

The Unseen Epidemic: Bad Touching Faced By Women of Valley of Kashmir in Public Transport

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Abstract: This article sheds light on the prevalence of bad touching faced by women of Kashmir, in public transport, exploring the tactics employed by harasser like man spreading, cross armed pose, putting one's feet on another's etc. Root causes of bad touching like overcrowded vehicles, no reserved seats for women, inadequate public transportation, inadequate reporting, inadequate enforcement and victim blaming are highlighted. My findings reveal the fact that bad touching occurs regardless of what the victim is wearing. During research it is found that it is not uncommon to the women wearing religious attire. Both harasser and victim of bad touching span across all age groups, from teenagers to old persons. Moreover, this article offers some practical solutions for its prevention.

Keywords: women, bad touching, harasser, overcrowded vehicle, public transport.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Bad touching is a term used to describe unwanted or inappropriate physical contact, especially of a sexual nature. It is also known as eve-teasing, molestation, groping etc. The practice is very much pervasive in valley of Kashmir, however the place where it is most faced in the valley is in public transportation. In today's world, women are equally competing with men in all aspects of life, be it education, health, defence, media etc. However to reach their respective working places a woman has to go through an ordeal of using the public transport in which she faces a range of unwanted physical touch that violates her dignity. It is the problem which is faced by women globally. It is the time to shatter the silence and take a hard look at the issue to create a safer and more respectful environment for all.

Through this article, I am to highlight the plight of women, who have suffered extreme from bad touching while travelling in public transport particularly in the valley of Kashmir.

Kashmir is the northernmost geographical region of the Indian subcontinent. Many girls in the valley may have at-least one story to tell about having gone through some kind of eve teasing while travelling in any type of public transport, especially buses. Most of the incidents pass with out noise. These incidents are rarely expressed and even if they are, nothing or little is done against the same.

Common tactics employed by men to bad touch women in public transport:

Folded arms pose: Folded arms pose also known as the crossed arms pose, is a posture in which a person folds his arms across his chest typically with his hands pushed under his arms. This very pose is much exploited by a harasser to target the bosom area (chest area) of a victim who is sitting on the seat next to him even without getting others noticed it.

Man-spreading: Man-spreading is a practice whereby a man, especially one travelling in public transport, adopts a sitting position with his legs wide apart, in such a way as to encroach on an adjacent seat or seats. Man-spreading is so common that it has almost become an unwanted yet accepted practice. It causes so much discomfort, feeling of harassment especially among women. The harasser man-spreads to allow his legs touch against a woman's, limits a woman's ability to move. Even if man-spreading is done unintentionally it causes very much discomfort to a person sitting next to the man-spreader.

Placing one's feet on a woman's feet:

The harasser deliberately touches his feet to hers, making her feel anxious and disrespected. This act is done in both the situations, whether the girl is seated or standing in the vehicle.

Taking advantages of the crowded vehicle: In overcrowded vehicles woman has to face bad touching in two scenarios:

(a) One is when she is standing in aisle of the vehicle. In the valley the aisles are packed with people standing shoulder to shoulder, filling every available space. This crowded aisle provide a disturbing opportunity to bad touch a victim in different forms without being noticed.

(b) Second is when she is sitting on aisle seat. In this scenario the harasser uses other parts of body besides hands to touch a woman. Parts like legs, bust, feet etc are used against the poor victim sitting on aisle .Here the disgusting form of harassment is when the harasser presses his groin (genitals) against her.

Does the harasser belong to any particular age group ?

No, the harasser can belong to any age group including teenagers, young men, middlemen and even old men.

However ,ironically, my findings revealed that most of the harassers in public transport of valley are not young men, but rather middle aged men and the old aged men are not at the back of the list.

Does the victim of bad-touching belong to any particular age group?

No,bad-touching can occur to women of any age group from childhood to old age. It is faced by women of all ages including

Children

Teenagers

Young adults

Middle ages women

Older adults(60 years old women etc).

Is the harassment limited to women or girls wearing revealing or small outfits ?

No, it occurs regardless of what someone is wearing. During my research I found that it is not uncommon even for the women who are wearing:

Traditional attire (salwar, kameez-etc)

Religious attire (abaya, hijab etc)

Formal attire (office wear etc)

In which type of vehicle does the most bad touching occur in the valley?

In my research, I found that in Kashmir valley, most incidents of bad touching occur in buses .

Factors that contribute to the problem of bad touching:

● **Crowded vehicles:** Although according to the Motor Vehicles Act of 1988, driving a bus that is over loaded is punishable under section 194, almost no legal action is taken against the same in the valley.Vehicles especially buses are extremely overcrowded, with people packed tightly together, making it difficult to breath.

● **Inadequate Public Transportation system :** There is scarcity of public transportation buses in Kashmir resulting in overcrowding on the available buses.

For instance, the entire day, only 30 buses run from main town Bandipora to Srinagar.

● **Absence of reserved seats for women in buses :** Except for Srinagar, there are no reserved seats for ladies in public transport anywhere else in Kashmir.

● **Victim blaming:** Victim blaming like

“ You were wearing provocative outfit”,

“You should have been more careful”,

“You are overreacting”,

“you are making a big deal out of nothing”

Indeed contributes to a culture that tolerates and normalizes bad touching.

● **Inadequate reporting:**Most of the incidents go unreported, allowing harasser to continue their actions .

- **Inadequate enforcement.** Even if a victim reports bad touching, inadequate actions are taken against the harasser. This occurs due to:

Lack of evidence

Fear of retaliation

Victim shaming, lack of accountability etc.

Measures to prevent bad touching in public transport:

- The rule of reserved seats for women in public transport should be stringently enforced with zero toleration for violation.
- Vehicles found to be overcrowded should be subject to heavy punishment.
- Some specific buses reserved for women should be introduced during peak hours.
- Outdated buses with unsatisfactory seating should be replaced with modern buses featuring spacious seats to reduce the likelihood of bad touching.
- Railway connectivity to other parts of Kashmir should be expanded. Besides bus services should be increased to reduce overcrowding.
- Society should learn to stop victim blaming and shift the focus to harasser, holding him accountable.
- Women and girls should be equipped with the confidence to confront the harasser without fear. And a culture should be fostered where reporting is encouraged.
- Upbringing of boys should be given equal attention as that of girls.
- Awareness programs should be made for boys to educate them about the impact of their actions on women's psychology.