

Over half of the cases of harassment reported by participants involved physical harassment. This is consistent with the structured observations, which revealed that groping and unnecessary touching were observed more frequently than verbal and other forms of harassment. It is also broadly consistent with survey findings from around the world, including London, Mexico City, Paris and India, which suggest that touching and groping are relatively common forms of harassment on public transport.

Figure 4: *Proportion of observed incidents by form of harassment (incidents could include multiple forms)*



Number of incidents = 372 (Control period data only, excluding first two days of trial)
Note that a single incident could include more than one of these characteristics; bars do not add up to one

Taken together, these findings make it easy to imagine the negative effects on the level of safety and comfort women enjoy as they go about their daily lives in public places.

Most passengers expressed support for harassment victims, but active bystanding was infrequent

Stated support for helping victims of sexual harassment was high: around **90 percent of respondents say they would take some form of action** if they saw an incident, and around **75 percent agreed that we should reach out to victims** of sexual harassment on buses.

Unfortunately, this near universal support for helping victims of sexual harassment did not translate into widespread active bystanding. **In only 1 out of every 5 incidents did enumerators observe active bystanding**. This is suggestive of a large intention-action

gap, confirming findings from previous research and our qualitative fieldwork.

Digging deeper into the survey responses revealed some ambivalence towards victims, which may have further undermined bystanders' resolve to intervene. Close to 30 percent of respondents said they would hope that someone else would intervene. And around half of participants agreed with statements justifying or diminishing sexual harassment. These attitudes were reported more frequently by men, who make up the majority of bus passengers in Dhaka.

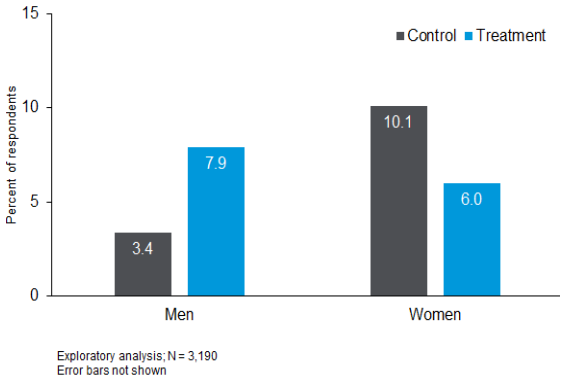
Consistent with research on the bystander effect, ambiguity about whether an incident amounted to sexual harassment may also have acted as a barrier.[xi] Bystanders were more likely to intervene when victims spoke up against the harassment, but this cue only occurred in around half of cases. However, even when victims did speak up, bystanders intervened in only three out of every ten cases, suggesting ambiguity alone cannot explain the size of the behavioural gap.

7 / Post-intervention findings: Estimated effects of the posters

The posters seemed to positively impact awareness of sexual harassment and attitudes towards victims

We found that **the fraction of passengers nominating sexual harassment as their biggest safety concern increased significantly after the posters were installed**. Interestingly, the increase was concentrated among male passengers, for whom the proportion more than doubled, from around 3.5 percent to around 8 percent. Among women, the proportion fell, from 10 percent to 6 percent. These results suggest that the posters increased the salience of sexual harassment as a legitimate concern among men (who make up the majority of bus passengers, as well as the vast majority of perpetrators) while reducing the perceived threat of sexual harassment among women.

Figure 5: *Estimated impact of posters on whether sexual harassment was reported as biggest safety concern on bus trip*



We also observed a significant increase in the prevalence of supportive attitudes towards the victims of sexual harassment. **The proportion of passengers *disagreeing* with statements justifying or dismissing sexual harassment increased by over 10 percent after the posters were installed.** Specifically, the proportion disagreeing with the statement "*Because some women wear skimpy clothes in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without their permission*" increased by 8 percentage points, from 70 percent ($p<0.01$), while the proportion disagreeing with the statement *"If a woman doesn't complain about someone's behaviour, it probably isn't serious enough to be sexual harassment"* also increased by 8 percentage points, from 50 percent ($p<0.01$). Again, the increase was concentrated among men, while the prevalence of pro-victim attitudes among women (which was higher to begin with) were largely unchanged.

We did not find an increase in the proportion of passengers who said they would intervene if they saw someone being harassed. Over 90 percent of passengers nominated at least one constructive action they would take before the posters were installed, and this was unchanged afterwards. We did, however, observe an increase in passengers' reported willingness to engage the conductor, which was one of the least commonly reported actions before the posters were installed.

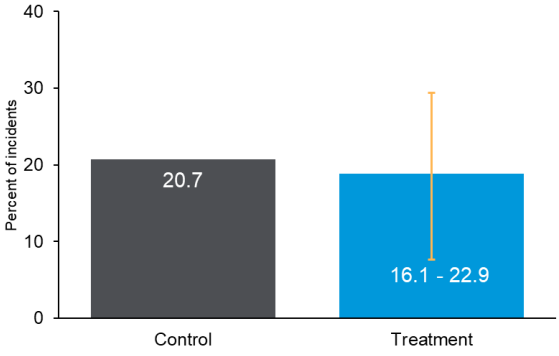
Despite these promising results, we note that there remains a long way to go before attitudes change completely. For example, 6 in 10 men

still agreed with the statement that *"Many women exaggerate their experiences of sexual harassment"* and almost 45 percent still agreed with the statement *"If a woman doesn't complain about someone's behaviour, it probably isn't serious enough to be sexual harassment".*

The change in attitudes did not, however, seem to result in an increase in active bystanding

Unfortunately, we did not observe any significant impact on the likelihood that a bystander intervened during a sexual harassment incident observed by our enumerators. **The likelihood of active bystanding remained at around 20 percent even after the posters were installed**, though there was a large range of uncertainty due to the sample size and differences in estimates across the regression models.

Figure 6: *Estimated impact of posters on likelihood of observed active bystanding*



Primary analysis, linear regression; N = 943
The treatment bar is labelled with the range of point estimates across models, while the bar height is determined by the median effect across models that control for enumerator experience effects. Error bars span the range of 95% confidence intervals across models.

We explored this result further by looking at changes in the specific actions suggested by the posters and found that there was little change across all of these actions. In particular, there was no increase in the frequency with which bystanders engaged the conductor, despite the increase in reported intentions to do this. We also looked at whether reported barriers to intervening changed after the posters were installed. While this data is noisy, we found that fearing other passengers' responses to active bystanding remained a commonly reported barrier after the posters were installed, particularly among men.

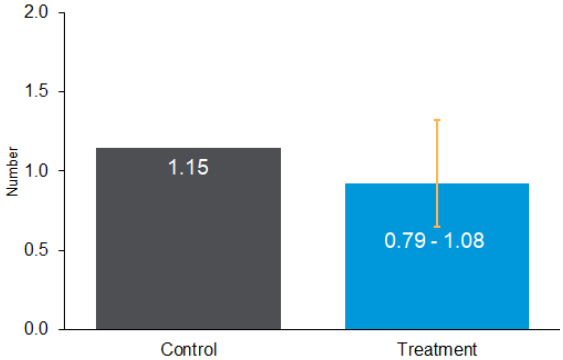
Despite this result, the change in attitudes we observed may have had other positive impacts. For example, they may have induced longer term changes that we were unable to measure as part of this trial. Nevertheless, our results suggest that more needs to be done to encourage active bystanding in this setting.

The frequency of harassment fell, though we cannot conclusively attribute this decline to the posters

As shown in Figure 3 above, **the average frequency of observed harassment was substantially lower after the posters were installed**. However, some of the decline appeared to start prior to the posters being installed.

As described above, we suspect that some of this decline might be due to enumerators adapting through the trial to the task of recording harassment. We attempted to adjust for these changes in enumerator behaviour using a range of statistical models. These models produced estimates ranging from no statistically significant change in harassment frequency to a large and statistically significant decline (0.8 incidents per trip after the posters vs. 1.15 incidents per trip after the posters, a 30% decline; $p<0.01$).

Figure 7: *Estimated impact of posters on number of harassment incidents per trip*



Secondary analysis, negative binominal regression; N = 774
Error bars span the range of 95% confidence intervals from several alternative models. The treatment bar is labelled with the range of point estimates across models, while the bar height is determined by the median effect across models that control for enumerator experience effects

While we cannot interpret this as robust evidence that the posters deterred harassment, the direction of the results holds some evidence of promise. **These results provide a strong argument for further testing to investigate**

this potentially large deterrent effect from a low-cost intervention.

8 / Recommendations

Continue measuring sexual harassment and active bystanding

This trial demonstrated the feasibility of robustly measuring sexual harassment in a challenging context. Although we faced some unanticipated challenges, the approach of combining surveys with observations by trained enumerators provided important new insights. The approach could be refined further using lessons learned in this trial, for example by building in several days of practice for enumerators to allow them to settle into the task of collecting detailed data in a dynamic and crowded setting.

Following these refinements, this approach could, for example, be used to observe whether the prevalence of sexual harassment and active bystanding changes over time or is more prevalent in some settings than others. Such data could be used to better understand how the scale of sexual harassment varies across places and populations, enabling better targeting of interventions, and could also be used to track progress in addressing the challenge.

Conduct further testing of posters to encourage bystander action and deter harassment

To confirm whether the posters have the potential to reduce the frequency of harassment, further testing should be conducted, for example by installing the posters on new bus routes or in other public spaces. Given the low cost of installing the posters, and the large potential benefits of reducing sexual harassment, additional testing seems well warranted.

Develop and test ways to tackle additional barriers to active bystanding

The pattern of results we observed suggest several promising avenues for new interventions:

- Correcting bystanders' perceptions about how others would react if they intervened - future work could test the effect of publicising the widespread support for victims of sexual harassment we found in the passenger surveys, as a way of correcting perceptions of injunctive social norms.
- Reducing bystanders' uncertainty about what constitutes sexual harassment - in attempting to tackle this uncertainty, interventions could also provide guidance on how to engage appropriately in cases that may seem ambiguous.
- Encouraging bystanders to engage the conductor first, given the authority that conductors are likely to have within the social environment of the bus, and the hesitation that some passengers may face in engaging perpetrators and victims.

9 / BRAC's team

This project was made possible by the contributions of the fantastic teams at BRAC, starting by the Social Innovation Lab, who masterfully coordinated this entire project and amazed us by their creativity, openness, rigour and commitment to social impact. We have been pleased to help them grow their capacity to apply behavioural insights and are proud to still be working with them on new exciting projects.

We have also been grateful for contributions and support from:

- The Gender Justice and Diversity Team, who led all gender sensitisation training and ensured that our intervention was as good as it could be.
- The Road Safety team, who made it possible for us to collaborate with BRTC

and run one of the first trials of its kinds in real conditions.

- The Communications team, who helped us deliver polished, accessible, attractive intervention materials.

Nishat Tasnim and Shafqat Aurin, who coordinated and led most activities on this project for the Social Innovation Lab, shared a few thoughts about their experience.

"At Social Innovation Lab, we already followed human-centred design principles. But the BIT trial gave us new tools and helped us learn the methodology and the science better."

Our collaboration with BIT was one of the finest examples of how two different organisations based in two different continents can be motivated by the same inspiration, design and trial.

We feel like the project was a success, as the assumptions were backed by primary data, rigorously generated by our experiment.

BRAC has a history of co-creating and working with the communities but this was our first officially acclaimed "behavioural experiment", and it has also sparked interest within the organisation to have more evidence-based behavioural experiments in areas even beyond gender-based violence.

At the Social Innovation Lab, we follow human centred design principles, and make it a practice to incorporate human behaviour into programme design. But the BIT trial gave us new tools and helped us learn the methodology and the science better. Live prototyping for all tools and nudge validation from the field in pre-test stages was a unique experiment. It definitely ignited more interest in behaviour science in both of us.

There weren't any organisational constraints as such, really mainly practical ones linked to the nature of bus travel in Dhaka, where there are no fixed times, stops, or ways to track buses or passengers. We would have loved to run the trial for longer to gain deeper insights, but were limited by complexities like the still very "manual" bus tracking system in place (the one thing we have struggled with the most was getting our observers in the right buses !), or the budget needed to hire enumerators to compensate this lack of digital tracking.

But BRTC, despite having an analogue system, helped us immensely with the implementation, sharing bus numbers and timings on a daily basis.

As a whole, we'll remember this project as an amazing collaborative effort between BIT, BRAC and BRTC.

Nishat Tasnim, Deputy Manager, Innovation Ecosystem and Partnerships

Shafqat Aurin, Interaction Designer, Social Innovation Lab

10 / Conclusion

This project, the first collaboration between BRAC and BIT, demonstrated the feasibility of applying behavioural insights and an adaptive, user-oriented approach to tackle the universal challenge of sexual harassment in a difficult setting.

While the intervention we developed did not have a clear impact on the likelihood of active bystanding, it demonstrated how low-cost solutions can help increase the salience of an important social issue and induce encouraging changes in attitudes. Moreover, our findings raise the possibility that a poster can discourage harassment from occurring in the first place and suggests that organisations should continue implementing these types of interventions while measuring their impact.

This trial also illustrated the ways in which organisations can rapidly learn about the potential impacts of an intervention even in the absence of existing data and despite the fact that we could not conduct an RCT. By working

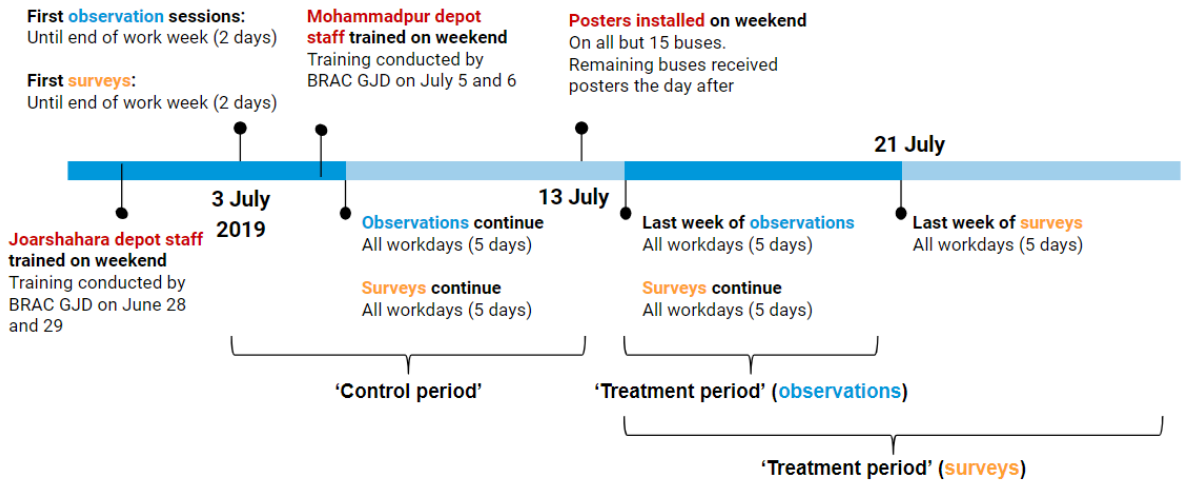
with innovative mobile data collection platforms like D2, we progressed the measurement of behavioural outcomes at scale in an area which has previously been dominated by self-reported surveys. Although we encountered several challenges in implementing this approach, we identified ways in which it could be refined and deployed again in the future.

At the same time, by conducting closely targeted passenger surveys in parallel to structured observations, we were able to better interpret and validate the changes we observed. And by working with management, drivers and conductors at BRTC, we were able to rapidly train staff and install the posters on specific buses in a way that ensured that the social environment of the trial was supportive of passengers who might step up to be active bystanders.

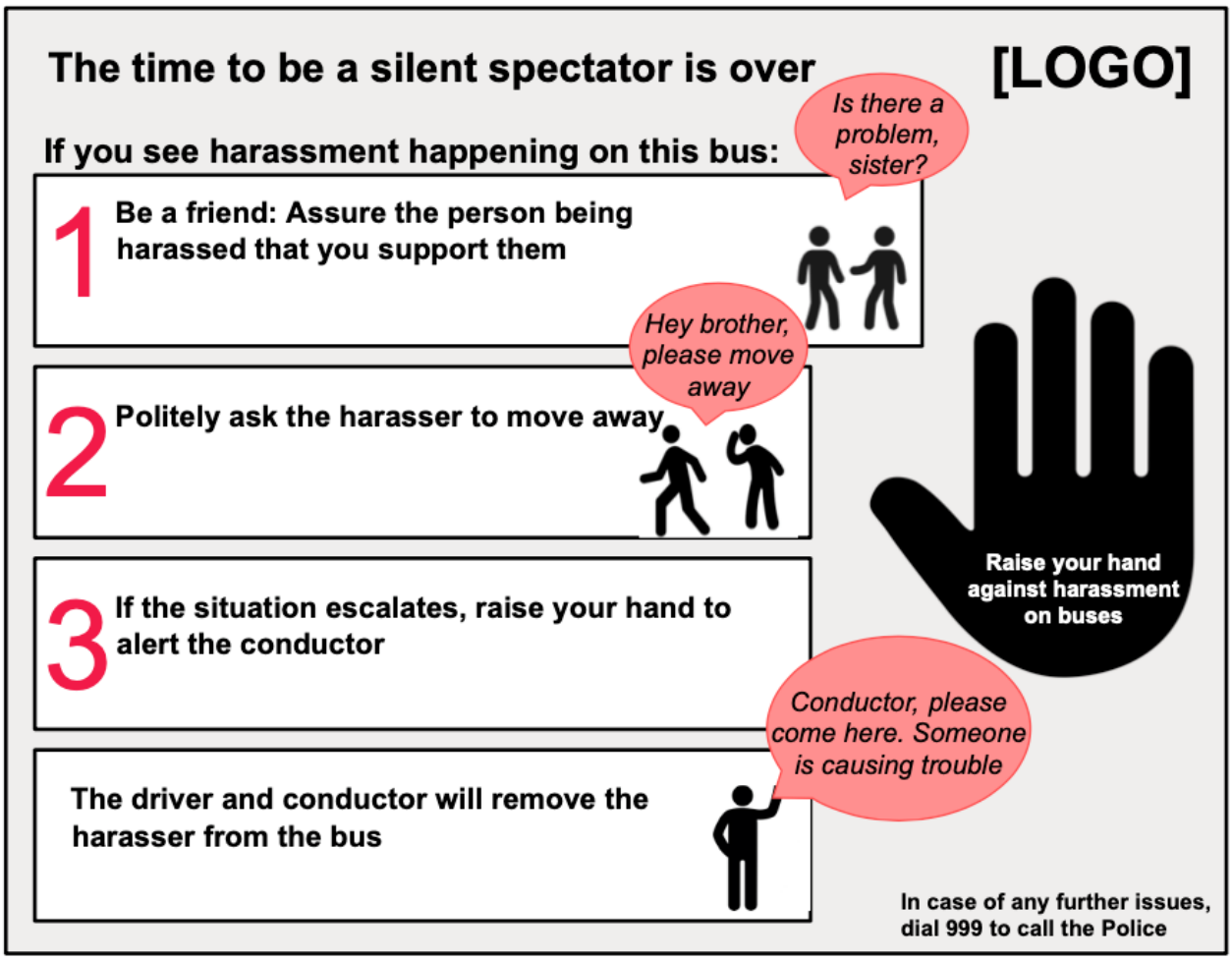
Ultimately, our findings highlight the difficulty of overcoming challenges like sexual harassment, and the substantial progress that still needs to be made in Bangladesh and elsewhere around the world. By providing detailed new data and insights learned by implementing a low-cost intervention, we hope this trial helps other organisations continue to develop new and improved efforts to reduce the frequency of gender-based violence and its impact on women’s lives.

Annex

Trial implementation timeline



English translation of poster



Notes

[i] Rahman, Fahmida. (2018). Safe Roads for Women: Reducing Sexual Harassment and Road Crash in Bangladesh. BRAC University.

[ii] Heather Hensman Kettrey, Robert A. Marx, and Emily E. Tanner-Smith, 'Effects of Bystander Programs on the Prevention of Sexual Assault among Adolescents and College Students: A Systematic Review', *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 15, no. 1–2 (2019): e1013, https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2019.1; Public Health England, 'A Review of Evidence for Bystander Intervention to Prevent Sexual and Domestic Violence in Universities', accessed 25 September 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/515634/Evidence_review_bystander_intervention_to_prevent_sexual_and_domestic_violence_in_universities_11April2016.pdf.

[iii] Peter Fischer et al., 'The Bystander-Effect: A Meta-Analytic Review on Bystander Intervention in Dangerous and Non-Dangerous Emergencies.', *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 4 (2011): 517–37, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023304.

[iv] Bibb Latané and Steve Nida, 'Ten Years of Research on Group Size and Helping', *Psychological Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (1981): 308–24, https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.89.2.308.

[v] Gobet, Fernand, Peter CR Lane, Steve Croker, Peter CH Cheng, Gary Jones, Iain Oliver, and Julian M. Pine. "Chunking mechanisms in human learning." Trends in cognitive sciences 5, no. 6 (2001): 236-243.

[vi] This training, which was developed and conducted by BRAC's Gender Justice team, included modules on identifying harassment, and how to react in case of harassment. Suggested escalation steps included i) asking the perpetrator to leave the bus, and ii) calling the relevant authorities.

[vii] Latané, B., & Darley, J. M. (1970). The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help? Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

[viii] Webb, T. L., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Does changing behavioral intentions engender behavior change? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *132*(2), 249–268.

[ix] There are many adjustment methods available, each of which correspond to different underlying assumptions and can produce different results. Since the correlation with additional experience appeared to decline as more experience was gained (and because this seems plausible from a theoretical perspective) we modelled the effect of enumerator experience on harassment frequency using log and reciprocal functions, and present the range of impact estimates from both types of models.

[x] Observers reported that the incident was brought to their attention by the complaints of the victim in around 40 percent of the time.

[xi] Russell D. Clark and Larry E. Word, 'Why Don't Bystanders Help? Because of Ambiguity?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 24, no. 3 (1972): 392–400, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0033717.