

## EVERY RIDE MATTERS: WOMEN COMMUTERS ' EXPERIENCES

### Abstract:

The issue of women's security in public transportation becomes even more critical because it requires public transport to meet their mobility needs. Women's safety is becoming a priority for the government authorities to take action. The current study investigated the personal security of woman commuters in public transport in the province of Palawan, Philippines. It utilized a fieldwork approach using interviews and participant observation among fifteen (15) woman commuters from three municipalities within a three-month period. The findings concluded that the travel setting of woman commuters, such as the type of public transport, frequency of travel, travel time, duration, and reasons for travel has influenced their experiences in their access to and waiting in terminal, fear, and experience of harassment, violence, and accident, that disturbs their security in public transport. It was recommended that authorities shall enact policies to enforce public safety and address women's travel needs in order to bridge the mobility gap in gender inclusivity. Public transportation operators shall be required to have to advertise and enforce public safety measures.

Keywords: Personal security, Public transport, Women commuter's experiences

UNDER PEER REVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

Freedom of movement, mobility rights, or the right to travel is part of the concept of basic human rights that encompasses the rights of the individual to travel from place to place. Sustainable Development Goal target 11.2 states that by 2030 countries should provide access to a safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport system for all, improving road safety and expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those vulnerable situations, women, children, a person with disabilities and older persons (United Nations). The 1986 Philippine Constitution provides that "neither shall the right to travel be impaired except in the interest of national security, public safety, or public health, as may be provided by law" (Art. 3 Sec. 6).

Globally, women are frequent and regular users of public transport. In developing countries, women rely on some form of public transport as their only choice of motorized transport. It is, therefore, important that they perceived public transport as being safe and secure (Allen and Vanderschuren, 2016). The issue of women's security in public transportation becomes even more critical since it is women, rather than men, whom most depend on public transport to meet their mobility needs.

Empirical research has clearly established that the transportation needs and travel behavior of women are different from men (Loukaitou - Sideris, et al., 2009). Women have daily mobility patterns that are more complex than men, owing to their gender roles, which combine domestic and caregiving tasks with paid employment, income-earning activities, and community and social obligations such as being a primary caregiver, responsible for accompanying children to school and medical services, and purchasing fresh produce and groceries from markets; hence, their daily mobility will involve travel to and from these services and locations, often with purchases in hand (ADB, 2013).

This study anchored its framework on the provisions of RA 9710 known as the Magna Carta for Women in its Declaration of Policy that "*The state shall promote empowerment of women and pursue equal opportunities for women and men and ensure equal access to resources and development results and outcome. Further, the state realizes equality of men and women entails the abolition of unequal structures and practices that perpetuates discrimination and equality* (Chapter 1, Section 2).

*Further, the State condemns discrimination against women in all its forms and pursues by all appropriate means and without delay the policy of eliminating discrimination against women in keeping with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and under international instruments consistent with Philippine law. The state shall accord women the rights, protection, and opportunities available to every member of society.*

The current study investigated, explored, and analyzed the woman commuter's experiences in public transport in the Province of Palawan, Philippines specifically in terms of public transport settings limited to the frequency of travel, travel time, duration of travel & reasons to travel, and to the experiences that disturb their security to access and waiting in the terminal.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Researchers used a qualitative research design, and a descriptive method was employed in the study. According to Bueno (2016), the purpose of the descriptive method is to collect detailed and factual information that describes existing phenomena. In this study, researchers utilized interviews and participative observation to understand women commuters' experiences in public transportation in the Province of Palawan, Philippines.

The study took place en route from the city of Puerto Princesa City terminal to Roxas, Taytay, and El Nido terminals and vice versa. The locale of study was selected due to its proximity to the routes and the increasing number of public transport vehicles operating en route in the area.

Through snowballing sampling, fifteen (15) individuals were determined, five (5) woman commuters from Roxas, Palawan, five (5) from Taytay, Palawan, and five (5) from El Nido, Palawan whose age ranges from eighteen (18) years old and above. They were chosen based on their traveled routes, residences, and experiences in reported incidence. Their consent was sought first before the conduct of the interview. Their anonymity was confirmed to them as well as the assurance that information supplied by them would be used for this research alone.

The interview with the public transport operators and drivers was conducted at their convenient time. However, observation was conducted en route from terminal to terminal and during a stopover. Recording of interviews from participants using an audio recorder and documentation was done with their permission. Similarly, the documentation in the process of observation was conducted with permission from the commuters.

Data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA) to identify regularities or patterns among categories. This analysis involved examining and identifying themes within the data that are important to the description of the woman experiences in public transport.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### ***Public Transport Setting***

Commuters are faced with situations such as the type of public transport, the frequency of travel, travel time, duration of travel, and reasons why they need to move from one place to another.

The succeeding data are gathered from fifteen (15) woman commuter participants in northern Palawan. These results are not intended to represent the entire women commuters in the said locale.

**Type of Public Transport.** As commuters move from place, they need to use some mode of transportation such as buses, vans, and jeeps as the case maybe. Women are part and parcel of these commuters.



*Figure 1. Commuters boarding public transportation*

Data gathered from fifteen (15) woman commuter participants revealed that they either took buses under San Isidro Bus Express, the RORO Bus Lines, or Cherry Bus Lines that travel north of Palawan (from the city of Puerto Princesa to Roxas, Palawan, to Taytay, Palawan and El Nido, Palawan and vice versa). On the other hand, shuttle vans are under the DASEK, CAMARIH, FORTWALLY, LEXUS, Eulen Joy, PALSHUTEX, NATURE, etc. traversing the same route as the case may be.

The above data were supplemented by an observation made by the researchers within three months of alternate travels in these public transports on the aforementioned routes. Commuters took buses & shuttle vans. In addition, public transport is usually dominated by a woman and oftentimes brought along with them children. This was supported by an interview with a bus inspector claiming that in general, woman commuters are far greater than male commuters.

Woman commuters take trips regularly. Their trips can either be shorter or longer or trip chain from Roxas, Taytay, or El Nido to Puerto Princesa City and vice versa. Oftentimes, they took cutting trips (trip chaining) or series of travel segments that follow one another based on the home location and place of work or school.

This means that woman commuters rely on the use of different types of public transport in Northern Palawan either by Public Utility Bus (PUB) or by vans since it is the most common and affordable. Jeeps are no longer part of this type of public transport taking longer trips; instead, said vehicles take shorter trips to barangays.

It was supported by the study conducted by Aloul, et al. (2018) that most of the women surveyed used public transportation. Forty-six percent (46%) said that they had no other choice but to use public transportation, followed by 27% who said they preferred it due to its affordability. Asian Development Bank (2013) revealed that as women generally have lower cash incomes and may have less decision-making control over household financial resources, they have limited affordability for public transport services.

Moreover, in many countries, public transit is the only option for many women, even if routes are not convenient for their commutes and off-peak service is not ideal for errands and safety (Zhen, 2021)

**Travel time** refers to the period in which woman commuters usually traveled, either daytime or nighttime.



*Figure 2. Bus unloading women commuters*

Data revealed that eleven (11) of the fifteen (15) participants usually travel during the daytime. However, taking the first trip of the van/bus will start travel at four thirty (4:30) to five (5:00) in the morning especially when trips are bound for Puerto Princesa City.

This implies that women commuters traveled during the daytime considering their safety on travel and risk as far as their security is concerned either while accessing or waiting at a public terminal, during their travel, and until they reached their destination.

It was observed that commuters who took their first trips via van had to be fetched from their homes as early as four o'clock in the morning or wait at the terminal before departure while those by bus had to be at the terminal or other bus stops earlier than the departure or loading time. To cope with these travel schedules, women participants as much as possible travels with a companion or at least with someone familiar to them; by going to the terminal when the bus/van was about to depart and only waiting at lighted part of the terminal; and by not leaving bags/luggage unattended while waiting. This implies that due to the high risk in those wee hours, woman commuters employ some means to keep themselves safe.

Most women use public transportation on weekdays, particularly during morning peak hours. Those numbers taper off into the evening and late-night hours as fear for personal safety and security mount (Aloul, et al. 2018)



*Figure 3. Van and bus at the terminal*

**Duration of travel.** The length of time consumed by woman commuters on each trip in public transportation may depend on the routes they are taking and the frequency of stops while on the road which influences their security due to frequent stops and long travels.

Those who commute one way from Roxas, Palawan to Puerto Princesa City by van travel within the duration from two (2) hours to two (2) and half (1/2) hours. While those from Taytay, Palawan to Puerto Princesa City travel within three (3) hours to three (3) and half (1/2) hours; and those from El Nido, Palawan to Puerto Princesa City travel for five (5) hours to five (5) and half (1/2) hours. However, when they travel by bus, there will be one (1) to one (1) and a half (1/2) hours longer travel duration. The above duration of travel will double if the woman commuters have to travel back and forth on the same day.

The aforementioned duration of travel is sometimes influenced by circumstances such as stops at the terminal to rest or eat, stops along the highway to load and unload passengers and cargoes, repair or change of tires, and machine malfunction. It usually took fifteen (15) to twenty (20) minutes for buses at the terminal or bus stops and one (1) to two (2) minutes or longer to load and unload passengers and cargoes along the highway. For vans, it took a shorter time for stops at the terminal. In Taytay Terminal, it was observed that from morning until afternoon, every ten (10) to twenty (20) minutes a van arrives and leaves the terminal either to or from El Nido, Palawan.

This means that women commuters have different duration of travel both shorter and longer, depending on the routes they are taking and the frequency of stops while on the road. Such differences may influence their safety & security while traveling due to frequent stops and long travels.

The National Crime Records Bureau (2011) as cited by Sur (2015) supported the above result that in every fifty-one minutes, a woman faces harassment or assault in India's public spaces. Meanwhile, Manila, Philippines ranked 10th in the list of capital that has the most dangerous public transport system for women, according to a Thomson Reuters Foundation survey (ABS CBN, 2014). However, the same might also be true in other parts of the world and countries as women use public transport systems on daily basis.

**Reasons for Travel.** Woman commuters give varied reasons why they travel.

The study revealed that out of fifteen (15) participants, seven (7) woman commuters' reasons for traveling is a visit to family members (husband, parents, or children). Six (6) of them travel due to work such as attending meetings, and seminars, submitting reports, remitting funds, and other work-related activities. Two (2) of them travel to relax and have some time for leisure activities in the city, and three (3) of them said they travel due to medical checkups of a family member, to buy products for business, and to get an allowance from parents (in the case of a student).

Further, it was observed that traveling by bus on thoroughfares is a combination of commuters from all walks of life, men and woman, young and old, professionals and students, and even ordinary people due to several reasons. Adult women sometimes bring with them young children who are usually free of fare, senior citizens and students who claim fare discounts, and adult commuters who are employees.

This means that women commuters have different reasons to travel, which are family-related, school-related, or work-related. This implies that these women are taking their role as homemakers and home providers when they travel.

It was supported by Loukaitou – Sideris, et al. (2009) and Aloul, et al. (2018) female travel because of their different social roles and economic activities. Women make more trip chains between home and childcare or school and on to work, purposes of shopping, visiting family members, education, treatment, and others.

### **Experiences of Women Commuters**

There are situations or circumstances that woman commuters meet that affect their security in public transport such as access to, waiting in the terminal, fear, and experience of harassment, violence, and accident.

*Access to and Waiting in the Terminal.* Commuters usually wait for public transportation at stations or terminals and that and some circumstances affect their security. Data are categorized into two (2), police visibility, lighting, and CCTV cameras; and the transport infrastructure and services.

There are four (4) terminals that the study cover, which includes Puerto Princesa Terminal, located at Barangay San Jose, Puerto Princesa City; Roxas Terminal located at Barangay 2, Roxas, Palawan; Taytay Terminal located at Poblacion, Taytay, Palawan; and El Nido Terminal located at Barangay Corong-Corong, El Nido, Palawan.

#### **Insufficient Police visibility, lighting, and CCTV cameras**

Data revealed that four (4) woman participants from Taytay, Palawan, and Roxas, Palawan experienced that terminals in the said municipalities are dimly lit. Further, two (2) of them declared that there is no security guard or police on duty in the said terminal, especially at night and absence of closed circuit television (CCTV).

Two (2) participants from Roxas, Palawan recalled and supplemented this,

Participant 4

*“...Ahh yon nga po, may guard dapat tapos yong CCTV parang di ko napapansin na may CCTV. (Yeah, that’s it, there should be a guard then I didn’t see a CCTV...)”*

Participant 5:

*“Magkaroon ng CCTV camera, kasi isa yon sa mga pinaka source sa mga investigation in case na magkaroon ng mga insidente na hindi maiwasan. (A CCTV camera should be available because it is a source of information in case of unavoidable incident in the terminal)”*



Figure 4. Bus terminal during nighttime (Puerto Princesa City)

A woman participant recalled an experience along the lines of,

Participant 6

*“Safe naman ako sa terminal kapag umaga, o may araw pa dahil maraming mga tao pa. Pero sa gabi, kagaya ko na matatakutin palagay ko kapag gabi ay hindi safe kasi hindi natin alam kung anong mangyayari sa iyo lalo na kung gabi. Lalo na pag madilim ang terminal tapos kaunti ang tao. Sa akin po, tingin ko kahit ganito lang sya pampubliko dapat meron syang security guard. Para kahit mapagabi man maging safe. (I am safe at terminal in the morning or during the day because of the presence of people. But at night, it is not safe because I am afraid of darkness, because we do not know what will happen at night, especially when the terminal is dimly lit and only few people are around. For me, even it is public; there should be a security guard)”*

Another woman participant had a similar view. She said,

Participant 11

*“...ang nakikita kong suliranin sa terminal ay hindi masyadong visible ang mga security officer natin o ang mga police. (...the problem that I observed at the terminal is that security officers or police is not always visible, and maybe it will be better if there is...)”*



Figure 5. Bus terminal during nighttime (Left: Taytay, Center: El Nido & Right: Roxas)

The above data was verified by observation, it was witnessed that only a few streetlights are functional making the terminal dimly lit. Further, the presence of police or security officer in the area was evident in Puerto Princesa City but not in the other public terminal. An interview with the Terminal Tourist Police revealed that their 12-hour patrol duty starts at 8:00 a.m. and until 10:00 p.m. CCTV camera is not functioning except in the Public Terminal of El Nido, Palawan.

As shown above, the participants have apprehensions as far as safety while waiting at the bus terminal, especially at night is concerned. It should be noted that they all agreed that the visibility of security or police officers in the area installation of CCTV camera and streetlights decrease woman commuters' fear.

It was supported by Gekoski et al. (2015) that high visibility patrols by uniformed police and transport staff are one of the most fundamental crime reduction strategies used on public transport. Casey and Crothers (2005) conducted a survey on the perceptions of public safety, the participants identified that the most important improvements would be to provide police visibility. The second priority was more lighting, and the third was CCTV (Casey and Crothers, 2005).

### **Insufficient transport infrastructure and services**

Three (3) of the participants revealed that there is no waiting shed for passengers in the area, while another (1) commented that sometimes they waited too long in the terminal due to the irregular schedule of bus/van and that the arrival and departure of the bus and van is not organized. While one (1) mentioned of availability of a smoking area and proper comfort room; however two (2) of them also concluded that they felt safe at the stopover. In this aspect, a woman participant recalled,

#### **Participant 9**

*"Hindi po safe, kasi wala pong formal na waiting shed na safe, ang problema din po kapag gabi ay walang ilaw...(It is not safe, because it has no waiting shed; at night there is no light...)"*

Another participant supported this statement. She declared,

#### **Participant 2**

*"Medyo o minsan hindi organize or systematic ang pag-alis ng bus or van, wala sa tamang oras ang kanilang pagbyahe. Dati every one hour to one hour and thirty minutes ang pagitan ng pag-alis pero ngayon na experience ko minsan napapatagal o napapabilis depende sa dating ng pasahero o punuin"*

*muna. (Sometimes van or buses departures are not organized or systematic, it did not follow the schedule of travel. Before, it only takes one hour to one hour and thirty minutes trip interval, and at the present, it takes longer depending on the arrival of passengers)”.*

Another participant commented on the same issue, Participant 5 said

*“Doon sa terminal o sa bus station hindi lang lahat babae but also some kids di ba? Which is one of the concern eh yong health ng mga bata, even nga matanda eh. Lalo na kapag may asthma, dapat ang isang bus station at terminal dapat meron talagang intended place for smoking area then comfort room, proper comfort room. Ang mga commuters, drivers, dispatchers at konduktor. (Not all people in the terminal are women. There are kids and older ones. One of the concerns is their health, especially those suffering from asthma. The smoking area should be identified and as well as proper comfort room)”.*

Data revealed that women commuters are not secured if there is no proper waiting shed area for all commuters, separate comfort room, and smoking area are also the concern of women including an unorganized schedule of departure disturb women commuters’ safety.

On the other hand, observations made by the researchers Puerto Princesa City Public Terminal & Roxas Public Terminal vans and buses travel schedules have an interval of one (1) hour. Proper waiting shed areas are also present except in Taytay Public Terminal. Comfort rooms for males and females are separated.

This means that the safety of commuters especially women at the terminal in Northern Palawan should be strengthened to ensure the optimum security of all travelers that pass through the area. Since women play a critical role in a nation’s social and economic development, their mobility needs should be addressed.

It was supported by the study of Erickson (2016) that when women feel uncomfortable or unsafe taking public transportation, they’re less likely to travel at all, which limits their access to education, higher-paying work, social networks, and more.

***Fear and Experience of Harassment.*** There are uncertainties experienced by women commuters in public transport relative to some form of harassment.

Data revealed that out of fifteen (15) women commuters, nine (9) of them experienced fear and harassment while on board public transportation. Commonly, this harassment is experienced inside the van and bus while on travel. These include sexual assault, remarks with sexual innuendos, and overcrowding.

### **Sexual assault**

A woman who experienced sexual assault during an early morning trip declared,

Participant 1

*“Ang kabuay da ang malam na ameng ing sundo, ingapros na ako, una akeng bag anang nakapetan, dason pag abot doman sa balay ang isa pang pasahero, dege ren anang hipo, pataas den, tapos dason sa isa pang pasahero, bakkak tana apros sa akeng likod, tapos dason doman pagtadeng sa is aka pasahero, apros doman akeng likod, ako ingadlekan,ing pabayaang ko ron, isara pa ako naeya, akeng isip aga iba iba ren, pag abot sa terminal ing*

*toladan na akeng iteng, tapos akbay, duto ako asilag kanana.* (The old man that we picked up at his home took longer than necessary, so while waiting the van dispatcher started touching/groping my back. Then when the van awaits another passenger he touched again my back until we picked another two (2) passengers, he continued doing that to me. I was so afraid and ashamed that's why I did not make any reaction. When we reached the terminal, he touched my shoulder, and in doing so, her hands unintentionally reached my breast)".

She added:

*"Naisip kong ireport sa pulis pero kailangan kong isipin ang sasabihin ng aking mga kamag-anak. Lalong na ang magiging epekto nito saking asawa at anak"* I need to consider the reactions of my family and relatives. Most especially the effect to my husband and children.

As to reporting to authorities, these women have thoughts of doing the same but decided to do otherwise, with the belief that it might bring shame to them, and their report might not be given appropriate justification. However, the woman participant who experienced sexual assault filed a complaint against the driver despite her hesitancy which lasted for three (3) months. Even though she received discouragement from family members, she did the right thing in filing a case in court, which in return favored her claims, and the abuser was meted an appropriate penalty.

An interview with barangay officials and Philippine National Police officers in the three municipalities supported the above findings that their respective offices do not have records/files regarding harassment of woman commuters. The same result was also revealed during interviews with terminal desk officers or terminal guards.

This implies that there are cases where the women neglect or just let it happen and don't want to report to authority for the sake of family or shame.

It was similar to the study conducted by Binder (1981), only 18% of adult women's rapes and 11% of the assaults of children were reported. For adult women, the primary reason for not reporting seemed to combine a type of guilt as well as embarrassment.

Moreover, Engel (2018) supports the above findings. She found out that common reasons why women don't report sexual harassment and sexual assault because of denial and minimization, fear of the consequences, fear they will not be believed, and shame.

### **Remarks with sexual innuendos**

When there were extra seats beside a woman passenger, bus conductors took the opportunity to occupy the seat. The conversation was initiated by inquiring about the woman's name or cell phone number. They felt harassed because perpetrators of harassment were so persistent for them to respond. They found these disturbing especially when they feel nauseous and nervous because of the long travel, or they prefer to rest.

This was supported by a statement from a participant, who said,

### **Participant 5**

*"Sinabi ng konduktor sa isang dalaga, "ang sexy mo naman ga', pwede ka ba mamayang gabi, tapos sasabihin nila "joke lang" nasa sa iyo lang yan kung seseryusuhin mo."* (The bus conductor said to a lady "you are so sexy honey, are you free tonight", and then comment "just kidding", it's up to you if you will take it seriously)".

Similar instances occur especially with young female passengers who wear revealing clothes. The bus conductor persistently talked to these women or if not gave some lewd comments to get attention. As a result, these women feel harassed and uncomfortable.

A participant who observed such an incident said,

Participant 11

*“May isang beses akong bumyahe na may isang babaeng sumakay na maikli ang damit nya tapos lagi siyang inaasar ng konduktor, tingin ko dahil sa suot nya rin kasi nagbibigay sya ng motive kaya ganun. (In one of my trips, there was a lady passenger wearing revealing clothes. The conductor teased her maybe due to her attire”.*

Further, one of the participants said,

Participant 8

*“May byahe ako na tinabihan ako ng konduktor, akala nila estudyante lang ako. Wala man lang karespe-respetong magsalita. Basta na lang hihingin ang cellphone number ko at one time, sumakay ako at naka-front seat. Nasalubong namin ang jeep na nagbayahe din sa amin. Sabi ng konduktor “kaya pala nakangiti ang driver ng jeep, kasi ‘chicks’ ang nakaupo sa harap.” (I had a travel when the conductor seated beside me presuming that I am a student, and was so disrespectful in asking of number. Once, as I seated front and we met a jeep along the highway. The conductor commented that the reason the driver is smiling it is because a “chick’s” is seated in front)”.*

Another participant revealed a similar experience, and said,

Participant 9

*“Minsan po kapag madaling araw, yung pagpauwi dito sa Roxas yung nararanasan ko po at naobserbahan ay kaunti lang ang sumasakay pag madaling araw. Madalas tumatabi saakin ang konduktor, tapos nagtatanong ng mga wala namang kwentang tanong” Ano ang pangalan mo? Tagasan ka? Ano ang cellphone number mo? na dapat wala naman sila doong pakialam”.* (When I travel early in the morning, I observed that only few of passengers are boarding, oftentimes, the bus conductor will seat beside me and asked nonsense questions about my name, address, and cellphone number which are not his business anyway”).

These claims are supported by the observation made by the researchers in one of the buses where a bus conductor made a casual talk with the woman commuter even though she ignored him by not responding to the talk or pretending to be busy listening to music, texting, or playing video games.

They are among others who claimed to have experienced fear and harassment while traveling in public transportation. Most of them had experience with bus conductors and dispatchers. Though they seemed to be negative in this aspect of their travel experiences, they continued availing of the services of public transport.

An interview with the management of the bus lines confirmed that there are few complaints made by woman commuters, but these are limited to lost baggage or cargo and not harassment.

Further, data revealed that among those who experienced harassment, four of them were students. Since seats for men and women are not separated, chances are women can sit beside or in between male passengers. Due to the long travel, the woman participant felt dizzy and eventually blew up, thus the man beside her massaged her back and shoulder making her uncomfortable because she did not know the man.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Technical Assistance Consultant's Report (2014) testified the type of harassment accounted by female commuters are staring/leering and deliberate contact/groping thirty-four percent (34%), comments/remarks with sexual innuendos and obscene gestures twelve percent (12%) along with men blocking the way for women to disembark or following after disembarking and stalking or making animal or kissing noises.

Meanwhile, in Mexico City 6 out of 10 women suffer from some kind of verbal or sexual harassment while traveling on public transportation resources, display different or more complicated patterns of travel, and are more influenced by fear of attack or harassment than are comparable to men (Kapoor, 2016).

### **Overcrowding**

This was supported by a statement from a participant and said,

Participant 7

*“Ay ganyan po pag minsan maraming pasahero madalas po ay nakatayo kami, gawa na hinahabol naming ang oras basta makarating lang kahit nakatayo. Minsan nagkakaroon din ng takot pag overcrowding. Sakin okay lang naman nakatayo syempre kung sino ang mauna sya mauupo, kapag may bumaba at mabakanteng upuan bago makakaupo. Okay lang yung ganun. Huwag na masyadong siksikan kung ano lang sana ang seating capacity ay dapat yun lang. (Sometimes if there are several passengers, we opted to stand and wait when seats are vacated especially when we are running with time. There are also fears in overcrowded bus but for me it is also okay because those who come first should sit first. But it should not be that overcrowded, it must be within the seating capacity)”.*

Participant 6 added:

*“Kapag papunta ako ng-----sumakasakay ako sa -----, madalas punuan, loaded, pakiramdam ko tatagilid tapos matutumba kung may ibang option lang hindi talaga ako sasakay doon. Yung tipong loaded na nga, mabilis pa tapos, yung parang may makakasalubong siya. Tapos biglang magb-ibreak siya, minsan may motor na mag-overtake. Nakakatakot kasi nga, paano kung nabunguan niya yun, paano kung pati kami doon sa loob diba, kaya katakot talaga yung bus. (I went to --- via ----; usually it is loaded with passengers and at the same time it is fast, as if the bus will tilt along the highway. Sometimes there are motorists who overtook the bus; it causes fear for collision among passengers)”.*

In addition participant 4 observed;

*“Hindi rin safe ang ibang pasaherong babaeng nakatayo, hindi nila napapansin na sila natsatsansingan na ng mga nakatayong lalake, siguro hindi na lang nila pinapansin dahil sa sobrang punong puno na. (It is not safe for standing woman commuters while travelling because chances are they can*

be harassed by standing male passengers)”.



*Figure 6. Passengers on board*

It was further observed that the circumstances most experienced by these women are standing inside the bus due to overcrowding. This made them vulnerable to injury especially when the bus made urgent stops/breaks. They are prone to physical harassment also because most often they are standing in between male passengers. Male passengers do not give up seats to standing women, the elderly, or children inside the bus.

Another circumstance related to this is the experience of traveling in overcrowded buses/vans. Buses still board passengers even when no seats are available, and passengers have to stand whether the trip is short or long distance. Sometimes, the vehicle has to carry cargoes/pieces of baggage more than the capacity of the bus compartment, so the cargo is placed under the seats or in the vehicle's aisle. These cause discomfort to passengers as they sit or alight or disembark the bus/vans. Overloading causes difficulty to the bus itself as it ascends or descends slopes on the highway.

This implies that overcrowding buses put passengers at high risk of injuries, passengers can bump into one another, and passengers get pushed out of the bus when the doors open. The overcrowded bus makes travel unsafe for women. The overcrowding inside the bus gives the opportunity to men to not only stand close to women but for unnecessary pushing, shoving, and rubbing bodies. Women do not feel bad about unintentional pushing due to the crowd, but when someone starts taking benefit from the situation, it becomes irritating.

Meanwhile, overcrowding leads to frequent physical contact and raises doubts if the physical contact is purposive and acceptable, sexual harassment in an overcrowded vehicle is an interaction among different perceptions based on gender and class – judgment ad condition or situation where sexual harassment makes it hard for women to report complain (UP System Website, 2014).

This implies that woman commuters have experienced different forms of harassment in public transportation in Northern Palawan. Such harassment could be incurred while on public transport or waiting at the terminal.

Relative to this, the State affirms women’s rights as human rights and shall intensify its efforts to fulfill its duties under international and domestic law to recognize, respect, protect, fulfill, and promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms of women, especially marginalized women, in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other fields without distinction or discrimination on account of class, age, sex, gender, language, ethnicity, religion, ideology, disability, education, and status. The State condemns discrimination against women in all its forms and pursues by all appropriate means and without delay the policy of eliminating discrimination against women in keeping with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other

international instruments consistent with the Philippine law. The State shall accord women the rights, protection, and opportunities available to every member of society.

Section 4 (k), paragraph 2 of the Magna Carta of Women provides "Violence Against Women" includes paragraph (2) Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work, in the educational institution and elsewhere, trafficking in women, and prostitution; and paragraph (3) Physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs. Section 31 provides the services and intervention as necessary such as, but not limited to (k) transportation assistance.

**Violence.** Some forms of uncertainties are experienced by woman commuters in public transport due to force or intimidation and the like.

Data revealed that eight (8) out of fifteen (15) participants had experienced some form of force or intimidation while traveling on public transportation. It is categorized into ambush/shootout, theft, and loss of baggage.

### **Ambush/shootout**

Another participant who declared a related incident supports this,

#### **Participant 5**

*"Sumakay ako ng bus that night along ---- at ----. Binaril ang bintana ng driver so napahinto kami, sumigaw ang mga pasahero na "kuya dumiretso ka na lang" huwag na ninyong babain hindi ninyo alam ang lugar na to, madilim at walang ilaw. Saka walang mga bahay. Hindi natin kilala kung sino ang mga nasa paligid. (I was travelling by bus that night along ---- and ----. The driver's window was shot so the driver stopped the bus. A passenger shouted to the driver to continue driving because the area is too dark and inhabited. We do not know the people around us)".*

*"September 2017 naranasan ko kasama ang ibang pasahero around 2 to 3 am sa ---- din nasa pagitan kami ng barilan ng taong labas at military, natatakot na akong magbyahe ng madaling araw" (It was September 2017 that I experienced a shootout between the military and unidentified persons, between two to three o'clock in the morning at ----, I am afraid to travel early in the morning or midnight).*

#### **Participant 13**

*"Minsan pa lang naman ako nakaexperience na natakot talaga ako sa ---- bus yung may nakasabay kami na may dalang sako na may lamang mahahaba, basta alam ko mahaba yun. Sumakay sa --- sa alanganing lugar papunta sa ---. Tingin ko ay baril yun. Tapos bumulong ang konduktor sa driver na meron nga sa dulo. May mga naririnig akong pangyayari na tinatambangan, madalas sa bahaging ---- at ---- inaabangan. So far mga isolated cases. (I experienced once while travelling via ---- Bus when there were passengers who boarded at uninhabited area along ----highway going to ---- who brought with them sack containing something long with I presumed to be guns. Then the conductor whispered to the driver about the presence in the bus. I heard of isolated incidents of ambush to military personnel in between ---- and ----)".*

Data revealed that one of them experienced a shootout in an uninhabited part of the highway between Taytay, Palawan, and Roxas, Palawan on separate dates and times. The first

was a bullet hitting the driver's window while the other was when the van was caught between unidentified people and a military shootout. Both incidents happened at night, which brought fear and traumatic experience to the passengers.

This reveals that a participant experienced traveling in a bus at night with male passengers bringing with them concealed guns. This brought fear and uncertainties during the trip for an impending encounter with the military. This implies that the presence of any armed group/individual that is against the government directly affects women in public transportation including their travel time and routes.

Similarly, United Nations Women (UN Women) reported that women leave work or school at late hours and they harmed on their way home as they pass through areas that are dark and desolate. Usually from 6:00 pm to 12:00 am, women are once again the group most affected by robberies.

### **Theft and loss of baggage**

Another woman participant shared her experience and said,

Participant 3:

*“Yung mga kasamahan ko meron talaga, may kasamahan ako bag talaga ang nawala. Nagkapalitan, tapos nung hinanap na nawala na daw. Ayon ang konduktor nagbayad. (I remember my companion, she lost her bag and according to bus conductor it was lost, so the bus personnel paid the corresponding amount)”.*

This experience was supported by another participant, who said,

Participant 4:

*Ahmm, oo minsan medyo maraskal sila magdrive, tapos kahit yung mga konduktor maraskal din, may time na nawalan ako ng wallet na purse lang naman siya, hindi ko alam kung nalaglag ba siya o kinuha talaga siya sa bulsa ng bag ko. (Yes, sometimes they drive recklessly, and also the conductor. Once I lost my purse, I didn't know if I dropped it or it was stolen from my bag).*

Interviews with terminal dispatcher/liaison officers supported this claim by stating that in most cases, complaints of passengers are lost baggage or cargo, valuables such as purses, wallets, cellphones, etc.

Pursuant to the Memorandum Circular No. 2015 – 002 of the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) all Public Utility Bus (PUB) operators are strictly required to tag their passengers' baggage with a blank sticker with corresponding tags indicating the name of the baggage owner and half of the blank sticker tag shall serve as claim stub of the passenger/s upon disembarking.

This implies that woman commuters have experienced different forms of violence while traveling on public transport. Said violence can be categorized as slight or grave, yet it brought discomforts and uncertainties to commuters, especially women.

Due to these, woman commuters no longer insist on boarding when the bus is already overcrowded; make reports of violence to authorities if necessary; they do not expect male passengers to give their seats because it is on a first come first serve basis and both male and female passengers are paying fare dues; and by being calm because it might distract passengers or even the driver.

A similar study conducted by the University of the Philippines found that there are unique factors in a public transport setting that can lead to harassment such as overcrowding which leads to frequent physical contact; overcrowding which raises doubts if the physical contact is on purpose and acceptable; and harassment in an overcrowded vehicle.

**Accident.** Circumstances experienced by woman commuters in public transport endangers their life and properties.

The study revealed that twelve (12) out of fifteen (15) woman participants experience fear of accidents while in public transportation. One of the sources of fear is when the bus travels fast (speeding), especially at night and the weather is not good or raining. Since the road to Northern Palawan has several curves and some on either side of the road, it is very risky for buses to travel fast. This creates fear in passengers especially when the bus changes gear or stops shortly.

Data showed that six (6) of the participants had experienced an accident as they traveled on public transport. One of the participants declared,

### **Vehicular Accident**

#### Participant 2

*“Unang una ko talaga na naexperience yung mga luma pang bus noon naranasan kong masiraan, hindi na makaakyat sa matarik na kalsada, ang nangyari ay huminto at ibinaba kami at naghintay ng sumunod na bus para makarating kahit late na sa school.”*(The first time I experienced accident was while boarding old bus; it failed to ascend the sloping part of the road. The bus was forced to stop and passengers have to wait for the next bus arrive)”).

Another participant supported the above statement and said,

#### Participant 3

*“Ang mahirap sa sasakayan ay yung napuputukan ng gulong, mabuti na lang nakakapreno agad ang bus. Minsan may mga hayop na tumatawid sa kalsada, biglang preno. (In case of wretched tire/s it might result to accident when the driver failed to stop the bus; or oftentimes due to stray animals crossing the road)”*.

In like manner, another participant recalled her experiences,

#### Participant 10

*“Yung time na yun nakikinig ako ng music sa earphone tapos napansin ko nagsisigawan ang mga tao at ang bus liku-liko, zigzag zigzag na ang takbo. Aruy patay! sabi ko parang aksidente na ang dating nito. Iba na ang takbo ng bus hindi na sya sa proper way na pag drive ng driver dapat sana straight lang sya tatlong beses kaming hinampas hampas bago tumaob. Namalayan ko na lang... nasabi ko buhay pa ba ako? Naramdaman ko parang namanhid ang buong ng katawan ko. Ang naririnig po sigaw, humihingi ng tulong, kahit po humihingi kami ng tulong wala pong lumalapit sa amin. Nakuha lang po kami pagdating ng rescue at mga ambulance. (That time, I was listening to music and then observed that other passengers are already shouting, the bus is running zigzag. Then I realized, we had an accident. The bus toppled upside down, leaving the passengers trapped inside. I felt numbness all over my body. I heard people crying for help but nobody is coming until rescue arrived)”*.



Figure 7. An accident witnessed by the researchers during data gathering

Further, three (3) woman participants revealed similar experiences. One of them experienced an accident on board one of the buses bound for Northern Palawan in 2016. It caused five deaths and several injuries to the passengers. The accident happened in a sloping part of the highway where the bus descended. Added to these circumstances is the change of driver by the conductor from some point of travel on the highway. Today, such change of driver due to fatigue is discouraged through the Memorandum Circular No. 012–2017 directing all Public Utility Bus operations to observe in the dispatch of their drivers" PUB drivers are required to drive for six (6) hours only; more than the six (6) hours period an alternate driver on standby shall take over, and the conductor cannot be an alternative driver to provide continuous assistance to passengers.

The researchers also observed the said experiences of the commuters during the data gathering. Added to this observation is when drivers of buses and vans reply to text messages or answer phone calls while driving even though the talking is done for a very short period. Said behavior of drivers is prohibited under section (4a) of Republic Act No. 10913 or the "Anti-Distracted Driving Act declaring unlawful the use of mobile communication device to write, send, or read a text-based communication or to make or receive calls, and other similar acts while a motor vehicle is in motion or temporary stopped at a red light.

It implies that accidents do happen on public transport. Whatever the cause/s of these incidents, it endangers both the life and property of commuters. Though laws are implemented to ensure the safety of passengers, accidents cannot be avoided. . Further, it revealed that most of these accidents concern the driver of the bus or van.

The study by Kaplan & Prato (2012) supports this data that the most common cause of accidents is driver error either driving while tired or fatigued, distracted driving, speeding, and the influence of alcohol or drugs.

### Over speeding

In a situation where it is over-speeding, five (5) woman participants declared that they asked the driver to slow down because it's risky, especially at night; to use a seat belt if available; to be calm; be awake during travel; and or asked for a bus hotline or change bus.

Some of their experiences are presented below:

#### Participant 6

*"Minsan nakikita ko ang driver na inaantok, sinasabihan ko na "kuya okay ka lang ba?" kung mabilis sinasabihan ko naman ang driver "Huwag po masyadong mabilis" (Sometimes, I observed that the driver is sleepy, so I talked to him; and if he drives too fast, I ask him to slow down)".*

## Participant 14

*“Mabilis magpatakbo, yun lang. Yung minsan naka angat na ang puwet mo kasi parang wala ng kurbada, natatakot ako minsan baka kung mapano. (Driving too fast that sometimes you feel that your bottom no longer touches your seat especially if the bus is turning curves in the road)”*.

## Participant 15

*“Hindi ko lang talaga malimutan na byahe namin ng anak ko ay yung driver na...mabilis talaga magpatakbo.. lalo na nun umuulan-ulan..(I can't really forget when the bus runs too fast and it was raining that day)”*.

Data revealed that women commuters feel unsafe when the drivers exceed the expected speed of driving. The memorandum circular indicates the speed limit for provincial buses shall be eighty (80) kilometers per hour (kph). The speed limit for city buses shall be sixty (60) kilometers per hour (kph) except when traveling inside the expressways, in which case their speed limit should be eighty (80) kilometers per hour (kph).

In addition, Section (2) of the Republic Act No. 10916 requires the mandatory installation of speed limiters in public utilities and certain types of vehicles. This is to maintain at all times the safety and protection of the public and pursue a more proactive and preventive approach to secure the safety of passengers and the public in general on roads and highways.

Speeding is a major factor in traffic deaths and injuries. In 2017 the National Council Security Inquiry Fact website stated that twenty-seven percent (27%) of vehicular accidents in the US are caused by over speeding. In addition, the United Nations reports that every 1% increase in mean speed produces a 4% increase in the fatal crash risk and a 3% increase in the serious crash risk. The death risk for pedestrians hit by car fronts rises rapidly (4.5 times from 50 km/h to 65 km/h). In car-to-car side impacts, the fatality risk for car occupants is 85% at 65 km/h.

In response to the different fears of women commuters' researchers interviewed the bus/van personnel and revealed the following:

The RoRo Bus lines have dash cam installation inside and outside the bus for the protection of the driver, especially in cases of accidents and to check the behavior of the bus conductors. Fire extinguishers, seatbelts, and persons with disabilities (PWD) seats are also provided inside the bus; warning devices, complete tools, and reserve tires are available; tire bolts, brakes, and fuel are checked before departure.

These are all provided to ensure the safety of the travel, especially of the commuters. In line with this, Republic Act Number 8750 requires mandatory compliance by a motorist of private and public vehicles to use seat belt devices and requires vehicle manufacturers to install seat belt devices in all their manufactured vehicles. The driver and front seat passengers of a public or private motor vehicle are required to wear or use their seat belt devices while inside a vehicle running the engine on any road or thoroughfare, front and back seat passengers are likewise required to use their seat belt devices at all times. Any passenger who refuses to wear a seat belt shall not be allowed to continue his/her trip.

Further, Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board Memorandum Circular No. 2010-023 provides that the State promote the mobility of persons with disabilities (PWD), as well as general public awareness of the rights of PWDs and foster understanding of their special needs. Public Utility Bus shall have a display of the International Symbol of Accessibility in the designated seats inside all units. Regular buses

shall have at least five (5) while air-conditioned buses shall have at least four (4) designated seats for PWDs near entrance doors. Other passengers may use those designated seats if not occupied but shall yield them to incoming PWDs whenever the occasion arises. Owners or operators of Public Utility Bus operating in highly urbanized cities shall install in their units audio-visual aids such as buzzers and bells flashing lights to inform the driver of any alighting passengers.

In like manner, Cherry Bus Line has seven inspectors checking at different points of travel from Puerto Princesa City to El Nido, Palawan, and vice versa. This is to make sure that the number of passengers manifested in the tickets is similar to the actual head count. Routine procedures such as cleaning the bus, checking tires and brakes, and regular meeting of drivers and conductors are also conducted before departure. Instead of a dash cam, Global Positioning System (GPS) and speed limiter are installed inside the bus. In cases of over speeding, the speed limiter will serve as an alarm. They adhere to the belief that customers/passengers are always right.

Further, an interview with CAMARIH Operation Manager revealed that they practice online booking so that a passenger (tourist or local) has the freedom to choose a favored seat and the passenger beside him/her.

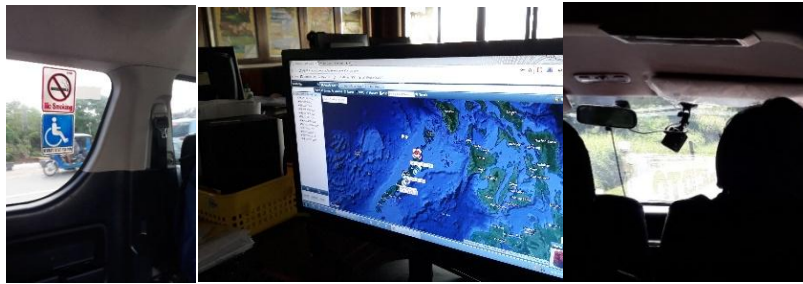
Drivers have to undergo one-week training under senior drivers to be familiar with their travel patterns and how to talk with guest/tourist passengers. Routine procedures such as checking of brake and brake pad, extra tire, fire extinguisher, trash can, and tools are made before departure.

For maintenance, the brake pad is replaced once forty thousand (40,000) kilometers (km) of travel is consumed while the brake shoe is replaced after eighty thousand (80,000) kilometers (km) of travel. This is to ensure the safety of the travel and avoid accidents. Further, a speed limit of ninety (90) kilometers (km) per hour is expected, otherwise, drivers are called for suspension or termination. Accidents can be easily monitored through the Global Positioning System (GPS) locator. The GPS device informs the operators about the proper routes and the speed at which the van is traveling. Should a van go missing for any reason, the device can help bus operators and authorities to recover it. It can help operators quickly send a replacement bus to convey the passengers stranded by a broken-down bus. The management is open to suggestions and complaints. Their priority is the safety of the passengers.

The study implies that each bus company/operator has different policies as far as the transportation business is concerned; it has similarities in routine procedures, however, the bottom line is the safety of the passengers, and passenger safety is their primary concern.

As far as driving hours, Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board Memorandum Circular Number 2017-012 (1) requires Public Utility Bus drivers to drive for six (6) hours only. (2) In excess of the six (6) hour period, an alternative driver on standby shall take over; and (3) the conductor cannot be an alternate driver in order to provide continuous assistance to passengers;

Further, the said agency requires operators of any public land transportation service to equip, install and provide devices such as Global Positioning System (GPS) devices for all bus units. This is based on a study on Speed Control of Public Utility Buses where there is a strong indication that accident severity is very much related to the speeds of colliding vehicles. This accident type is caused primarily by tailgating or miscalculation of speed. The GPS device can also help improve security and safety for passengers and drivers.



*Figure 8. Installed Dash Cam, GPS Monitoring, and sets for PWD*

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This means that the buses/van operators whom the study has covered have shown compliance with the mandates of the law to ensure that travels in the said thoroughfares are safe for both the buses/vans and the commuters. It is likewise deduced that these transportation operators obediently follow transportation laws.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result of the study the researchers concluded that women commuters have varied experiences that may affect their security and safety while waiting, accessing, and during on public transportation.

It is therefore recommended that the Local Government Unit (LGU) shall enact policies to enforce public safety to address women's travel needs in order to bridge the mobility gap in gender inclusivity. Likewise, provide lighting in dim areas, install street lights & closed-circuit television in the public terminal, and create a women's front desk and twenty-four hours presence of police officers to increase the safety and security of women in a public terminal. Moreover, public transportation operators ensure that women are free from fear and harassment, violence and accident while waiting and on board public transport.

### Consent

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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