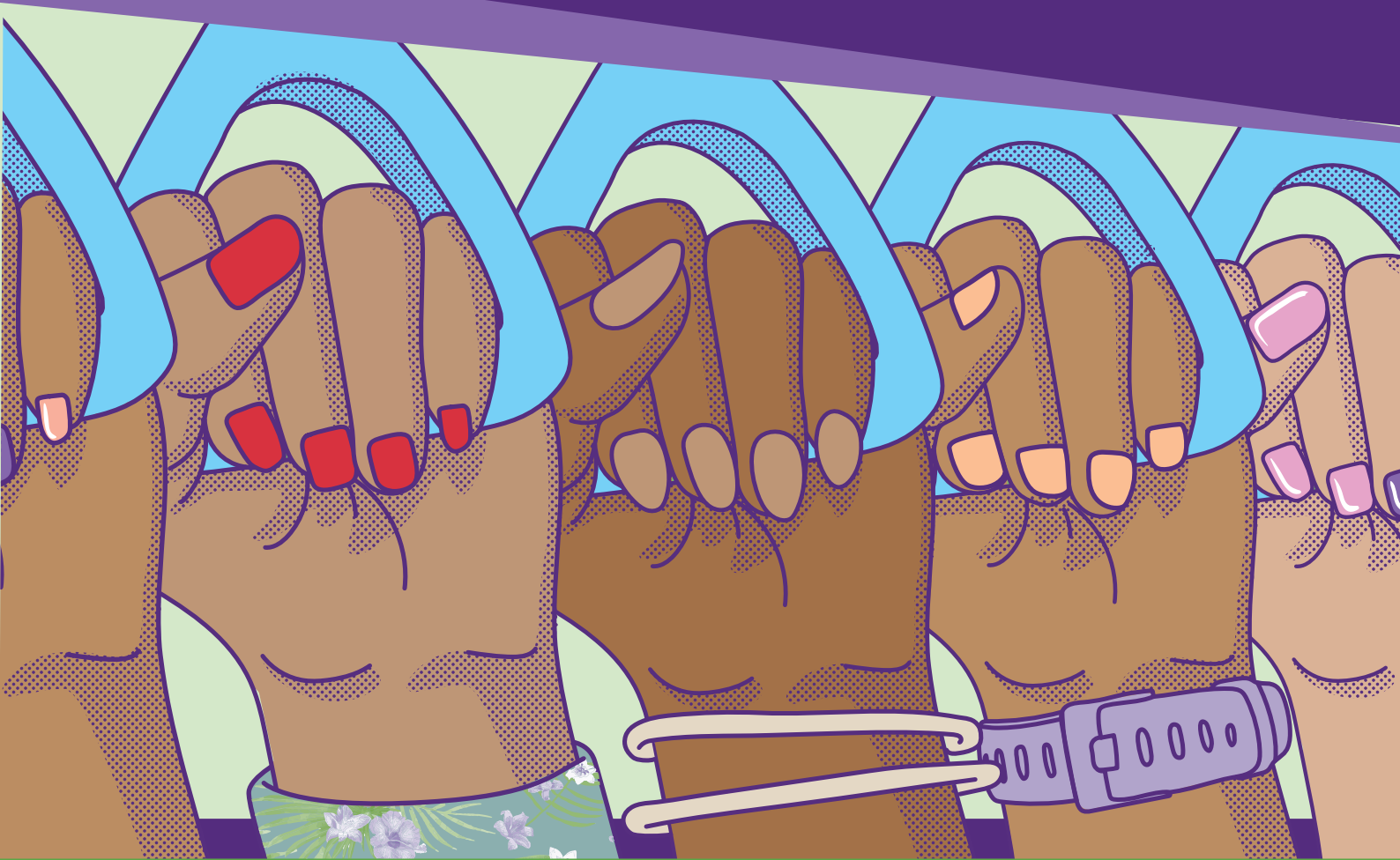


# ENOUGH

TOGETHER WE CAN END VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



OXFAM



Report

# SMASHING SPATIAL PATRIARCHY

Shifting social norms driving sexual  
and gender-based violence on public  
transport in Sri Lanka

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OXFAM

# SMASHING SPATIAL PATRIARCHY

With rising urbanization following a civil war, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) on public transport has become increasingly relevant in Sri Lanka, as women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people enter historically masculinized spaces more than before. Despite important legislative and policy advances, sexual harassment on public transport is widely under-reported, and suffers from both bystander and duty bearer inaction.

Global literature and experience have shown how such behaviours are strongly governed by social norms. Rooted in systems of power, patriarchy and hetero and cis normativity, these norms justify, legitimize or excuse SGBV, grant perpetrators impunity and sustain a culture of fear and silence. This report explores the belief systems, norms and influencing factors that drive violence against women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people on public transport. It also identifies positive outliers, key allies and positive influences as potential pathways to norm change. The findings directly inform a context-specific version of Oxfam's worldwide 'Enough' campaign that aims to replace harmful social norms with positive ones that promote gender equality and non-violence.

The campaign in Sri Lanka, 'Not on my Bus', co-created with local partners, aims to reduce sexual harassment in public transport through promoting bystander intervention. It focuses on challenging the harmful norms that bystander intervention will not help or even worsen matters, and that the responsibility for action solely rests on survivors. It seeks to promote positive norms that bystanders should intervene and that it is everyone's responsibility to uphold everyone's rights to violence-free public spaces.

## Keywords

Sexual harassment | Public transport | Mobility | Social norms | Gender norms  
Spatial patriarchy | Sri Lanka | Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is widespread in Sri Lanka (Gomez and Gomez, 2004; Perera et al, 2011; WHO et al, 2013) transcending both private and public spaces. With rising urbanization following a civil war, SGBV in public spaces including public transport has become increasingly relevant as more women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people are entering historically masculinized spaces.

Sri Lanka's first national study on this topic revealed that 90% of women and girls have been subjected to sexual harassment on public buses and trains at least once in their lifetime, while over half of women and girls said they experienced violence on a regular basis (UNFPA, 2017). Two prominent cases caused outrage and drew national and international attention to the problem of SGBV in Sri Lanka: the 2014 arrest of and public backlash against a Sri Lankan woman who slapped a man in response to sexual harassment (known popularly as 'the Wariyapola incident'), and the brutal gang rape and murder of Vidhya Sivaloganathan in Jaffna on her journey home from school in 2015.

Sri Lanka's laws first recognized sexual harassment as a criminal offence in 1995, defined as 'unwelcome sexual advances by words or action used by a person in authority', and punishable by five years in prison and/or a fine. However, in spite of its widespread prevalence and legislative advances, sexual harassment on public transport continues to be under-reported, while bystanders and duty bearers do not act sufficiently.

In Sri Lanka, only 8% of women and girls reported seeking help from law enforcement when facing sexual harassment on public transport, while 82% of bystanders reported they rarely intervened (UNFPA, 2017). Studies have revealed how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people too rarely seek support or redress when experiencing violence in public places citing fear of persecution based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (IGLHRC, 2014). This is particularly facilitated by existing laws such as 365A of the Penal Code which criminalises same sex relations and the Vagrants Ordinance which is used to target sex workers, transgender people and/or anyone with non-conforming gender expression (ibid).

Global literature has shown how behaviours such as these are strongly governed by social norms—the unwritten rules or shared beliefs around what is considered typical or appropriate behaviour (Sanday, 1981; Otterbein, 1994; Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2013). Rooted in systems of power, patriarchy and

hetero and cis normativity, such norms justify, legitimize or excuse SGBV, grant perpetrators impunity and sustain a culture of fear and silence.

Initiatives aimed at combatting SGBV require an understanding of the social norms unpinning it and how they interact with individual, material, institutional and social factors. There is a significant body of research on SGBV in Sri Lanka, including national Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Surveys. Much of the existing research however focuses on SGBV in the private sphere (in households, between families and intimate partners). There is limited research into SGBV and particularly VAWG in public spaces, especially public transport, and the social norms that permit and reinforce it.

*Enough: Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls* is Oxfam's worldwide campaign to replace harmful social norms with more positive ones that promote gender equality and non-violence.

A consultative process bringing together partner organizations and experts working on SGBV in Sri Lanka in January 2018 concluded that the national campaign would focus on VAWG on public transport.

## The primary objectives of the formative research were to:

1. gain an in-depth understanding of the norms and other factors that interact to sustain perpetrator and bystander behaviour, and prevent women from speaking out and/or seeking support; and
2. identify the drivers of norm change that can inform the design of the Enough campaign in Sri Lanka.

The research draws on an adapted version of the ecological framework of behaviour change (Cislaghi and Heise, 2018), which recognizes that various intersecting factors influence behavior at four overlapping levels: individual, social, institutional and material. For example, an SGBV survivor's knowledge that there is a specific desk at the local police station will not in itself encourage reporting if they also anticipate social sanctions in the form of victim blaming from the police.

Oxfam's social norms diagnostic tool is a research methodology (Butt, 2019) based on best-practice research methods for diagnosing social norms and the socio-ecological framework of behaviour change, rooted in a feminist participatory action research approach. It was applied in nine workshops with participants including women, men, transwomen and

those who identified as queer across five cities that serve as mass transit points for people of multiple ethnicities and ages —namely Batticaloa, Colombo, Kandy, Katunayake, and Kilinochchi.

To explore the prevailing attitudes, narratives and norms that may impact law enactment and service provision, 13 key in-depth interviews were carried out with duty bearers (including but not limited to bus drivers, police, government transport officials) and key stakeholders concerned with SGBV and/or public transport issues, including the UN, civil society groups and private sector actors. Sri Lanka's context-specific Enough campaign strategy was developed on the basis of the research analysis.

## KEY FINDINGS

The research identified 12 norms around gender roles and responsibilities and sexual harassment that, to varying degrees, fuel violence against women and transgender and gender non-conforming people on public transport, and creates a culture of impunity for perpetrators. It also highlighted key influencers and factors that intersect with norms to weaken/reinforce SGBV on public transport. In addition, the researchers identified some positive deviances or outliers, key allies and positive influencing factors that could potentially assist norm change.

### NORMS AROUND GENDER ROLES

Three key norms arose regarding gender roles, responsibilities and idealized notions of masculinity and femininity rooted in systems of patriarchy and power. These norms shape beliefs around who should occupy which spaces and how, and therefore provide the context within which SGBV on public transport could be understood.

Across genders, age groups and cities, participants characterized ideal women as submissive ('accepting male dominance'), obedient, decently dressed and nurturing, with their primary responsibility being to look after their children and home. This was a very strongly held norm with a high prevalence across the five cities.

In Katunayake, virginity and a clean reputation were also characteristics used to describe ideal women by men. In Colombo, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals not subscribing to this ideal also shared a fear of backlash—for example, transwomen said that they would not speak up when being harassed as their voices could give away that they were not 'real women'. It was also found that if one transgressed the traits of

an ideal woman, violence was seen as a reasonable consequence.

Across all cities, another norm that emerged was that the ideal man is a provider of financial and economic security, and that he should be 'decent' and respectful towards women. In Batticaloa it was noted specifically that men would be mocked by neighbours for engaging in care work, and that the community would call men 'lazy' if they were not engaged in work outside of the home. Class was also a factor in the responses given by participants, with the ideal man being associated with the term 'decent' on several occasions—implying that men who came from a particular class or socio-economic background would behave in an indecent way.

This idea arose again later in discussions on the characteristics of perpetrators of sexual harassment, with participants arguing that 'decent' men would not behave in such a way. However, as the discussions progressed it was observed that men were not held up to these idealized characteristics of respect as much as women were to the idealized notions of femininity, and it was seen that women transgressing their expected roles faced far more significant and dire consequences.

Less prevalent and strong but still influential was the third identified norm that men should be the dominant partner and be responsible for protecting women. The patriarchal notion of chivalry and protection was strongly highlighted as an important characteristic of ideal men. Participants felt that men as the 'stronger sex' had a responsibility to 'keep women safe', especially as they were unable to do this for themselves. This also extended to dominance within the family unit, in terms of making decisions and having control.

### NORMS AROUND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Eight key norms arose around how survivors of harassment, particularly women were viewed and were expected to respond; the role of bystanders; and the key characteristics of perpetrators and drivers of their behaviour. Participants of the research articulated how these norms impact their lived experiences.

A very strong and most prevalent norm across all five districts, among community members and duty bearers alike, was that women should dress decently to avoid harassment. If they dress any differently, they are inviting harassment upon themselves. Participants said that bystanders would be more or less likely to intervene based on the perceived 'decency' of the women's clothing, and this would also have a direct

impact on the attitude and support gained from law enforcement should she choose to make a complaint.

While most of the participants said religious or conservative attire would protect a woman from being harassed, in Batticaloa younger participants said that women who wear religious attire like the hijab or abaya are more likely to be harassed, since some men think they will not resist or retaliate in public transport. This tied in directly with the next norm, women who face harassment are the 'wrong type' of women, or have transgressed their prescribed roles. Women who dressed differently, travelled at 'strange' times or alone, and those who did not seem to be from the area were all cited as examples.

The norm that bystanders do not and should not interfere because it is not their business, and that they would get into trouble or make the situation worse was also very strong and widely held. Bystanders were primarily seen to be apathetic and bystander intervention was thought uncommon. The reasons for this included feeling that intervening would be perceived as making the situation worse (e.g. by angering the harasser), sexual harassment being considered a private matter even when taking place in a public setting, not being willing to face the consequences of going to the police, and believing that the woman might have invited the harassment in some way. It was also noted that bystanders should not intervene as doing so would risk their own safety. A weaker and less prevalent norm, raised in focus group discussions in Katunayake was that bystanders who intervene have hidden intentions. This implied that bystanders who broke the norm of not intervening were to be looked upon with suspicion, and their intentions in doing so questioned.

When it came to survivors' responses to incidents of sexual harassment, a norm of medium strength was that good women do not complain, yell or hit perpetrators. Survivors are discouraged from speaking out and confronting their perpetrators, even if the harassment is severe.

There was evidence of strong social sanctions against women speaking out, such as women being blamed by perpetrators and bystanders based on how they are dressed, or being out at a particular time of day. The case of a video clip that went viral on social media showing a young woman from Wariyapola confronting her harasser and getting arrested, and the subsequent vitriol she faced for her clothes and actions, was referenced by various participants. Women also reported being afraid of going to the courts for fear of having their character called into question.

This contradicted another, very strong, norm—the onus of

responsibility for preventing and/or responding to SGBV falls on women. Strategies identified by participants for addressing sexual harassment centred around changing the actions and behaviours of female passengers/survivors to avoid/prevent harassment, rather than perpetrators. An issue that was consistently raised was that women do not speak up. A norm of medium strength that emerged in connection to survivor response was that perpetrators will continue to harass—we should not expect any different, i.e. perpetrators are not expected to change their behaviour.

Overall, perpetrators and their actions were not identified as the root cause of the problem, but rather survivors and the external factors that enable harassment were.

The final norm that emerged was that men need to fulfil their needs—it is common and normal for them to do so. While this norm around male sexual entitlement was not as strong or prevalent as the previous norm, it came out strongly in the discussions in Katunayake and Kandy. This was underpinned by the belief that men do harass and though it may not be 'acceptable', it is expected.

## INFLUENCING FACTORS

A number of factors that influence the occurrence of SGBV on public transport were identified.

Sri Lanka's civil war (1983–2009) was highlighted as a factor that had shifted social norms that influence SGBV. In Batticaloa, specific reference was made to how norms around gender roles and responsibilities have relaxed in the post-conflict context, towards war widows and female-headed households. Participants also pointed out how norms have been influenced by an increase in female education in the post-war developmental boom.

A major factor highlighted that prevents women and bystanders from reporting incidents of harassment was the complexity of the legal system. In one discussion about bystander intervention, some of the younger men shared that they choose not to intervene in part because they do not want to be drawn into further inquiries at the police station.

Across all districts, participants reported feeling that the police are not helpful or supportive when complaints about SGBV on public transport are made to them. In addition, there were concerns around the practicality of being able to prove that an incident took place. Respondents stated that police often blame victims for SGBV, which further deters reporting.

Other factors raised included how the role of class and

power dynamics affects how survivors and perpetrators would be perceived and treated by law enforcement and bystanders. For example, if the survivor was perceived to be from a higher class, then the police would be more helpful.

The positive effects of technology were also highlighted: respondents described how social media has allowed survivors to find widespread support from outside their communities, and how using mobile phones to film incidents has served as a deterrent to perpetrators who could no longer remain anonymous.

Some participants did however note that perpetrators were also using mobile phones as a tool for harassment, by taking pictures of women without their consent.

Overcrowding was also identified as a factor that reinforced norms and weakened sanctions against perpetrators: it was suggested that the crowded environment of a peak-time bus makes it easier for perpetrators to harass women without being noticed.

## KEY INFLUENCERS

Participants identified key actors with influence over perpetrators' decisions to harass, bystanders' decisions to intervene and survivors' decision to respond to SGBV on public transport.

Those with influence over survivors were parents, particularly mothers, especially over how survivors should react to incidents, whether and how to involve law enforcement and stand up to harassment, and whether or not to endure victim-blaming. Other key influencers identified in this regard were bystanders, partners, schoolteachers and older women in community. Key influencers identified over bystanders and (potential) perpetrators were other bystanders, and bus drivers and conductors. Respondents were also asked to identify the key influencers for perpetrators and once again other bystanders, conductors and bus drivers were highlighted.

## POSITIVE DEVIANCES

A few positive deviances, i.e. individuals or groups that defy harmful norms, also arose from the analysis. Older women were identified as the exception among bystanders, as they were more likely and willing to intervene in incidents of SGBV on public transport, and face less backlash for doing so. In terms of gender roles and responsibilities, it was found that younger respondents focused more on gender-neutral positive characteristics (e.g. being brave, taking responsibility, being honest and hardworking) for both men and women. The youth also proved to have more malleable ideas around gender roles and positive norms, such as how it should not matter how women dress and the

need for bystander intervention.

## THE 'ENOUGH' CAMPAIGN IN SRI LANKA: NOT ON MY BUS

The Enough campaign for Sri Lanka is called 'Not On My Bus'. It was designed through a participatory approach that focuses on addressing the norm around the apathy, and the unwillingness of bystanders to intervene and stop sexual harassment from taking place.

At the sense-making and campaign-planning workshop, the 11 norms identified in the formative research were ranked and prioritized according to criteria including prevalence; level of influence on the actions of perpetrators, bystanders and survivors; and 'campaignability'.

### Groups consistently highlighted the following norms as among the strongest:

- women should dress decently to avoid harassment;
- women should be submissive and accept male dominance; and
- bystanders should not intervene in order not to make things worse.

The campaign was named 'Not on my Bus' and given the slogan 'don't ignore sexual harassment #CreateAScene'. The multilingual campaign (in English, Tamil and Sinhala) will focus on breaking the norm that bystander intervention will not help, or further exacerbate the issue, as well as the norm of placing the responsibility of action solely on the survivor. Its main targets are bystanders, especially bus drivers and conductors, young people (including school children) and rush-hour commuters. The campaign name was chosen to appeal to the target audience of the campaign, mainly bystanders who use public transport and draws directly from the positive norm that the campaign aims to create—that bystanders should create a scene and should intervene when they witness sexual harassment in public transport.

The campaign will communicate the importance of bystander intervention on social media (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) and traditional (print, online, TV) media. The campaign recognizes that it cannot solve all the problems related to sexual harassment in public transport, but can take on strategic areas in which norm change campaigns can be effective. A campaign strategy has been developed and agreed by Oxfam and partner organizations, outlining strategic activities, ranging from media campaigns to dialogues with government institutions, which will aim to challenge the negative norms and promote positive norms that encourage bystander intervention.



# INTRODUCTION

# 1

Sri Lanka has in recent years seen some gains in gender equality. The 2018 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report ranked Sri Lanka as one of the best performing countries in the region, having closed nearly 68% of their overall gender gap, and entirely closing the gender gap on health and survival (WEF, 2018). However, studies show that progress in other areas is lacking. For example, Sri Lanka has a high prevalence and tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), particularly violence against women and girls (VAWG).

A World Health Organisation (WHO) country profile on SGBV in Sri Lanka states that ‘reports of the relevant service entities and NGOs indicate the prevalence of diverse forms of GBV ranging from rape, sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, violence during pregnancy, sexual harassment in public places, etc.’ (WHO, 2018).

Acts of violence based on unequal power relationships and gender norms are defined as SGBV, and women are disproportionately affected (UNHCR, 2018). SGBV encompasses a broad spectrum of physical, emotional and psychological acts carried out by a wide range of possible actors, from spouses and family to neighbours and strangers (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002). SGBV is a major public health concern, and has multiple economic, health and social consequences for women, children, transgender and gender non-conforming people and societies as a whole. VAWG, the most common form of SGBV and the primary focus of this study, can take place at multiple stages of a person’s life at different levels: individual; community and societal.

With rising urbanization following a civil war, SGBV in public spaces, including public transport, has become increasingly relevant in Sri Lanka, as women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people are entering historically masculinized spaces more than before to avail new educational and economic opportunities. In 2017, UNFPA Sri Lanka released the first national study documenting the nature and determinants of harassment faced by women and girls using public transport. The report found that a staggering 90% of women and girls have been subjected to sexual harassment on public buses and trains at least once in their lifetime; over half said they experienced violence on a regular basis (UNFPA, 2017). Two prominent cases caused outrage and drew national and international attention to the problem of SGBV in Sri Lanka: the 2014 arrest of and public backlash against a Sri Lankan woman who slapped a man in response to sexual harassment (known popularly as

‘the Wariyapola incident’), and the brutal gang rape and murder of Vidhya Sivaloganathan in Jaffna on her journey home from school in 2015.

An amendment to Penal Code Section 345 in 1995 recognized sexual harassment as a criminal offence punishable by five years in prison and/or a fine, defining it as ‘unwelcome sexual advances by words or action used by a person in authority’. Additionally, a helpline was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs in November 2018 for survivors to report incidents of SGBV. However, despite these legislative and policy advances, sexual harassment against women and girls on public transport continues to be under-reported, with widespread inaction by bystanders and duty bearers.

Only 8% of women and girls reported seeking help from law enforcement when facing sexual harassment on public transport, while 82% of bystanders reported they rarely intervened when witnessing SGBV on public transport (ibid.). Studies have revealed how LGBT people too rarely seek support or redress when experiencing violence in public places citing fear of persecution based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (IGLHRC, 2014). In recent years, there has been much discussion and documentation on the prevalence and manifestations of harassment on public transport. Dozens of women share their stories of SGBV in public spaces daily on digital platforms like ‘Not Your Nangi’ and ‘Street Harassment Hurts’ to break the silence around issues related to harassment.

Global literature has shown how sexual harassment against women and girls on public transport is strongly governed by social norms—the unwritten rules or shared beliefs around what is considered to be typical or appropriate behaviour (Sanday, 1981; Otterbein, 1994; Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2013). Rooted in systems of power and patriarchy, these norms justify, legitimize or excuse SGBV, grant perpetrators impunity and sustain a culture of fear and silence among survivors.

The prevalence of harmful gender norms and stereotyping have been highlighted as a growing problem by the committee reviewing Sri Lanka’s progress on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):

*‘The Committee is concerned about the persistence of stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men among the general*

*public and the media... reflected in their disadvantageous and unequal status in many areas, such as employment, decision-making, land ownership, education including sexual and reproductive education, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women, including violence in family relations.'*

(CEDAW, 2014)

Initiatives aimed at combatting SGBV in any form therefore require an understanding of the social norms and shared beliefs that underpin violence across public and private domains, and how they interact with other individual, material, institutional and social factors. Much of the existing research in Sri Lanka focuses on SGBV in the private sphere—in households, families and among intimate partners (Guruge et al., 2016).

There is limited research into SGBV in public spaces, particularly on public transport, and the social norms that permit and reinforce it. This has led to a lack of robust evidence that can inform interventions to tackle its root causes.

## 1.1 RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

This report aims to contribute to SGBV literature and fill a knowledge gap by identifying and analyzing the social norms and other intersecting factors that underpin and allow SGBV in public transport, with a primary focus on VAWG.

Enough: *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls* is Oxfam's worldwide campaign that aims to challenge the social norms that drive gender inequality and VAWG in partnership with feminist activists, women's rights organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and national governments.

A consultative process bringing together partner organizations and experts working on SGBV in Sri Lanka in January 2018 concluded that the national campaign would focus on VAWG on public transport.

A study identifying social norms and their influence on VAWG on public transport was seen as critical to understanding the root causes of harassment against women and girls, as well building a repository of knowledge to strengthen campaigns and other interventions.

It fits the objective of Oxfam's overall gender programme in Sri Lanka, which is zero tolerance for SGBV. It will also

inform Oxfam in Sri Lanka's overall programme work, because VAWG has been identified as one of the key challenges for mobility, which reduces women's economic agency and access to services.

## 1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the social norms that perpetuate SGBV on public transport in Sri Lanka. It also seeks to identify how these norms interact with other factors to sustain perpetrator and bystander behaviour, and prevent women from speaking out and seeking support.

These factors cover the following spheres:

- individual (e.g. personal beliefs, income, identity categories);
- material (e.g. available assets, infrastructure);
- contextual (e.g. conflict, disasters); and
- structural (e.g. laws, policies).

The research also aimed to identify the attitudes and opinions of key duty bearers—such as the police and public transport providers—on the identified social norms. Additionally, it sought to identify drivers and strategies for norm change based on examples of positive deviance, key allies within reference groups, and opportunities presented by institutional, material and social changes to challenge the negative social norms. Finally, it aimed to outline the programmatic implications of the findings, and develop a pathway to design a relevant campaign strategy.

## 1.3 REPORT STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 is a review of global literature on SGBV in public places. In it, we explore the global evidence on the norms and other factors influencing SGBV on public transport and identify evidence gaps that can inform the research design. In Chapter 3, we describe the feminist participatory research methodology used and introduce the social norms diagnostic tool, sampling strategy and research process.

Beginning with a background on the regions included, the main findings are presented in Part 4. This includes the norms, key factors and influencers identified, the trends across regions and age groups, and positive deviances and pathways to change. In Chapter 5, we describe the campaign strategy developed on the basis of the findings for the Enough campaign in Sri Lanka, which is called 'Not on My Bus'.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 SGBV IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

SGBV in public places, which includes sexual harassment (i.e. unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature) and threats of violence, is a critical problem in a range of contexts worldwide (UNHCR, 2003). A 2016 multi-country study by ActionAid found that 79% of women interviewed living in cities in India, 84% in Bangladesh, 89% in Brazil, 86% in Thailand and 87% in Vietnam had experienced some form of sexual harassment in public, ranging from unwanted comments or gestures to rape (ActionAid 2016).

Another study, by Neupane and Chesney-Lind (2013), on violence against women on public transport in Kathmandu, Nepal found that 97% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment. This experience is not unique to developing countries.

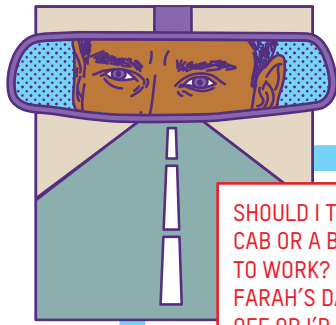
A recent study by the Australia Institute found that 87% of 1,426 women surveyed had experienced verbal or physical harassment in the street (Johnson and Bennett, 2015, pp.1–15); 63% of respondents in another study reported being sexually harassed on the New York subway system (Stringer, 2007, p. 1–25). Studies have shown that it is predominantly younger women, adolescent girls, single women, minorities and members of the LGBTQ community who are particularly at risk of sexual harassment on public transport, especially when travelling alone (Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2013; Beebejau, 2016).

Despite the prevalence and highly public nature of SGBV, bystander inaction is a widespread issue, as is the lack of reporting by survivors and witnesses. A 2014 survey by ActionAid Vietnam and the Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi found that the majority of those who witnessed violent acts did not attempt to intervene or report them. The study found that 87% of women and girls had experienced sexual harassment in public places, and 89% of men and bystanders had witnessed such acts, yet the majority (65%) had not taken any action (ActionAid International Vietnam, 2014). In addition to the strong bystander effect, weakly enforced social sanctions condemning SGBV create a situation in which perpetrators are rarely held accountable for their actions, and such behaviour continues to exist. At the root of the lack of bystander action, survivor reporting and harmful acts carried out by perpetrators are social and institutional norms which promote the normalisation of SGBV and victim blaming.

Without social and institutional sanctions holding perpetrators to account, those who are most affected live and move in a culture of fear, adopting coping strategies that require them to alter their behaviours to avoid danger. Such strategies include dressing differently, taking alternative transport routes, restricting their mobility and lying about marital status. SGBV in public places severely limits the enjoyment of their rights and their ability to participate fully in social, political and economic activity. Furthermore, it can cause grave and often irrevocable strain on mental and physical health and wellbeing. This can have negative implications for household wealth and economic development because ‘a woman might forgo a well-paying job for one paying less that is closer to her home, or women’s absenteeism might increase [causing] productivity [to] decrease because of the psychological effects of sexual harassment’ (González et al, 2015).

In some contexts, the threat of SGBV can lead parents to stop their daughters from attending school or getting them to marry early in order to preserve the honour of the family (Nahar et al., 2013; Verma et al., 2013). For example, Oxfam’s research on social norms surrounding early marriage in Pakistan has shown that increased access to education is not a protective factor against early marriage when girls’ safety while travelling to school is still considered a risk (Saha et al, 2018).

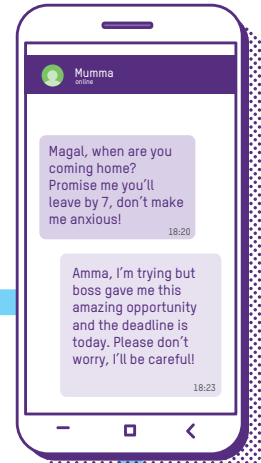
# COPING MECHANISMS



SHOULD I TAKE A CAB OR A BUS TO WORK? IT'S FARAH'S DAY OFF OR I'D HAVE HAD COMPANY.

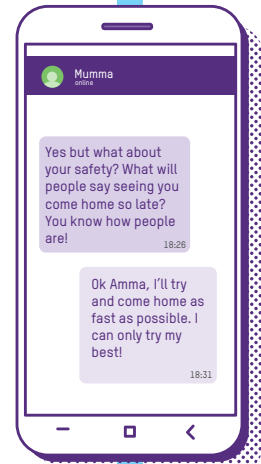


WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK? CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL!



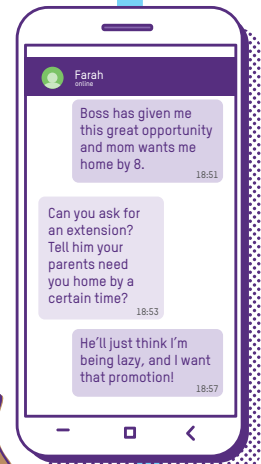
Magal, when are you coming home? Promise me you'll leave by 7, don't make me anxious!

Amma, I'm trying but boss gave me this amazing opportunity and the deadline is today. Please don't worry, I'll be careful!



Yes but what about your safety? What will people say seeing you come home so late? You know how people are!

Ok Amma, I'll try and come home as fast as possible. I can only try my best!



Boss has given me this great opportunity and mom wants me home by 8.

Can you ask for an extension? Tell him your parents need you home by a certain time?

He'll just think I'm being lazy, and I want that promotion!



THIS IS A COMPLETELY UNKNOWN AREA FOR ME, WHERE AM I?



MEN ALWAYS BACK OFF IF THEY THINK YOU'RE ATTACHED.



IT'S REALLY LATE AND LONELY. THERE'S 6 MISSED CALLS FROM AMMA!



## 2.2 CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL NORMS

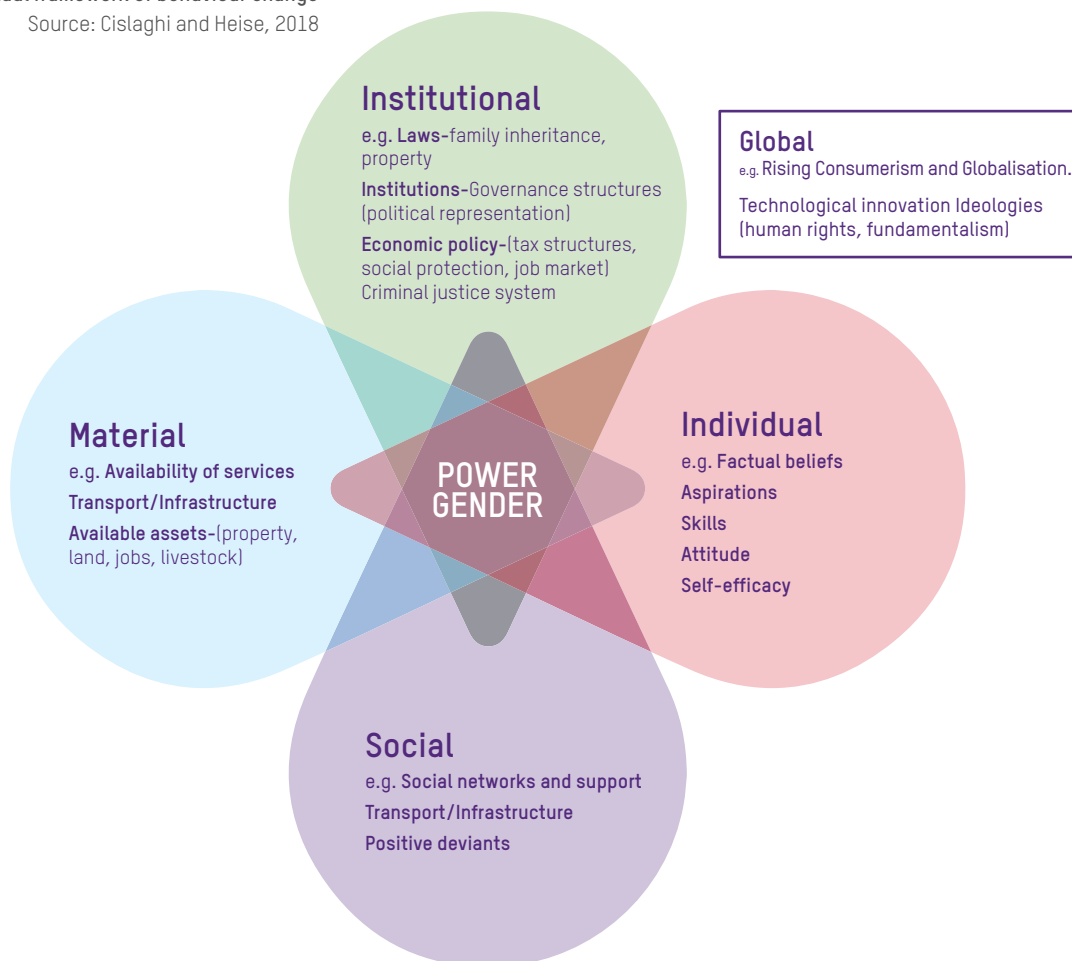
Social norms are unwritten, informal understandings that govern the behaviour of members in a group. Gender norms have been defined in a variety of ways (Cialdini et al., 1990; Bicchieri, 2006; Heise, 2013; Young, 2014), and are central to understanding sexual violence. Recently, Cislighi, Manji and Heise have suggested that gender norms are:

*'...social norms that specifically define what is expected of a woman and a man in a given group or society. They shape acceptable, appropriate, and obligatory actions for women and men (in that [particular] group or society), to the point that they become a profound part of people's sense of self. They are both embedded in institutions and nested in people's minds. They play a role in shaping women's and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting women's and men's voice, agency and power.'* (p8)(Cislighi, Manji and Heise, 2018)

The theoretical work of Cialdini et al. (1990), Mackie et al. (2015) and Bicchieri (2006) has shown the importance of distinguishing between 'descriptive norms', which are defined as a shared set of beliefs about what others do or what is considered typical behaviour, and 'injunctive norms', which are defined as a shared set of beliefs about what others think one should do or what is considered appropriate behaviour.

Social norms are kept in place by social sanctions, which can be positive or negative. Positive sanctions are rewards, such as approval and increased popularity, given as a form of reinforcement. Negative sanctions come in the form of disapproval, such as gossiping and violence, given as a form of dissuasion and deterrence. Norms are also enforced by a reference group, comprised of those whose opinions are relevant or matter to an individual's choices. Reference groups are important to identify because they heavily shape the choices that survivors, perpetrators and bystanders make about SGBV, determining the social expectations around a particular

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of behaviour change  
Source: Cislighi and Heise, 2018



behaviour and the consequences that result from non-compliance (Alexander-Scott et al. 2016).

The existence of reference groups demonstrates the highly 'inter-dependent' nature of social norms, as they shape mutual expectations about appropriate behaviour and in turn influence the actual behaviour of groups (ibid.).

An adaptation of the ecological framework of behaviour change (Cislaghi and Heise, 2018) provides a helpful structure for understanding the factors that sustain harmful gender norms, and how to design effective interventions around these. The framework (Figure 1) recognizes that various domains influence behaviour, identifying four overlapping spheres of influence: individual, social, institutional and material. Their adaptation considers how social norms intersect with each of these levels of influence; for example, an individual's awareness of a service is not necessarily enough to encourage its use if they anticipate social sanctions.

## 2.3 SOCIAL NORMS AROUND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC PLACES: THE GLOBAL EVIDENCE

### NORMS AROUND GENDER ROLES

A number of global studies have explored the link between rigid gender norms and SGBV against women, girls, minorities and members of the LGBTQ community in public places (Sanday, 1981; Otterbein, 1994). Neupane and Chesney-Lind (2013) conducted a study on sexual harassment on public transport in Nepal and found that social norms around gendered roles— that men as providers are responsible for working outside the home, while women as nurturers are responsible for raising children and doing care and domestic work—has led to a gendered separation of private and public spaces, with men asserting their dominance over public spaces. This is what Valentine (1989) described as 'the spatial expression of patriarchy'.

Such a gendered separation of private and public space leads to men asserting their dominance over women in what is believed to be their rightful and exclusive public domain. Women and girls who use public spaces are seen to be transgressing their prescribed roles and are often described as 'bad women' who are inviting sexual harassment and assault. An Oxfam study on social norms around women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh found that respondents considered it acceptable to harass women who engaged in market or field work in

public places, as these are activities typically associated with men, suggesting that women did not belong there. Respondents in this study described these women as 'shrewd [and] undesirable' (Saha et al, 2018).

The aforementioned study, alongside a 2017 qualitative study on perceptions of sexual harassment among young men in Mumbai, found another important social norm: that women who dress liberally (or in Western outfits), smile, travel alone or, ironically, do not respond to sexual harassment with strong language or disgust are 'bad women' who send a signal to men that they are sexually available (Zietz and Das, 2017).

Rigid gender stereotypes also have a harmful impact on gender non-conforming persons, who find their very existence threatened and suppressed by cultures that refuse to acknowledge them as legitimate in their gender identity and expression. In a study in Portland, Oregon, Lubitow et al. (2017) find that transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals experience frequent harassment, discrimination and violence on public transport, the severity of which correlates to how visible their non-binary gender or transgender identities are. The experiences of transgender individuals were also informed by broader and intersecting forms of privilege and oppression, such as racism and misogyny: trans-men noted that before transitioning, when they were perceived to female, they faced greater harassment on public transport. Trans-women were often more severely harassed on account of being perceived as both transgender and female/feminine – a form of discrimination known as transmisogyny (ibid).

### NORMS AROUND POWER, PRIVILEGE AND PHYSICAL DOMINANCE

In a study conducted in Nepal, a majority of respondents cited norms around male power, privilege and physical dominance over women as the main reasons for perpetrators' behaviour, and survivors' and bystanders' reluctance to respond to physical and verbal violence. The norm that identifies a 'real man' as one who is 'daring, courageous, confident...and able to prove his manliness or masculinity' is used by perpetrators and bystanders alike to rationalize SGBV in public places (Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2013).

Zietz and Das (2017), in a study on the attitudes and beliefs of young men around sexual harassment, similarly identify harmful social norms around men's sense of sexual entitlement. The men interviewed shared that they perceived that they are 'owed' sex on account of being men (for their biological nature requires it). Hence, by engaging in sexual harassment, they are considered to be 'following their natural, psychological and physical instincts' (Zietz and Das,

2017). During the study, many participants justified sexual harassment by commenting that ‘men will be men’.

### **NORMS AROUND FLATTERY AND ROMANCE**

Studies exploring the nature of SGBV in public places within Spanish-speaking contexts in parts of Latin America find that verbal harassment is often justified by women and men as a form of compliment.

Lundgren’s 2013 study in Havana found that many female respondents linked piropos (a term for catcalling that is also synonymous with flattery) to feeling beautiful and desired. In the words of one respondent: ‘I tell you that if I go out and that day, during the whole day, no one says anything to me, I feel very sad. Because then I think that they don’t find me attractive, that I didn’t have positive energy’.

Lundgren also explored how the concept of piropos is linked to ideas of masculinity and male friendships: many men consider those who engage in piropos to be daring, courageous and witty.

### **NORMS THAT CONSIDER SEX EDUCATION AND ITS DISCUSSION AS TABOO**

In societies that are patriarchal, rigid notions about sex, gender identity and gendered expectations permeate most aspects of children’s lives—both at school and at home. A lack of sex education, underpinned by the norm of never broaching the topic of sex or sexuality as it is considered to be a ‘western’ trend or disrespectful to do so, means that adolescents and young people are not informed about consent, sexual harassment and rape.

A study conducted in India revealed that even though the boundary between cultural acceptability and sexual taboos is constantly shifting, there remain staunch opponents to sex education based on the idea that it ‘corrupts the youth’ and offends ‘traditional values’ (Tripathi and Sekher, 2013).

For example, in 2007, a national education program for 15–17-year olds in all state-run schools to combat the spread of AIDS was suspended by 28 Indian states in response to criticisms from conservatives who believed that it could lead to ‘promiscuity, experimentation, and irresponsible sexual behaviour’ (Vishnoi and Thacker, 2009).

The tendency to regard sex education as a system of globalized values that threaten tradition and culture makes it difficult to share important information regarding rights, responsibilities, and services available to those who are in need of them.

Unsurprisingly, Ward and Inerto (1990) found that the social stigma attached to sexual abuse is higher in cultures where anything related to sex is highly stigmatized.

### **THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SANCTIONS ON BEHAVIOUR**

The strength of these norms is reflected in the strong anticipated social sanctions which pose significant barriers to SGBV reporting and bystander intervention. Among the reasons for not taking any action against SGBV and not reporting incidents, women cited fear of public condemnation, hurting their families’ reputation, having their mobility restricted, retaliation from the perpetrator or early marriage.

Women and men also express very little faith in duty bearers such as the police, seeing them as harmful at worst and ineffective at best (ActionAid, 2014).

As descriptive and injunctive norms are also held by duty bearers such as the police, judiciary and public sector agencies. Representatives of these organizations have the power to observe, tolerate, perpetuate or confront violence, and therefore hold a lot of influence over how it is dealt with (Altinyelken and Le Mat, 2017).

Action Aid’s 2015 baseline study of women’s experience of violence in seven countries found that women, when reporting sexual harassment to the police, were often humiliated and blamed for the way they act and dress, and in some cases even experienced further sexual harassment from the police themselves.

Similarly, a 2016 study conducted by Human Rights Watch found that in a number of countries transgender and queer persons have received severe physical and sexual abuse at the hands of policemen.

### **INTERSECTING FACTORS**

These norms and sanctions interact with a range of structural, material, social and individual factors to sustain VAWG in public places.

Socio-economic and political transformations, such as migration and increased urbanization, have in some cases led women and girls to take on new educational and economic opportunities, and thus increase their presence in public places.

This greater spatial mobility challenges existing norms around gendered roles and responsibilities, and has often been met with an increased risk of exposure to SGBV (ActionAid, 2013). Fiscal austerity measures have led to cuts in investments in public services and

infrastructure, thus increasing women's unpaid care workloads, and reinforcing existing norms that limit their mobility.

Disinvestments have also been made in SGBV response and recovery centres, further weakening the sanctions against SGBV in public places that provide support to survivors (ActionAid, 2017).

Furthermore, in Nepal the poor quality of public infrastructure has led to over-crowding and insufficient lighting in buses and on streets, thus giving perpetrators of SGBV more anonymity (Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2013).

At the structural level, laws and policies against SGBV have played a key role in either promoting or preventing discriminatory practices.

Over the past 25 years progressive laws and policies addressing SGBV have increased considerably and succeeded in raising the visibility of violence against women in public spaces, de-normalizing the practice, and strengthening public sanctions against it (Fraser and Wood, 2018).

Other regressive laws, which criminalize homosexuality, transsexuality and the autonomy of women result in state-sanctioned discrimination and violence towards

transgender and gender non-conforming persons, and women that threaten the separation of the rigid gender roles (ibid).

At the individual level, a lack of information about existing laws to protect against sexual harassment and the SGBV response services that are available to them can lead survivors to feel less confident and less able to take action (ActionAid 2014). This can be a consequence of silence surrounding matters of sexual and reproductive health in school and at home.

In addition, certain individual characteristics—such as age, socio-economic status, marital status, gang membership, and alcohol abuse—can be protective or risk factors for perpetration and survival of SGBV in public places. (Zietz and Das, 2017).

Adolescent girls and women who are unmarried and/or of poorer socio-economic status, who travel alone and are not associated with any strong male figures, face a greater risk of SGBV in public places. (Zietz and Das, 2017).

In addition, the inequality of socio-economic status between men and women, where the perpetrator is of a higher socio-economic status than the survivor, grants the perpetrator a higher degree of immunity (ibid).



# METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this project was grounded in feminist principles of:

1. overcoming gender biases and social inequalities;
2. recognizing and interrogating the central role of gendered inequalities, norms and unequal power relations;
3. treating women, and gender diverse and socially excluded groups as central to the research, and engaging them as agents of change;
4. using an intersectional and contextualized approach;
5. recognizing how research itself can be an act of power between researcher and participants (APWLD, 2017).

These principles were reflected throughout the research cycle: informing the research objectives and questions, sampling approach, research methods and process, analysis and influencing

## 3.1 RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLING APPROACH

Qualitative data was collected in five Sri Lankan cities, Batticaloa, Colombo, Kandy, Katunayake in Negombo and Kilinochchi, through nine focus group discussions (FGDs) with 167 passengers and 13 key informant interviews (KIIs) with duty bearers between September and November 2018.

Locations were selected at a pre campaign design workshop held with partners in January 2018 based on a criteria including assumed prevalence of sexual harassment in public transport, transit use, feminization of the labour force, geographic spread, ethnic/religious diversity and the current presence of organizations/ persons/groups in the workshop in those areas.

Batticaloa is a major city in the Eastern Province, whose residents are primarily Tamil and Muslims (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). Batticaloa has also been the base for a great deal of development sector interventions having faced considerable conflict during the civil war (Daily News, 2017). Dubbed the 'gateway to Eastern Sri Lanka', the Batticaloa railway line runs through the North Central and Eastern Provinces (Ministry of Transport, 2012), and the bus depot also connects to several districts, including Colombo (SLTB Express, 2019).

Colombo is Sri Lanka's largest and most densely

populated urban city (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), as well as its administrative capital. Considered to be more progressive and developed than other areas of Sri Lanka, Colombo is also a major transport hub. It is highly ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse, with a mix of Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils and Sri Lankan Moor populations and a large migrant population from across the country who come for work as well as those who commute in daily (ibid).

Kandy is the capital of the Central Province and the second most populated urban district in Sri Lanka (ibid). It is an educational hub, holding the country's second oldest university, the University of Peradeniya (University of Peradeniya, 2019). Most of the country's private higher education institutions have branches in Kandy. It is the site of many good-quality highways in the country, and a railway system that links Colombo and Badulla (Daily Mirror, 2019). It also has a wide network of buses traveling to various points in the country. While Kandy is a Sinhala majority city, there are sizable communities of other ethnic groups, such as Moors and Tamils 12).

Katunayake is a suburb of Negombo city in Western Province. With the change of government in 1977 and the introduction of the open economy policy, a large area was allocated to create a free-trade zone creating a number of jobs in the new garment factories (Abeywardene et al., 1994). Youth, primarily women, from across the country came in search of employment (Attanapola, 2004).

Kilinochchi is the main town of Kilinochchi District in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. It was the administrative centre and de facto capital of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam throughout the civil war until January 2009, when the Sri Lankan Army recaptured the city (Buerk, 2009). Most of its residents are Tamil (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), with a railway service which was defunct during the war.

It is considered a war-torn area that is still in the process of recovery and development after being virtually cut off from the rest of the country for over 30 years. In 2010, a new bus service was launched to meet the needs of people commuting to hard to reach areas, and the railway station is part of the Northern Line linking the country's north with Colombo (The Island, 2010).

## SAMPLING

The sampling framework for the FGDs and KIIs was developed in line with the gender transformative and feminist participatory approach of the research. Participants were selected to reflect diverse backgrounds, perspectives, professions and social identities, including queer and transgender identities; sex workers; garment factory workers (who often work in urban areas away from their hometown); students and state- and private-sector employees. In all but Katunayake, two FGDs were conducted: one with young (18–30) and one with older (31–40) adults, and respondents were further sub-divided by gender for half of the activities, recognizing the impact of power dynamics inherent to the groups social dynamics on participation.

Figure 2: Sampling Framework- FGDs

LOCATION	FGD 1 (18-30)	FGD 2 (31-40)	PARTICIPANTS
Colombo	13 participants in total - 3 participants identified as transgenders; 6 women and 4 men. Several participants also identified as LGBTQ+	17 participants in total - 8 participants identified as transgenders or gender non conforming, 3 women and 1 man, 5 participants also identified as part of the sex worker community	30
Kandy	15 participants in total 8 women and 7 men	27 participants in total 16 women and 11 men	42
Batticaloa	28 participants in total 20 women and 8 men	10 participants in total 8 women and 2 men	38
Kilinochchi	21 participants in total 14 women and 7 men	19 participants in total 15 women and 4 men	40
Katunayake	17 participants in total 12 women and 5 men	N/A	17
<b>Total</b>			<b>167</b>

Additional KIIs were also conducted with 13 key duty bearers (e.g. drivers, police, government transport officials) to explore their prevailing attitudes, narratives and norms that may impact law enactment and service provision. These groups were selected as they are considered to be in positions of authority and influence to respond to sexual harassment on public transport. Key areas of questioning for KIIs were identified and developed from the research questions and findings of the FGDs.

Figure 3: Sampling Framework- KIIs

CHARACTERISTICS	RESPONDENTS
Ministry of Transport	1
Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs	1
CSO's Engaged on the issue	3
Police	1
Private Sector organizations who provide transport for female employees	2
Sri Lanka Transport Board	3
Media	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

## 3.2 SOCIAL NORMS DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

A context-specific social norms diagnostic tool (Butt, 2019) was developed to guide the FGDs. It consisted of a set of participatory exercises that helped to identify and discuss:

- the social norms, perceptions and expectations that shape, constrain or promote sexual and gender based violence on public transport; and
- to develop initial ideas for change strategies.

The FGDs were organised around four activities, described below. All the exercises in the tool were contextualized with the support of local partners.



### DISCUSSING BROADER GENDER NORMS

The first activity began with getting the participants to understand the broader context of gender norms, roles and responsibilities, and to share their related experiences. This was vital for participants to begin thinking about how different kinds of violence, ideals of masculinity and femininity and gender norms are interconnected and have a common foundation. It also provided the researchers with valuable insight into the overarching gender norms in Sri Lanka.

### VIGNETTES AND DISCUSSION ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Through a guided discussion, participants worked with facilitators to build a vignette that showed specific manifestations of harassment (e.g. gestures, sounds and phrases used), as well as other details (e.g. age and appearance of the survivor and perpetrator, the reaction of bystanders and law enforcement etc). based on their own experiences. This allowed them to begin relating the information to their personal experiences, as well as providing the researchers with insight into the nature of sexual harassment on public transport.

An example of a vignette from the tool that was used in the workshops with the 18–30 age group:

*'Aisha is 16 years old and takes the bus to school every day. One day she is coming back after debating club and it is only her and another friend. They get in the bus and sit at the back. On the way, a group of men shout out to them, telling them that they look beautiful. When they ignore this, the men come closer and continue to tease them. One of the men, Kapila shouts out an insult. Other people on the bus don't say anything, and Aisha and her friend move away and sit closer to the front of the bus. The men keep teasing them. Aisha informs the bus conductor who tells her that if she doesn't want to be teased then she should take a trishaw or a cab without making a fuss. A few people on the bus witness this incident but say nothing. Aisha and her friend get off the bus but tell no one at school, home or anyone about the incident. They are especially afraid that if they tell their parents they will no longer be allowed to participate in after-school activities or allowed to travel on their own'.*

Names and other details of the characters in the vignettes were changed for each workshop to contextualize the situation and make it as familiar as possible.

These vignettes were followed by question-prompted discussions around the social norms, social sanctions, influencing factors, positive deviances, and key influencers of such experiences.

## ROLE PLAY

The third activity continued with the participatory and transformative approach, using 'Theatre of the Oppressed' techniques through role play. Participants get involved in the performance and explore, analyse and transform the reality being played out. The facilitators began to provide less direction, and participants took more of a leading role in shaping and changing the vignettes given through role play, suggesting solutions and thus becoming agents of change.

## BRAINSTORMING STRATEGIES

This led directly into the final activity, in which full autonomy was given to the participants to brainstorm strategies for change and prioritize them. This provided valuable insights for the design of the campaign, as the suggestions came directly from the participants who would be the beneficiaries of future interventions.

Thus, participants were taken on a journey from diagnosing norms, deepening their understanding of

how they are sustained, and brainstorming strategies for change—transitioning progressively into more active roles.

## 3.3 RESEARCH PROCESS

All stages of the research process adopted a gender transformative and feminist participatory approach using Oxfam's guideline on integrating gender in research planning (Butt et.al., 2019). This manifested in various ways—striving for full and meaningful participation of local partners and gender-diverse and socially -excluded groups in all stages of the research cycle. It went beyond gender binaries, and considered at issues of intersectionality, designing the research to empower participants as agents of change and more.

### PRE-CAMPAIGN DESIGN WORKSHOP

Oxfam in Sri Lanka began preparations for the 'Enough' campaign in Sri Lanka in a three-day pre-campaign workshop on 8–10 January 2018 with partners and gender justice activists. They conducted a detailed problem analysis on the types of violence on which the campaign could focus, and the potential social norms that needed to be addressed.

A key outcome of the workshop was the need to identify a specific form of SGBV as the focus for the research and subsequent campaign, the location of the study, and the broad categories of norms that would be explored. Participants were acquainted with the Enough campaign's theory of change and jointly analysed their collective understanding of negative social norms and behaviours that lead to SGBV in Sri Lanka, as well as existing campaigns to influence them. The campaign focus was identified by prioritizing SGBV related issues according to their relevance, prevalence, 'campaignability', the potential to challenge and change norms or stereotypes surrounding the issues, partners' experiences and relevant target audiences. It was therefore decided that the Sri Lanka campaign would focus on addressing sexual harassment on public transport.

The discussion on the geographic focus of the campaign and formative research were identified based on the aforementioned criteria. The group concluded to hold the campaign's formative research in five districts: Colombo, Kandy, Batticaloa and Killinochchi.

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND MAPPING

A comprehensive literature review was conducted on the nature and drivers of sexual harassment on public transport in the region and in Sri Lanka. This gathered

insights on the kinds of norms that are prevalent, the factors that are most influential, and where there were research gaps. This also included a review of global and national campaigns and programme interventions implemented to combat sexual harassment against women on public transport, with an emphasis on what has and has not worked to shift social norms.

Then a comprehensive mapping of existing efforts to combat sexual harassment in Sri Lanka was conducted. This was achieved through interviews with key stakeholders (UNFPA, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs, other women’s groups and organizations, and private sector organizations) who have conducted such efforts within the last five years, as well as the impact of these initiatives where evidence existed.

Subsequently, the research instruments, sampling framework, consent forms, documentation formats, and ethics and safeguarding documents were developed and translated into local languages.

### RESEARCH DESIGN WORKSHOP

A one-day research design workshop was held with partners and stakeholders in August 2018 to review a draft social norms diagnostic tool, sampling framework and other research tools. Participants included young feminist initiatives, local and international NGOs, private sector organizations, student networks and consultants. They provided feedback on the social norms diagnostic tool, prompting several revisions to better reflect and capture local realities, improve the quality of the data and facilitation of the workshops and KIs.

A one-day facilitators’ training workshops was subsequently held. Feedback was sought from facilitators on the practical implementation of the tool on the field. Following this workshop, the tool was further refined and pilot tested before being implemented.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE COLLECTION OF DATA

Primary data was collected between August and October 2018. Informed and voluntary consent was obtained from participants at the start of every workshop and interview. They were given the option to make any comments they wished off the record or opt out at any point. Facilitators provided information on referrals for care and support where available and needed. All of the data recorded was treated as confidential and anonymized. As the research was on a sensitive topic and involved survivors of violence and young people, Oxfam’s Safeguarding Adults and

Children policies (2018) and Guidelines for Research Ethics (2012) were fully adhered to. The tendency of respondents to respond in ways thought to be acceptable can be problematic when researching sensitive issues, as it can bias the findings. Engaging facilitators who had previously worked in or were from the same community and spoke the local language was key to establish greater trust with participants.

Additionally, the use of vignettes and questions with hypothetical but relatable characters was crucial to establish a notion of distance between the issues discussed and specific personal experiences.



## DATA ANALYSIS, SENSE-MAKING AND CAMPAIGN-PLANNING WORKSHOPS

Data analysis paid particular attention to drawing out critical similarities and differences between the beliefs and experiences of men, women and members of gender-diverse communities. It also aimed to assess the intersectionalities of age, class, ethnicity, religion and position.

In keeping with the feminist participatory approach of the research, in December 2018 a one-day sense-making workshop brought together Oxfam's national, regional and global researchers, programme and campaign staff; project partners; research facilitators and participants to validate, analyse and refine the preliminary findings. Participants also

prioritized norms, key influencers and influencing factors based on their perceived relevance, prevalence and level of influence on behaviours.

Outputs from the sense-making workshop served as critical inputs for the two-day campaign planning workshop that immediately followed. During this workshop, participants assessed the prioritized norms through pre-identified criteria, such as prevalence, level of influence on the actions of perpetrators, bystanders and survivors, and 'campaignability' (see Annex), to ultimately select the norm that the Sri Lanka Enough campaign would focus on. Thus, based on the selected norm and other key findings, participants developed the campaign objective, principles, theory of change and key messages.



# 4

## KEY FINDINGS

We identified 11 norms around gender roles and responsibilities, and sexual harassment that, to varying degrees, fuel violence against women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming people on public transport and create a culture of impunity for perpetrators of violence. We also identified key reference groups and influencing factors that intersect with the norms to weaken or reinforce SGBV on public transport. Finally, we also examine the positive deviances, key allies and factors of positive influence as potential pathways to norm change.

### 4.1 KEY GENDER NORMS AROUND IDEAL MEN/WOMEN: TRAITS, ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES

Three overarching social norms arose around gender traits, roles and responsibilities, and idealized notions of masculinity and femininity. These norms shape beliefs around who should occupy which spaces and how. These provide the context and framework within which SGBV on public transport could be understood.

#### NORM 1

**WOMEN SHOULD BE SUBMISSIVE AND ACCEPTING OF MALE DOMINANCE. THEIR PRIMARY ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE IN THE HOME.**

Strength: **Very Strong**



Traditional gendered roles and responsibilities are entrenched in Sri Lanka. In a 2013 study, more than half of men and women agreed that a woman's role is 'to take care of her home and cook for her family' (57% of men and 67% of women), while similar numbers of men and women (70% and 74% respectively) agreed that a man's role is to provide for his family (de Mel et al, 2013).

The primary research findings validate and augment this: across both age groups and all districts, participants characterized ideal women as submissive, accepting male dominance, obedient, nurturing, dressing 'decently', with their primary responsibility being to look after their children and home. This was a very strongly held norm with high prevalence across the five cities. In Batticaloa and Kilinochchi, participants said going to the market and chaperoning children were the only acceptable reasons for women to use public transport. In Colombo, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals not subscribing to this ideal shared a fear of backlash—for example, transwomen said that they would not speak up when being harassed as their voices could give away that they were not 'real women'. In Katunayake, virginity and a clean reputation were characteristics used to describe ideal women by men. It was also found that if one transgressed the traits described for an ideal woman, violence was seen as a reasonable consequence. This revealed that SGBV is often a sanction against women and girls defying these gender norms.

Interestingly, in Kilinochchi and Batticaloa—which are commonly considered more conservative than urban centres like Colombo and Kandy—the idea of women being 'self-reliant' and independent in financial matters and participating in public spaces was thought to be more acceptable. In Batticaloa, specific reference was made to war widows: 'after the war, there are mostly women-headed households in the east and people are accepting the fact that there are women-headed households. So, when a widow woman travels alone, people don't look down at her and she sets an example for others to follow' (male FGD participant, Batticaloa). The idea that female education is helping to shift gender norms was also raised: 'since more girls are educated and getting into jobs and are outspoken and courageous, this has changed a little over time' (male FGD participant, Batticaloa). Batticaloa FGD participants also said that wealthy women or those of high social status do not necessarily need to fulfil care work responsibilities because they are not used to it and can afford to get help. Disabled women too were seen to be an exception.

Participants also said that elected female representatives and business leaders are also exempted from meeting these expectations, as they are considered exceptional.

In Kilinochchi, a few of the younger male participants said that women should be brave and courageous because of the modern and changing world. Female participants agreed to this view and expressed how society is becoming more accepting of women in public spaces. In Kandy, more positive gender-neutral traits of honesty, patience and respect were identified for both men and women, particularly among younger participants. In Katunayake, important gendered differences in perceptions emerged: women said that they should also do paid work to support the family, but men contested that they should look after domestic work.

## NORM 2

### THE IDEAL MAN SHOULD PROVIDE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC SECURITY. THEY MUST ALSO BE 'DECENT' AND RESPECTFUL TOWARDS WOMEN.

Strength: **Strong**



Across participants in all cities, the role of the man was seen to be that of a breadwinner responsible for upholding the material security of the family unit by working outside the home. In Batticaloa, it was noted specifically that men would be mocked by neighbours for doing care work, and that the community would call men 'lazy' if they were not engaged in work outside of the home. In Kilinochchi and Batticaloa, respecting women and 'being decent' were key traits associated with the ideal man. The idea of harassing women or disrespecting women while seen as common and expected ('descriptive norm'), it was not considered a trait of the ideal man ('injunctive norm').

The idea of class dynamics also arose here, with the ideal man being associated with the term 'decent' on several occasions with participants implying that men who came from a particular background and class would behave in a certain way. This idea arose again later in discussions on the characteristics of perpetrators of sexual harassment: participants argued that 'decent' men would not behave in such a way. However, as the discussions progressed, it was observed that men were not held up to these idealized characteristics of respect as much as women were to the idealized notions of femininity, and it was seen that women transgressing their expected roles faced far more significant and dire consequences.

In Colombo, the ideal man was also seen as one who consumes liquor and is able to sexually perform and please women. In Katunayake, men said that 'real men' drink or face strong social sanctions and disapproval from their peers. Women did not see this as an ideal characteristic, but rather one that contributes to SGBV.

In Batticaloa, participants said men with sick wives and very young children and wives, men who haven't paid a dowry and men in urban areas are not expected to fulfil these roles. In the case of the latter, it was noted that men take on cleaning and washing duties because 'the culture is different in the cities' (male FGD participant, Batticaloa).

## NORM 3

### MEN SHOULD BE THE DOMINANT PARTNER AND BE RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING WOMEN

Strength: **Medium**

The patriarchal notion of chivalry and protection was highlighted as an important characteristic of ideal men, tying into gender roles and the idea that women should be submissive (norm 1). Participants felt that men as the stronger sex had a responsibility to 'keep women safe', especially as they were unable to do this for themselves. This notion of dominance extended within the family unit in terms of making decisions and having control.

In Katunayake, a male FGD participant said that 'ideal men do not bend to women'. Correspondingly, a trait of an ideal woman that was identified was that she should 'accept male dominance'. In Colombo, participants suggested that men should take responsibility for protecting women, and women should be able to come to them when in need.



## 4.2 KEY GENDER NORMS AROUND SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Eight key norms arose around how survivors of harassment, particularly women were viewed and expected to respond, the role of the bystander and their response, as well as the key characteristics of perpetrators and drivers of their behaviour.

### NORM 4

**WOMEN SHOULD DRESS DECENTLY TO AVOID HARASSMENT. IF THEY DRESS DIFFERENTLY, THEY ARE INVITING HARASSMENT UPON THEMSELVES.**

**Strength: Very strong**

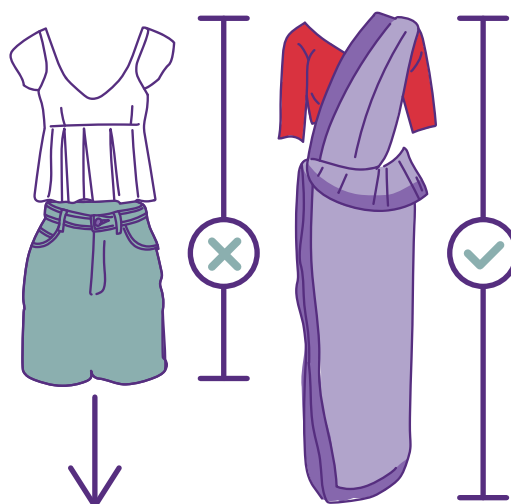
The strongest and most prevalent norm around sexual harassment across all five districts and among community members and duty bearers alike was that women should dress decently to avoid harassment.

If they dress any differently, they are inviting harassment upon themselves and should not expect any different. Moreover, participants said that bystanders would be more or less likely to intervene based on the perceived 'decency' of the women's clothing, and this would also have a direct impact on the attitude and support gained from law enforcement should she choose to make a complaint.

In Katunayake, one female participant said 'when women get harassed in public it is because of the way they dress and behave'. When discussing the vignette, a norm that came out across all regions was that Priya, an imaginary but relatable character who was harassed, could have avoided the situation if she dressed more modestly.

In Colombo, younger male participants said that if the woman is wearing a shalwar kameez and can be identified as Tamil, people 'in the bus will take her side'. They also shared that if she were 'a lesbian', by which they mean dressing in an ambiguous/masculine way, they would be confused about her gender identity and not support her. Older male and female respondents from Colombo said that a Muslim girl could experience less or a different form of harassment because of her culture, and that there is a certain power in her attire.

Older male and female respondents in Batticaloa said that girls wearing short dresses, tight or short skirts, or other modern clothes are looked down upon. Women mostly face harassment for wearing 'modern clothes' that 'attract men'. Older respondents in Kilinochchi also said that clothing will play a role in how a woman or girl is being harassed is viewed, and the support bystanders will give her. This will also extend to the response she will receive from the police.



It was noted in Kilinochchi that if the woman or girl was dressed in a traditional attire (e.g. a sari), an older police officer will be more likely to accept her complaint. If she is dressed 'indecently' the female police, instead of supporting would mostly comment on this.

Participants from Katunayake described an incident in which a survivor attempted to file a complaint, 'but what the Katunayake police station did was keep talking about her. Saying "what's so surprising about men getting erections when a girl wears clothes like this?"' (male FGD participant, Katunayake).

This is also a strong institutional norm among police, drivers and the media. For example, a bus driver in Colombo said 'in Sri Lanka, there is a particular way women are supposed to dress. In the 1960s our mothers' dress code was cheeththa and the jacket (cloth and jacket)...But when it comes to the present day, this decency cannot be seen, and the dresses worn by women do not even cover their knees. This can give the wrong message to men' (male KII participant, Colombo).

While most participants said that religious or conservative attire would protect a woman from being harassed, in Batticaloa, younger participants said that women who wear religious attire like the hijab or abaya are more likely to be harassed because some men think they will not resist or retaliate on public transport.

## NORM 5

### WOMEN WHO FACE HARASSMENT ARE THE 'WRONG TYPE' OF WOMEN AND/OR HAVE TRANSGRESSED THEIR PRESCRIBED ROLES

Strength: **Very strong**

Another norm related to victim-blaming was that women who face harassment are the 'wrong' type of women, which closely aligns with the norms around the concept of an ideal woman (norm 1). Harassment was seen as a natural consequence of what women would face if they transgressed the roles that they should fulfil.

Women who dress differently, travel at strange times or alone, who do not 'pass' as women or do not seem like are from the area were all cited as examples. Women also reported being afraid of going to the courts for fear of having their character called into question, further reflecting the norm of ideal women being submissive. This is supported by literature on gender-inequitable attitudes and knowledge around violence in Sri Lanka, which reveals a stronger acceptability of violence by men as well as women.

In a quantitative survey by Care International on attitudes and practices related to gender based violence in Sri Lanka, the majority of male perpetrators reported that their primary motivation was their 'right' to sex with women while two thirds of women agreed that if a woman is raped, she may be partly to blame because she is either 'promiscuous' or has a 'bad reputation' (de Mel et al., 2013). Furthermore, 67% of the women interviewed and 55% of the men agreed that 'in any rape case, one would have to question whether the survivor is promiscuous or has a bad reputation,' and over three quarters of men and women reported that 'some women ask to be raped by the way they dress and behave'.

A male KII participant in Colombo said that women who say they have been sexually harassed are usually engaged in prostitution and hence targeted. This was also raised when speaking to transwomen who worked as sex workers in Colombo, who said they are seen as transgressing gender norms and thus face more harassment than 'normal women'. Women working in the garment sector of the Katunayake Free Trade Zone said they are targeted because they are seen as indecent women who 'dress differently' (female FGD participant, Katunayake), which ties into norm 4.

In Colombo, participants in the 18–30 group said that if a woman is visibly pregnant and fulfilling their expected gender role, then everyone would support her without qualification to stand up against sexual harassment. However, this was contradicted by the older participants who said that pregnant women (with a focus on sex workers) faced more harassment. This was supplemented in Katunayake where, in order to benefit from this 'free pass' given to pregnant women, they need to dress in a certain way.

## NORM 6

### BYSTANDERS DO NOT INTERFERE AND SHOULD NOT INTERVENE BECAUSE IT IS NOT THEIR BUSINESS. THEY WILL GET INTO TROUBLE OR MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE.

Strength: **Very strong**

The norm that bystanders do not interfere, and bystanders should not intervene because it isn't their business; they'll get into trouble or make the situation worse was one of the strongest and most widely held of the 11 norms identified.



Bystanders were primarily seen to be apathetic and intervention uncommon. The reasons for this varied, including:

- feeling that intervening would be perceived as making the situation worse (e.g. by angering the harasser) and the belief that it would jeopardize the safety of both the bystander and survivor;
- participants believing that sexual harassment is understood by everyone else as a private matter even when taking place in a public setting;
- participants not being willing to face the consequences of going to the police; and
- believing the woman had invited the harassment in some way.

A study by the General Sir John Kotelawala Defense University found that although 82% of people reported witnessing an incident of SGBV, bystanders rarely intervened, citing an 'unwillingness to take the risk of causing conflict' and a 'fear of drawing attention to oneself' (Navoda, 2015).

In Batticaloa, respondents said that most bystanders would avoid trouble and not intervene, that harassment is seen as very common and best ignored when possible by both bystanders and the survivor. In Kilinochchi, respondents affirmed this, saying that bystanders will mostly not intervene. A male KI respondent from the media noted, that even when occurring in a public setting, SGBV was often seen as a private matter: 'they don't know the relationship between them. So often we can't rely on other people. This is the mindset of the people. They don't want to get involved in other people's private matters'.

It was noted by several participants in the FGDs and KIIs that bystanders should not intervene as doing so would risk their own safety. The notion that the harassment might be the woman's fault also played a role.

In Colombo, younger respondents said that most bystanders do not intervene because, if they get involved, they may have to face unnecessary problems such as going to court and long legal processes that would take time and energy. Younger people are the least likely to intervene because they are too timid, and lack agency and power. Some exceptions were highlighted by participants. Older women are most likely to intervene in a situation of harassment according to participants from Kilinochchi and Batticaloa, and they receive the least backlash for doing so.

In Colombo, older participants said that there is more support now for bystanders who support survivors, 'she's a woman with "eagle's eyes", there should be more such women in society' (Female FGD participant, Colombo).

## NORM 7

### BYSTANDERS WHO INTERVENE HAVE HIDDEN INTENTIONS

Strength: **Weak**

This norm, which can also be a form of social sanction against bystanders' intervention was raised in both the Katunayake FGD and KIIs with bus drivers and assistant managers of the national transport providers.

In Katunayake, a female participant said 'if it's a man they'd say that man is trying to score marks [from the survivor] by acting too cool and being over smart. And if it's a woman they'd say she's showing off and trying to score marks'. Bystanders who broke the norm of not intervening were to be looked upon with suspicion and their intentions in doing so questioned.

Participants in Kandy contradicted this idea, saying that those who intervene are seen to have a great sense of social responsibility and leadership qualities.

## NORM 8

### GOOD WOMEN DO NOT COMPLAIN, YELL OR HIT PERPETRATORS. IT IS NOT NORMAL FOR SURVIVORS TO SPEAK OUT AND COMPLAIN.

Strength: **Medium**

Participants noted that survivors were discouraged from speaking out and confronting their perpetrators even if the harassment is severe. The case of a video clip that went viral on social media showing a young woman from Wariyapola confronting her harasser (Daily Mirror, 2014) and the subsequent vitriol she faced for her actions was referenced by various participants as evidence of why it is better to stay silent.

In Kandy and Batticaloa, the norm that good women do not complain, yell or hit perpetrators even if to defend themselves came out strongly in FGDs with older participants. In response to the question of whether Priya, a vignette character, should have shouted at the perpetrator, older participants in Kandy said that verbal violence or aggression is unlike an ideal girl/woman. In Batticaloa, older respondents said the dominant belief was that a 'cultured and homely girl' (female FGD

participant, Batticaloa) would not fight back, and instead would be silent as an example of her good upbringing.

FGD participants also shared evidence of strong social sanctions against women speaking out, such as women being blamed by perpetrators and bystanders based on how they're dressed, time of day. Women also reported being afraid of going to the courts for fear of having their character called into question.

This was also highlighted by a number of women who shared their accounts of responding to sexual harassment on public buses with Sri Lankan citizen journalism site Groundviews in 2016 (Wickrematunge, 2016).

In Colombo, Kattunayake and Batticaloa, younger participants said women choosing whether or not to speak up were influenced by the anticipated social sanctions, especially concern for how the perpetrator may respond, possibly escalating the harassment or painting the survivor as a 'bad woman'. Examples provided included perpetrators scolding and blaming survivors, and questioning the survivor's morality by claiming that she was promiscuous or a prostitute. Older respondents noted that harassers often portray the survivor as a woman/girl/gender minority who is not trustworthy as a tactic to win bystander's sympathy.

Participants also said that if a woman spoke up against harassment or defended herself, bystanders would ultimately blame her for not acting like a proper girl, being too boisterous and seeking attention. A participant explained 'women are scared. Even though she's the survivor, everyone looks at her with a wrong eye. Maybe at her dress or something. People will accuse her' (Female FGD participant, Kattunayake).

In Kattunayake, participants highlighted how the gender binary played a role in transgender persons feeling like they could speak out. Transwomen noted that they choose to remain silent out of the fear of speaking out in a deep voice, as this would reveal their often stigmatized gender identity. They also shared how they wouldn't report it to the police out of fear of reprisals such as criminalization for their gender identity.

Younger respondents in Kattunayake and Batticaloa also shared that if a woman or girl who was harassed talked to her family about her experience, they would curb her freedom and tell her to stay home. In Colombo, younger participants did however share examples of how women who defied this norm and shared their stories of harassment and defence publicly were considered heroes by and found support from wider circles outside of their communities. They highlighted

the role of social media as an effective tool for garnering support from members of the general public, particularly youth, and for changing the conversation around victim-blaming. A KII respondent from a CSO said 'people now have been empowered with online media because they can see different countries take initiatives to speak against this problem.

It empowers certain people to be able to speak up and voice up and speak up against this' (Female KII respondent, Colombo).

Furthermore in Katunayake, participants noted that hitting a perpetrator was seen as an acceptable response if no-one else intervened and the harassment continued. In Batticaloa, younger participants echoed this saying that if women speak out in support of other girls or women in the bus, elsewhere in the community girls or women hearing this, would feel more empowered to speak out themselves or intervene.

Older participants said they felt there is more awareness than before on sexual harassment as more women and girls are getting educated and entering the paid labour market than before and becoming more open to sharing their experiences with their children and husbands.

## NORM 9

### THE ONUS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO SGBV FALLS ON WOMEN.

Strength: **Very strong**

Another prevalent norm that emerged across all regions was that the onus of responsibility for preventing and responding to harassment falls on survivors.

In Colombo, a female FGD respondent said 'we can't correct society. You must act correctly, and it is the way you dress that arouses boys'. In Batticaloa, younger respondents said that the common perception is that a woman traveling alone is 'tempting men' or inciting sexual harassment. Older respondents concurred, saying that to avoid harassment people in the community would tell women not to travel alone, be cultured, stop working late evenings or at night, and not to talk to men and boys they do not know. Strategies identified by participants for addressing sexual harassment also reflected this norm, centring around changing the actions and behaviours of survivors to avoid and prevent harassment, rather than changing the actions of perpetrators or bystanders. For example, in Kilinochchi,

younger respondents said that women being harassed would typically move to another seat or stand next to a more secure person, like an elderly woman.

As an example of a case of sexual harassment that was deemed to be successfully resolved, a male assistant manager of the national transport provider said: ‘When she [survivor] told me about the situation over the phone, I asked her to give the phone to the conductor and I advised the conductor to seat the girl close to another woman and he did it’ (Male, KII respondent, Colombo).

In contradiction to the injunctive norm that women should not complain (norm 8), a number of participants raised the idea that women need to speak up.

In Katunayake, it was seen as a woman’s responsibility to respond to sexual harassment and speak up for herself. Others being involved was considered by some participants to be ‘creating a big scene’.

A male bus conductor said: ‘the survivor has to speak up and inform the relevant authorities. Or if she cannot do that, she can move from the place she was in. If the survivor asks us to change her seat we can do that for her’ (Male, FGD respondent Kilinochchi). Similarly, a male KII respondent said: ‘when a woman is travelling in the bus and faces any difficulties, she has to inform the conductor’ (Male, KII respondent, Colombo).

A male KII respondent from the media said ‘ladies have to be very careful even if going with men. For instance, if there is a group of men around, it is not advisable to travel in their vicinity alone. One should be aware if it is a conducive environment to enter such a place. First, we should not sit with them.

People’s body language is important—if you’re very serious, don’t talk or smile and no-one will come and bother you. Don’t give any room. In society, we have appropriate dress codes for certain situations, and sometimes we can attract unwanted attention if people think we are dressed in a certain way. Due to this reality, I suggest first, preventive measures—try to avoid’ (Male KII respondent, Colombo).

In Kilinochchi, younger participants noted signs of norm change, saying that there is less pressure for women to be silent in the face of harassment and more support for them if they choose to stand up. This is specifically because more and more women are using public transport, driving their own vehicles and travelling long distances for work or university.

## NORM 10

### PERPETRATORS WILL CONTINUE TO HARASS. PERPETRATORS ARE NOT EXPECTED TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR.

Strength: **Medium**

A descriptive norm that emerged particularly when potential solutions to sexual harassment were discussed were that perpetrators will continue to harass we should not expect any different. In other words, perpetrators are not expected to change their behaviour, which closely interlinks with the norm around male dominance (norm 1). Overall, perpetrators and their actions were seen as something inherent and inevitable that could not be changed, and therefore not a viable solution to the problem. Rather, it was survivors and external factors that were seen to have a role in preventing harassment. This is in line with Jaufer’s (2017) observation of the oft-repeated justification of street harassment against women, ‘boys will be boys’.

## NORM 11

### MEN NEED TO FULFIL THEIR NEEDS. IT IS COMMON OR NORMAL FOR THEM TO DO SO.

Strength: **Medium**

A key norm around male sexual entitlement—that men need to fulfil their needs—came out strongly in FGDs in Katunayake and Kandy. This was underpinned by the previous norm that, although harassment may not be ‘acceptable’, it is expected.

This norm was reinforced by a male KII respondent from a CSO who said ‘We’ve created a culture in which we think it’s OK to harass and violate a female’s personal space, her body and right to just be able to live around freely without making her feel uncomfortable about her sexuality. The main reason is a sense of male entitlement that men in Sri Lanka have—the overall objectification of women. A woman is there to be groped and squeezed and pinched and rubbed up against’ (Male KII respondent, Colombo).

## 4.3 INFLUENCING FACTORS

### CROWDED BUSES AT PEAK HOURS ENABLE HARASSMENT

According to the UNFPA 2017 survey, women were more likely to face SGBV when their journeys were longer, after dark and/or on buses with fewer stops, thereby limiting opportunities for survivors to physically remove themselves from situations. Peak hours (when buses are more crowded) also heightened the risk of SGBV for women and girls, with perpetrators using proximity as an excuse. It was consistently suggested by participants in this study that harassment takes place more frequently during peak hours on crowded buses, because overcrowding offers greater anonymity.

This was also the case on long-distance buses traveling later at night. Overcrowding was also noted as a reason for bystander apathy, and was also used to dismiss sexual harassment as a 'misunderstanding' on public transport.

In Batticaloa, participants noted that the government anti sexual harassment campaigns that had been developed reflected the idea that, while women may be harassed, sometimes it is just a misunderstanding because of the crowded nature of the transport, and that reducing crowding would reduce harassment.

This view was propagated by a male bus driver: 'when the bus gets crowded, men are accidentally touching women and cannot do anything about it because that is the nature when the bus is getting much too crowded. Then the woman tries to shame and glare at men, and issues could happen' (Male KII respondent, Batticaloa).

### THE ROLE OF CLASS AND POWER DYNAMICS

The social positioning of a survivor and/or perpetrator as a result of their class, job, wealth and education etc. was raised repeatedly as an influencing factor.

In Colombo, respondents said that if the woman appears well-educated or dressed in a way that shows she belonged to a higher socio-economic class, then she is seen to have more credibility and support to shout back at the harasser and report harassment to authorities.

They also said that the police response might vary according to a woman's social status, class, age, appearance and level of education. In Batticaloa, respondents said that women who work in the garment industry or as unskilled labour are looked down upon, seen as 'not fit for marriage' and usually thought to be from uneducated families. When complaining, younger

and poorer garment factory workers receive a more negative reaction from the police. In Kilinochchi, it was shared by participants that women from politically influential or wealthier backgrounds and foreigners are not expected to fulfil the gender roles listed in Section 4.1 and are supported by police, bystanders and the community at large when they face harassment.

The norm that women who do paid work are 'promiscuous' has strengthened they claimed, stemming from the perception that jobs performed by women in garment factories are 'low-skilled' and socially undesirable.

### COMPLEXITY OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The perceived and real lack of support and sensitivity from the police, and the complexity and lack of efficiency within the law enforcement and legal system were seen as other major reasons why survivors do not complain, and thus harassers remain unafraid of consequences.

Across all five districts, participants reported feeling that the police are not helpful or supportive when complaints about SGBV on public transport are made to them.

This highlighted low trust in law enforcement, as well as concerns around the practicality of being able to prove the incident took place (tied in with the apathy and unwillingness of bystanders to support, as in norm 6). Respondents stated that police often blame victims or question the characters of bystanders supporting them, which is a further major deterrent for survivors making complaints or bystanders intervening.

In Katunayake, some of the younger men stated that they choose not to intervene so they do not get roped into further inquiries at the police station etc. It was also perceived as taking on an additional and unnecessary burden. A female participant in Katunayake said that the majority should stay silent because, if they interfere, they will likely get arrested.

### CIVIL WAR

Research has been undertaken into how the extraordinary circumstances of conflict upended social norms around gender in Sri Lanka (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The primary research in Batticaloa found that gender norms were thought to have relaxed around widows and in the context of female-headed households.

This has had an impact on perceptions around some women engaging in paid work (which is seen as allowed or necessary for them) and using public transport or traveling alone. While it did not emerge from this

research specifically, other studies have found that, for Sinhala women with the rise of post-war nationalism, gender norms have become more prescriptive and restrictive to fit what is considered to be traditional and culturally appropriate (Daniel et al, 2016).

## TECHNOLOGY

Technology was largely seen as a force for positive change and a serious deterrent for sexual harassment against women. Female participants noted instances in which they or others recorded incidents on their mobile phones as a way of challenging perpetrators' anonymity and successfully combatting sexual harassment. Posting videos on social media, particularly YouTube, was seen as a way of garnering wider support and raising awareness. Some participants did however note that perpetrators were also using mobile phones as a tool for harassment, by taking pictures of women without their consent.

## POOR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAW AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Across all regions, poor knowledge and understanding of the law against sexual harassment was found. For example, participants often did not know what the complaints procedure was and what their rights were. They were unaware of what laws criminalized sexual harassment, and whether their complaint was valid. Many survivors are unaware of what proof or details they need to provide and at which station to file a complaint.

## 4.4 KEY INFLUENCERS

Focus group discussion participants identified key actors with influence over perpetrators' decisions to harass, bystanders' decisions to intervene and survivors' decision to respond to SGBV on public transport.

Those with influence over survivors were parents, particularly mothers, especially over how survivors should react to incidents, whether and how to involve law enforcement and stand up to harassment, and whether or not to endure victim-blaming.

Other key influencers identified in this regard were bystanders, partners, schoolteachers and older women in community. Key influencers identified over bystanders and (potential) perpetrators were other bystanders, and bus drivers and conductors. Respondents were also asked to identify the key influencers for perpetrators and once again other bystanders, conductors and bus drivers were highlighted.

## 4.5 POSITIVE DEVIANCES AND INFLUENCES

A few positive deviances, i.e. individuals or groups that defy harmful norms, also arose from the analysis which, along with the positive influences identified, helped inform the campaign strategies for change and allies-partnerships.

Older women were identified as the exception among bystanders, they were more likely and willing to intervene in incidents of SGBV on public transport, and face less backlash for doing so.

The positive effects of social media were also highlighted with respondents describing how it has allowed survivors to find wide-spread support from outside their communities and served as a deterrent to perpetrators, and challenges their anonymity.

In terms of gender roles and responsibilities, it was found that younger respondents focused more on gender-neutral positive characteristics (e.g. being brave, taking responsibility, being honest and hardworking) for both men and women. The youth also proved to have more malleable ideas around gender roles and positive norms, such as how it should not matter how women dress and the need for bystander intervention. In this way, they emerged as a key target audience.

# THE 'ENOUGH' CAMPAIGN

## IN SRI LANKA: NOT ON MY BUS

# 5

### 5.1 THE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

The focus groups consistently highlighted three social norms as being the strongest:

- Norm 1: women need to be submissive and accept male dominance;
- Norm 4: women should dress decently to avoid harassment; and
- Norm 6: bystanders should not intervene because they will make things worse.

These were further discussed, assessed and prioritized based on a pre-defined set of criteria (see Annex), resulting in the norm on bystander inaction being selected as the focus of the campaign.

Participants first converted the negative norm into a positive social norm that the campaign would aim to create, before developing a campaign goal and objective around it. They then articulated the campaign's theory of change, which includes the changes that need to happen in different spheres with multiple stakeholders for example, the police, the media, the government and bystanders themselves.

This process was informed by the target audiences and influencing factors emerging from the research; for example, youth were highlighted as a key target audience based on the more gender-equitable attitudes they had displayed.

Participants also recognized that the campaign cannot solve all the problems related to sexual harassment in public transport, but through discussions and reviewing existing evidence and campaigns, they identified strategic areas where norm change campaigns can be effective.

### 5.2 THE CAMPAIGN

Called 'Not on my Bus' in English with the slogan 'don't ignore sexual harassment #CreateAScene', the Enough campaign in Sri Lanka aims to reduce sexual harassment in public transport by promoting bystander intervention. Its objectives include:

- Bystanders take action to prevent sexual harassment

in public transport in Sri Lanka and promote bystander intervention in situations of violence. The bystanders targeted are drivers and conductors, young people (including school children) and rush-hour commuters.

- Increased visibility of sexual harassment in public transport in Sri Lanka, particularly the importance of bystander intervention, on social (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) and traditional media (print, online, TV).

The campaign focuses on shifting the norm that bystander intervention will not help, or worsen matters, as well as the norm of placing the responsibility of action solely on the survivor, towards a positive norm that it is everyone's responsibility to uphold the rights of women, girls, transgender and gender non-conforming persons to violence-free public spaces.

The campaign's name was chosen to appeal to its target audience and draws directly from the positive norm that the campaign aims to create—that bystanders should intervene when they witness sexual harassment on public transport.

The campaign strategy also included a list of campaign principles that will form the foundation of the campaign, drawn from the feminist participatory action approach used in the research. These included:

- centring the experiences of violence of women, girls, trans and gender non-conforming persons through the campaign's communications;
- recognizing people who self-identify as women and other diverse gender identities;
- building solidarity among different stakeholders that do similar work;
- not promoting the idea that men should protect women, or portraying women as powerless; and
- believing survivors of violence.

In the theory of change, a number of long- and medium-term outcomes that need to be achieved for the norm to shift, related activities and target audiences were identified. As an example, one of the outcome areas identified was for the police to be proactive and supportive towards bystanders, for which the activities outlined included reinforcing positive norms among police



officers who are committed to SGBV prevention through incentive schemes (e.g. felicitation as champions and positive commendations in police stations).

The campaign was launched by Oxfam in Sri Lanka and partners in April 2019. Forum partners include organisations and networks like Chrysalis GTE, Men Engage Alliance, The Asia Foundation, International Youth Alliance for Peace (IYAP), Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) and Stand Up Movement Lanka.

The launch event saw the participation of key ministerial representatives from the transport sector, government

representatives, activists, partners and female commuters. Participants at the event signed a pledge titled 'Be a Better Bystander', and also witnessed a short theatrical performance on bystander intervention.

A panel discussion was held to highlight practical solutions towards harassment experienced in public transport as well as prevailing issues around reporting harassment. The conversation followed the psychological aspect of bystander intervention, shared real-life stories in relation to harassment and also explored the legal angles that both support and suppress reporting procedures.



## 6

## CONCLUSION

Social norms around gendered roles and responsibilities and their link to ideals of masculinity and femininity appear to be pervasive and deeply entrenched in Sri Lanka, contributing to the gendered separation of private and public spaces.

Across all regions, sex, gender, ethnicity and age groups, ideal women and girls were characterized as obedient, 'accepting of male dominance' and dressing decently. Those perceived to have defied these norms or transgressed their prescribed roles were considered the wrong type of women and deserving of SGBV. Rigid gender norms were also seen to have a harmful impact on transgender and gender non-conforming persons, who noted being frequently harassed on account of the visibility of their non-binary gender or transgender identities.

One of the strongest and most prevalent norms supporting victim-blaming and preventing bystander, duty-bearer and survivor response/reporting was that women who dress 'indecently' invite sexual harassment and should expect no different.

Though not acceptable, it was expected that perpetrators would continue to harass and their behaviours were largely unchangeable, reflecting male sexual entitlement. The onus of responsibility for preventing and/or responding to SGBV falls on women.

Overall, perpetrators and their actions were not considered the root cause of the problem nor a key part of the solution, rather responsibility is focused on the survivor and external factors that enable harassment. Men were held to a far weaker standard than women in terms of roles and responsibilities, and this has created a culture of impunity in which consequences for SGBV are low or non-existent.

Bystanders, who were identified as key influencers on the actions of perpetrators, survivors and fellow bystanders, were primarily seen to be apathetic to sexual harassment on public transport; intervention was seen as uncommon.

A widely held norm that exerted a strong influence on bystander behaviour was that bystanders do not and should not interfere because it is not their business, and that they might get into trouble or make the situation worse. This is compounded by the belief that violence is a private matter, even if it is taking place on public transport.

These norms also interact with and are reinforced or weakened by a range of structural, material, social and individual factors. For instance, gender norms around roles and responsibilities have relaxed in the post-civil war context, as more female-headed households have emerged; the complexity of the legal system and the perceived lack of support and sensitivity from the police strengthened norms around bystander intervention and victim-blaming; technology emerged as a force of positive change in the hands of survivors who were stripping perpetrators of their anonymity, while also being potentially negative in the hands of perpetrators who use it as a tool for harassment; and class and power dynamics are vital to understanding whether survivors have access to justice and how it is provided.

Positive deviants and allies representing key opportunities for norm and behaviour change include youth, who appear to hold more equitable gender norms; bystanders, especially older women, who do intervene in support of survivors.

Informed by the research and co-created with partners, the Enough Campaign in Sri Lanka, entitled 'Not on my Bus', aims to reduce sexual harassment in public transport by promoting bystander intervention.

It focuses on challenging the harmful norms that bystander intervention will not help, or worsen matters and that the responsibility for action solely rests on survivors, towards positive norms that bystanders should intervene, and that it is everyone's responsibility to uphold the rights of women, girls, transgender and gender non-conforming people to a violence-free public space.

While the primary goal of the research was to inform the Enough campaign in Sri Lanka, we also hope these findings will inspire further research into the norms that sustain violence against women and girls in public places; enable other organizations to take action and influence policy; and support the efforts of feminist networks and CSOs to shift the public discourse.

We also hope that the findings of the study will help us and others to effectively advocate the integration of a participatory approach that includes all voices and identities, thus addressing the wider context and issues of SGBV in Sri Lanka in the long term.

## ANNEX: NORMS RANKING EXERCISE

Participants were first asked to look at all the norms and rank their top three within groups, based on their experiences and knowledge. This was done through the use of a ranking criteria as follows:

QUESTIONS	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
How widely accepted is this social norm in Sri Lanka? Does an average person in Sri Lanka follow this norm?			
How much of an influence does this norm have on the behaviours of the perpetrators?			
How much of an influence does this norm have on the behaviour of survivors?			
How much of an influence does this norm have on the behaviour of bystanders?			
Do people in the Sri Lanka personally believe this to be true but still behave in a way that contradicts their belief?			
How strong is the 'punishment' for violating the social norm? Does the person who goes against the norm face a backlash?			
How easy would it be to mobilize communities across different contexts to shift this norm?			
Would it be easy to campaign (on and offline) around shifting this norm?			
How easy would it be to involve a range of stakeholders in shifting this norm?			

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# Glossary:

**Sexual and Gender Based Violence:** Any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It encompasses threats of violence and coercion. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature and can take the form of denial of resources or access to services. It is rooted in patriarchal norms and values that enables male dominance, especially over women.

**Violence against Women and Girls:** Gender-based violence directed specifically towards women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by it. It can take place both in the private and public spheres, across the lifecycle and cuts across all societies and cultures. VAWG it is rooted in deeply embedded notions of patriarchy, power and gender inequality.

**Patriarchy:** A system of male dominance in both public and private spheres, which is perpetuated and institutionalized through social structures and practices.

**Hetero-normativity:** Cultural and social practices where people are led into believing and behaving as if heterosexuality was the only conceivable sexuality. It also implies the positioning of heterosexuality as the only way of being 'normal' and as the key source of social reward.

**Cis-normativity:** The practices and institutions that legitimize and privilege those who are comfortable in the gender belonging to the sex assigned to them at birth. On the other hand, this norm systematically disadvantages and marginalizes all persons whose gender identity and expression do not meet social expectations.

**Social norms:** The unwritten rules or shared beliefs around what is considered typical or appropriate behaviour shared by people in the same group or society. This includes:

- a) beliefs about what others in a group actually do (i.e. what is typical behaviour) – descriptive norms
- b) what others in a group think others ought to do (i.e. what is appropriate behaviour) – injunctive norms

These beliefs shape the 'social expectations' within a reference group and are often enforced by social sanctions.

**Gender norms:** Social norms that describe how people of a particular gender are expected to behave, in a given social context. Gender norms are generally understood as defining the expected behaviour of people who identify as, or are identified by others as male or female as well as different gender identities.

**Sexual harassment:** A form of gender-based violence, and includes unwelcome physical or sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, unwanted sexual statements.

**Gender non-conforming:** Refers to people who do not conform to rigid gender norms and expectations of how they should look or act based on their sex assigned at birth.

**Transgender:** Refers to people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is how we see ourselves; an internal and personalized perception of our own gender. This may differ from the sex we were assigned at birth or how society might label us.

**Positive deviance:** A behavioural and social change approach which is premised on learning from the positive outliers or, certain individuals/groups who despite confronting similar challenges, constraints, and resource deprivations to their peers, are defying social norms. Their uncommon behaviours enable them to find better solutions to pervasive problems than their peers.

**Social sanctions:** Positive or negative responses or reactions by others to the behaviour of an individual. Positive sanctions are e.g. smiling, patting on the shoulder or being granted higher status in the community. Negative sanctions are e.g. scolding, gossiping, threats or physical aggression. People's anticipation of positive and negative sanctions is believed to affect their behaviour.

**Reference groups:** The 'others' whose behaviour and opinions matter in maintaining social norms.

**Spatial:** Relating to or occupying space.

**Bystander:** Someone who is witness to an event but does not take part.

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