

# **Widespread bullying and gender-based harassment in the transport industry restricts female participation**

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# Women, Work and Transport



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A new book "Women, Work and Transport" brings together researchers with international expertise in gender and transport work, to provide original evidence of the experiences of women working in all transport modes across countries in the Global North and the Global South.

Women play an essential role in the [transport](#) workforce worldwide, from public transport to ports and aviation to active travel. However, research detailed in the book shows they often do this crucial work in the face of gender-based violence and harassment—issues currently being challenged with 16 days of action (25 November to 10 December) by the United Nations and the Center for Women's Global Leadership.

Tessa Wright, professor of employment relations at Queen Mary University of London who co-edited and co-authored the new publication, questions why the sexist abuse faced by female passengers has inspired calls for change but the same cannot be said of transport workers enduring gender-based violence and harassment.

Professor Wright commented, "In this book, we expose the shocking extent of gender-based violence across the [transport sector](#), not only in the U.K. but globally, which has persevered for many years and contributes to [women](#)'s exclusion from this male-dominated industry.

"Indeed, transport was singled out by the International Labor Organization as one of the highest risk employment sectors when it passed Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work in 2019. These issues cannot go unchallenged."

Bullying and harassment was a key theme of the book's chapter based on research into the British rail sector—where the workforce is male-dominated, gender-segregated and ethnically diverse. The findings showed that bullying in the rail sector is significantly impacted by gender, race and ethnicity, age and disability, with ethnic minority women aged 55+ most likely to report discrimination.

The results differed depending on how the [survey data](#) is analyzed. A single category approach provides a clear picture of bullying for women, ethnic minority and disabled workers, but a more intersectional approach looking at combinations of multiple protected characteristics found that ethnic minority women aged 55+ years were more likely to be bullied.

Professor Wright and co-authors Hazel Conley and Mostak Ahamad drew on data from a survey about experiences achieving equality at work for members of the Transport and Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA), which has the largest female membership of the three main rail sector trade unions in Britain at around 28%. The research concludes that older black women, who were most likely to report suffering from bullying and harassment in the rail sector, would struggle to be adequately protected by the Equality Act 2010 due to the lack of an intersectional perspective in the U.K. legal system.

Professor Tessa Wright added: "Our research reveals that bullying and harassment affect women transport workers across the globe, with particular impacts for some groups including older black women. Employers and trade unions need to be more proactive in protecting the workers affected. The Global 16 Days campaign against gender-based violence provides an ideal opportunity for immediate action to ensure that transport offers safe and rewarding jobs for all workers."

When outlining the extensive sexual harassment faced by women working in [public transport](#) in Kenya, Wright and co-author Anne

Kamau also pinpoint the important role of key stakeholders working together to eliminate gender-based violence—in particular employers, trade unions, and transport authorities.

Since this research concluded, the TSSA has launched a rail industry equality survey and developed a Bullying and Harassment Community of Practice. The International Transport Federation also carried out a global survey of women in the rail industry earlier this year, with findings not yet reported but expected to inform a gender equality action plan.

Last week saw the book launch for "Women, Work and Transport" bring together editors and authors who have addressed the everyday challenges faced by women working in male-dominated environments—including gender stereotypes about women's lack of suitability for transport work, gender-based violence and [harassment](#), limited opportunities for promotion and progression, inflexible work patterns, poor working conditions, and lack of gender-specific facilities.

["Women, Work and Transport"](#) is published by Emerald.

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