

## **How Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Affect their Commuting Behaviour in Urban Bangladesh?**

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**Abstract:** *Women commuting are connected with their productivity, empowerment and social equity. The linkage of socio-economic status, transportation system and commuting behaviour of women is obvious. The main objective of the paper is to examine the commuting behaviour of Bangladeshi women in urban cities of Bangladesh. It mainly focuses on the determinants of the commuting behaviour of urban working women and their difficulties in the capital town of the country. In Bangladesh, socio-economic condition and family status have considerable influence on the commuting behaviour of women. In the absence of well-scheduled bus system women commuters heavily rely on rickshaw and walking to reach their work place. Generally, women have poor accessibility to the overcrowded public buses of Dhaka city. Due to inadequate transports, many women are forced to depend on more expensive and private modes of transport. The combination of unsafe, unaffordable and inaccessible transport system has put heavy constraints on female commuters. A gender-aware transport system is the need of the time for Dhaka city that would increase women's mobility and productivity, and ensure sustainable economic growth.*

### **1. Introduction**

There is considerable difference in the basic mobility needs of working women and men because of gender-based division of labour, socio-economic status, culture, and nature of employment. A man's common role in almost all societies is that of the main income-earner, who leaves the house for work in the morning and comes back in the evening. A woman, however, usually performs triple roles as income earner, homemaker, and community-manager (Peters, 1999). Commuting needs and behaviors of working and non-working women are also significantly different. These aspects also vary from country to country, community to community, and rural to urban areas. However, in most developing countries, interven-

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tions in the transport sector have hardly responded positively to the special and varied needs of women.

In Bangladesh, women are primarily involved in the informal sector and contribute substantially to their households. In general, women participate more in those industries that can be conducted at home in breaks between household works, and less in those that require them to work outside the home. However, these opportunities are relatively less in urban areas. In the major cities of Bangladesh, a large number of women work in export-oriented garment industries, the main source of the country's export earnings. Hardcore poor women workers are found in certain activities traditionally falling within the male domain like earthwork, construction etc. A significant number of women also work as teachers, lawyers, journalists, government employees, and employees in non-government organisations (NGOs). In spite of these, the majority of women in Bangladesh have yet to be empowered to participate actively in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the country (Sicat, 2007). The level of socio-economic empowerment of women is considered as one of the important determinants of women commuting.

In urban areas of Bangladesh, female students and working women are the main travelers. In Dhaka, transport related difficulties of working women are very apparent. As in many developing economies, socio-economic factors and transportation infrastructure are believed to be two important determinants of the women commuting behaviour in Bangladesh. The paper attempts to examine the commuting behaviour of working women of Bangladesh in urban areas. It aims to find answers of the following research questions: How does socio-economic status matter for the commuting behavior of working women in Bangladesh? Is transport infrastructure of Bangladesh designed to accommodate women commuters? What are the difficulties of working women in their day-to-day commuting?

The following are the specific objectives of the paper: one, to examine the linkage of socio-economic status of working women in Bangladesh and their commuting behaviour; two, to discuss women transportation issues in the perspective of the current transportation infrastructure of the country; and three, to capture the commuting behaviour of working women in urban Bangladesh.

Published literatures have been reviewed to form the background of the study. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 200 working women of Dhaka city of different classes/professions. Some case studies complement the evidence on women commuting behavior and relevant difficulties. Cases are collected from the women working commuters of different economic, social groups of Dhaka city. The paper is divided into five sections. After a brief background, relevant literatures are reviewed in section 2. Section 3 examines determinants of women's commuting in the socio-economic setup of Bangladesh. Section 4 examines the survey outcome related to the commuting behaviour of working women of Dhaka city. And section 5 puts forward concluding remarks.

## **2. Socio-economic Conditions and Commuting Behaviour of Working Women: Literature Review**

Most gender-based commuting behaviour analyses treat men and women as independent trip makers, where gender, marital status and number of children in the household are taken as explanatory variables (Taylor and Mauch, 1998). Ramon (1981) rightly notes that the mobility experience of the individual is shaped by socio-cultural factors. The evolution of the labour force has brought forth the unique needs, burdens, and patterns associated with women's commuting that are different from men. In connection with working men and women, it has been found that men are more likely to use simpler trip patterns than women (MacDonald, 1999). Women appear more likely to integrate non-work activities within work trips, including child chauffeuring and other household-serving trips (Taylor and Mauch, 1998).

Marital status of women defines their role in the family and thus influences their commuting behaviour (Meng, 2008). Turner and Niemeier (1997) find that both marital status and presence of children reduce women's commuting distance but not men's. The dual career-home responsibility affects women's careers much more than men's and thus also their commuting behaviour (Srinivasan and Peter, 2005). It has been shown in different studies (Kamiya et al 1995; Blumen, 1994 etc.) that the commuting distances of married women are generally shorter than those of married men. That is chiefly because the housekeeping role forces married women to remain close to home (Blumen, 1994). Meng (2008) observes that women select jobs closer to their residence because their household responsibilities shorten commuting distance. Kamiya et al. (1995) find that women, especially mothers of small children, regardless of their occupational status, are more likely to work in local labour markets and to commute shorter times compared to men.

Walking, non-motorized transport, and public transport like buses are the main means of transports for most people in the cities of developing countries. However, many of the mass or public transportation systems are inefficient and chaotic (GTZ, 2007). Car ownership is not a realistic option for most people living in the cities of developing countries. When it comes to female vehicle ownership rates, the rates become even lower. A UN-Habitat study of nine cities in various developing countries finds that while 11.6 percent of households headed by men had cars, only 1.62 percent of women-headed households had them (Women Watch, 2009). This can also be seen in the degree to which women get a driving license. Dependence on walking is very common by women in developing countries (Meng, 2008). However, women are significantly less likely than men to walk alone and reported walking with friends and family much more often than men (Kelly and Andrea, 2004).

Some unique difficulties are commonly faced by women commuters. In a number of low-income countries, problems of dirty footpaths crowded with hawkers and harassment by street boys is a great difficulty for the women commuters (Zahir Salma, 2003). In regard to availing public buses, there is health risk associated with waiting for long periods in inclement weather, particularly for older women. Overcrowded public transport involves invasion of personal space, which many find distressing and renders women vulnerable to sexual abuse. Moreover, fear of harassment and attack on the street produces high levels of anxiety among women commuters (Hamilton 2002). This is the common picture of most urban cities of a number of low income economies. For example, the residents in centrally located Srinivasapuram (an Indian city) expressed concern about the quality of public transportation and safety of women in the city (Srinivasan and Peter, 2005). A study on Nigeria (Asiyanbola, 2007) finds that urban transport infrastructure condition and intra-urban travel constitute a major threat to psychological well-being of women commuters.

It is evident that average women of Bangladesh are gradually overcoming social, cultural and corporate barriers and acquiring important positions in all economic sectors. Over the years, the women's labour force participation rate in urban areas increased, life expectancy at birth improved, and maternal mortality rate decreased. Public awareness efforts by development organizations and mass media have played an important role in this connection. In addition, women-led NGOs have been pushing for change in women's societal roles through research and advocacy. This has added momentum for development partners to push the government to address critical gender issues. Data from WHO (2009) household surveys over 20 years indicate that the female disadvantage has tended to persist in India and may have worsened in some other countries such as Nepal and Pakistan; however, for Bangladesh the gap has narrowed significantly over time. According to the Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum (2008), Bangladesh climbs 10 places in the rankings and is distinctive for being the second highest-ranking country in South Asia, after Sri Lanka; and is the highest-ranking Muslim-majority country in the Index, followed closely by Indonesia. It is expected that, the growing number of initiatives to promote women's empowerment and changing social conditions, coupled with the introduction of innovations in transportation infrastructure will have strong impact on women's commuting behaviour in near future.

### **3. Socio-Economic Status of Women in Bangladesh and their Commuting Behaviour**

In Bangladesh, most women have limited role in household decision-making, limited access and control over household resources, restricted mobility and inadequate knowledge and skills that lead to vulnerability (Sebstad and Cohen, 2002).

Traditional, cultural and social values and practices have reinforced the lower status of women as compared to the man in Bangladesh (Parveen and Ingrid, 2004). A woman, on an average, is married at the age of 19 years in Bangladesh (World Economic Forum, 2012). The latest available estimates indicate that in South Asia, 49 percent of women become mother at the age of 20 to 24, and in Bangladesh, more than a third are mothers by that age (United Nations, 2009). In a family, women generally have primary responsibility for the care and feeding of children. Cooking, cleaning, childcare and nursing activities, and looking after family members occupy the major portion of both working and non-working women's daily jobs (Islam and Nahid, 2006).

The relevant indicators of Global gender Gap Report 2012 show that women in general lag behind men in terms of literacy, health, and income (World Economic Forum 2012). In regard to overall Gender Gap Index the ranks of Bangladesh improved from 91 to 86 in between 2006 and 2012. In spite of the improvements, gender gap in the country lags behind in terms of economic participation, education and health. The rankings in terms of economic participation of women, literacy rate and health were 121, 109, and 123, respectively (World Economic Forum 2012).

Illiteracy is one of the main factors, which deters women from equal participation in socio-economic activities with her male counterparts and helps to perpetuate the inequality between sexes (Islam and Nahid, 2006). The ratio of female at secondary education is higher (Table-1). However, the girl students' dropout rates at both primary and secondary levels are comparatively higher than those of the boy-students. Consequently, the completion rates for girls are lower in both primary and secondary levels.

**Table-1: Gender Gap in Education in Bangladesh**

	Country Rank	Female	Male	Female to Male Ratio
Literacy rate	109	52	61	0.85
Enrolment in primary education	128	67	78	0.85
Enrolment in secondary education	1	50	45	1.13
Enrolment in tertiary education	119	8	13	0.61
Source: World Economic Forum 2012.				

**Table-2: Gender Gap in Economic Participation in Bangladesh**

	Country Rank	Female	Male	Female to Male Ratio
Labour force participation	82	62	85	0.73
Legislators, senior officials, and managers	102	10	90	0.11
Professional and Technical workers	104	22	78	0.28

Source: World Economic Forum 2012.

In Bangladesh, women's participation in economic activities shows great variations by gender. The participation of female in economic activities is not at all encouraging and falls behind the group of least achieved economies (see the country rank in table 2). The differences of male and female are significant in this connection. Especially, in case of senior officials, managers, professional and technical workers, the disparity is very wide (table-2). Non-recognition of household work performed by women shows almost half the population as unemployed and inactive (Islam and Nahid, 2006). Working women are also expected to play roles in family household works. Thus working women are to struggle between their jobs and family maintenance (Mini Case-1).

**Mini Case-1: Sahana has to Struggle in between her Garments Job and Family Maintenance**

Sahana is a twenty-five years old garment worker, stays with her mother-in-law, husband and four kids. Her mother-in-law takes care of her children and she hardly gets any support from her daily labourer husband in her household activities. She has a very tough daily life as she has to perform jobs like preparing food, cleaning, washing clothes, and feeding children alongside her jobs as garment worker. Walking is the mode of commuting to reach her work place. She lives in Rayerbazar area and covers a distance of approximately three miles to reach the factory located at Sobhanbag. While coming to the work place she sometimes faces situation such as physical assault, comment, vulgar words from the path walkers. Her working hours start from 8 and finishes at 6. She generally performs some overtime to earn money for better living. Walking not only takes lot of her time but also gives mental stress, insecurity and physical tiredness. While returning, she faces additional insecurity as it becomes dark. Again when she reaches home, she does household activities. The mental agony and insecurity of commuting make her life tough and challenging.

Note: Interviewed on December 04, 2013; name of the interviewee is changed.

In regard to the employment in different broad sectors, both male and female are

largely employed in the informal sector of the country. According to Maligalig et al. (2009), over 91 percent employed women are engaged in informal sector in Bangladesh. Employed women are mostly engaged in private household, agriculture, health, social work, and manufacturing. In the urban areas of Bangladesh, employed women are almost equally divided between unpaid family workers and employees. Relatively, greater proportion of urban women is engaged in formal sector. Nearly two out of every five urban employed women are found in the formal sector, as opposed to only 4 percent of their rural sisters (Pal 2001). This is mainly because of the readymade garments factories that provide employment to thousands of urban women. Labour in Bangladesh is cheap, female labour is even cheaper. According to a World Economic Forum (2012) survey, Bangladesh ranked 115 in terms of wage equality; and women's wage is on average 55 percent that of the male. As a whole a considerable proportion of urban women are concentrated largely in low-paid and tedious jobs (Pal, 2001).

Social, economic and family status has considerable influence on the commuting behaviour of working women of Bangladesh (Sicat, 2007). According to a study by Zahir Salma (2003), female travelers are more literate and better educated than non-travelers. About 67 percent of female travelers were students and 71 percent of female non-travelers were housewives (Zahir Salma, 2003). Married women work closer to home compared to single women, and mothers of young children commute less than other women (see an example Mini Case-2). Specifically, women who have greater home responsibility, due to the presence of young children, are less inclined to increase commuting efforts (Islam and Nahid, 2006).

#### **Mini Case-2: Short Commuting by a Working Mother in Dhaka City**

Sultana works in a college as administrative personnel. She is having a very co-operative and educated family. Her two children study in a nearby school. Being the mother, she has to take care of her household responsibilities along with her job. Her husband is very understanding, and cooperative who always appreciates her effort and tries to make her stress at lower level. They have rented a house near to her office that is in Uttara so that she can commute for shorter time comfortably. On the other hand, her husband has to commute for nearly one and half an hour to reach Motijheel area. The shorter commuting time gives her a little relief in managing both household and office activities.

Note: Interviewed on January 17 December, 2013; name of the interviewee is changed.

The transportation system of Dhaka is predominantly road based, and non-motorized transportation has a substantial share. Rickshaws (a type of tri-cycle peddled by human) and buses are the dominating mode of public transport. The number of passengers in public transport has been increasing continuously over

the last two decades. The road network of the Dhaka City is non-lane basis and all transport modes (motorized and non-motorized) use the same lane. Buses are the cheapest mode available as mass transit among the public transport. Other than buses, taxi, auto-tempo, auto rickshaw (baby taxi commonly called CNG) are available but relatively expensive small passenger transport modes (Mannan and Karim, 2001). Different studies also found that a considerable proportion of working women in Dhaka city rely on non-motorized mode and walking (Sicat, 2007).

In Dhaka city, buses are operated both by private and public operators. However, the private sector is dominating. Services of most buses are inefficient and unsafe. Long waiting, overloading, discomfort, and long walking distance from the residence/work place to bus stoppages are some of the obvious problems that confront the users of buses in their daily lives. In peak hours they very often load and unload at unspecified stoppages. It is a common practice in rush hours to deny access to the old, women, and children passengers, because this group has a tendency to avoid fighting during boarding and alighting (Mannan and Karim, 2001). The city road networks are designed for a smaller population, and do not have the capacity to handle the current increasing number of travelers and vehicles. This leads to overloading and overspeeding, which increases the risk of accidents (Mannan and Karim, 1999).

Use of the transportation system by men and women varies considerably in Bangladesh. According to a study by Zahir Salma (2003), the major modes of travel for female trips were 67 percent walking and 21 percent rickshaw. Use of public buses was 4.5 percent for women against over 8 percent for men. Public transport is not always comfortable to the women of Dhaka city. Especially, middle and upper income class women are not at all comfortable in using public buses. According to Women Watch (2009), in Dhaka, women's exclusion from public transport is due to overcrowded buses. A considerable number of low income employed women walk to and from work. For example, women garment workers account for about 70 percent of the female labour force in Dhaka and about 60 percent of these women walk to and from work (Sicat, 2007). The Study by Zahir Salma (2003) also finds the similar picture i.e., about 63 percent of women garment workers were found to walk to work (on average, 3 kilometers) and 36 percent to avail buses. It is well-known that rickshaws are popular in Dhaka as they provide door-to-door transport, enabling women and girls to travel to the workplace, schools, and other areas without being harassed or feeling uncomfortable in overcrowded buses and inadequate sidewalks. Bangladeshi women hardly travel alone. Generally, women have a lower incidence of vehicle use, and a higher incidence of walking. This is partly a reflection of lack of money to afford to buy vehicles or pay for services. A study by GTZ (2007) found, typically, men have greater mobility when looking only at motorized modes. The study added, when considering all



trips (motorized and non-motorized), women make more trips per day (more mobility), but the costs in both time and money are higher (less accessibility).

Difficulties of women commuters are well known and distinct in Dhaka city. Zahir Salma (2003) discusses several gender problems and issues of Dhaka city of which two address women commuting: one, absence of a good scheduled bus system and poor accessibility for women to existing bus services due to overcrowding; and two, inadequate sidewalks and pedestrian facilities which constrain poor garment workers who walk to work in large numbers. The transport services currently provided by the public and private buses are insecure, unreliable, congested and unsafe. It is difficult for women to compete with men for the limited space on the buses particularly given the cultural background in Bangladesh.

Incidences of violence against women and sexual harassment are among the challenges to the female commuters of Bangladesh especially in urban areas. Sometimes young women commuters face sexual and verbal harassment in the road (The Daily Star, Forum, March 2010). They have similar experiences in the public transport stands, railway stations or at other common places (Islam and Nahid, 2006). The majority of the mugging victims are working women. Pedestrians and women traveling on rickshaws face mugging. Women, more than men, are afraid to travel after dark. As the garment workers return home late, they are forced to walk in groups that provide personal security (Pal, 2001).

#### 4. Commuting Behaviour of Working Women in Dhaka City- Survey Observations

The survey on the commuting behaviors of working women covers women of different personal and family income groups. As the distribution of the working women shows (table-3), most belong to the low income group (40%)

Personal Income	Family Income			Total
	Below BDT20000	BDT20000-50000	Above 50000	
Below BDT10000	36	4	0	40
BDT-10000-30000	0	22	18	40
Above BDT 30000	0	8	12	20
Total	36	34	30	100

According to the survey observations, like men, women use own transport, buses, taxi, auto-tempo, auto rickshaw (three wheeler commonly called CNG) to travel to their workplace. The survey data (table-4) show that a considerable proportion of

working women in Dhaka city rely on rickshaw, own transport or public transport. The data indicate that public transport (mainly big and mini buses) is not the main mode of commuting for the working women, though it has been for the most male workers. The reasons have mainly been the poor accessibility and overcrowding. A good number of women also walk to their workplaces. Of the commuters, 25 percent walk to their workplace, as the survey data reveal. These women are mainly the garment workers. It is well-known that many garment workers in the Dhaka city travel to their workplace in group on foot every morning.

<b>Table-4 : Use of Transport Mode by the Working Women for daily Commuting</b>	
<b>Transport Mode</b>	<b>Number of Women in Percentage (approx)</b>
Own Transport	26
Public Transport	18
Office Transport	6
You share vehicle pool	0
Rickshaw	22
Auto Rickshaw	10
Walk	25
Note: Multiple responses	
Source: Survey data	

<b>Table-5 : Basis for the selection of Commuting Mode during Office Hour</b>	
<b>Commuting Mode</b>	<b>Number of Women in Percentage</b>
Time Factor	36
Cost Factor	40
Comfort Factor	32
Family Attitude	42
Distance Factor	4
Note: Multiple responses	
Source: Survey data	

Different factors affect their decisions in selecting available suitable mode for each (table-5). In most cases the determining factors are more than one. Family attitude and decisions are among the key factors in deciding transport modes by the working women. A considerable middle and upper class family found bus or public transport unacceptable for their female family members in Dhaka city. Time and comfort factors also come up as important determinants. Cost factor is particularly

important for low income group (individual or family). As expected, distance can hardly be a determining factor in a city with huge traffic especially in the office hour.

It is more or less recognized that in many cases services of buses are inefficient and unsafe for women. It is a common practice in rush hours to deny access to the old, women, and children passengers, because this group has a tendency to avoid fighting during boarding and alighting (Mini Case-3). Thus the tendency to use public transport by the working women is less in Dhaka city during day time. However, at night working women generally prefer public transport on security ground (in the absence of personal vehicle). Sometimes they also share vehicle. Walking and rickshaw are less preferred as compared to the day time (table-6).

**Mini Case-3: Availing Public Bus is Every Day’s Challenge to Parul Rani**

Parul, a forty year old lady works as a governess, has to come by local bus to her work place. She has to accomplish her whole household work and take care of her 19-year old daughter as her husband left her six years back. She belongs to lower income group and her income (Tk. 3500 approx.) is the only source of her livelihood. She lives in the Mirpur area of the city and she has to cover a long distance from there to Dhanmondi area every day. She starts approximately two hours before her reporting time from her home to catch the local buses. While coming from her home she has to come walking to the bus routes. These local buses are overcrowded because of the comparatively low fare. Practically it’s really very difficult for a female to get an entry into the buses fighting with the male folk. Usually she gives many attempts to get chance to enter into the buses. She faces worse situation at the time of getting down, as Dhanmondi area is the mid way for most of these buses. The rainy season becomes a nightmare for her. She has to wait for long hours to get entry into these overcrowded buses. In many occasions, she lost her moneybags while commuting and got hurt physically. However, she has no option but to go on with it.

Note: Interviewed on January 02, 2014; name of the interviewee is changed.

**Table-6 : Preference Regarding Transport Mode during Night in the absence of personnel vehicle**

Commuting Mode	Number of Women in Percentage (approx)
Public Transport	56
You share vehicle	5
Rickshaw	24
Auto Rickshaw	15
Walking	8

Note: Multiple responses

Source: Survey data

Commuters commonly face huge traffic in Dhaka city. Thus working women are to spend considerable time in commuting. Around 34 percent working women spend in between two to three hours in commuting (table-7) and around 35 percent working women travel more than 10 km in traveling their workplace every day (table-8). Other than commuting to the workplace, around 28 percent working women accompany their children to the schools regularly, as the survey data reveal.

**Table-7 : Average Time spend for Daily Commuting by the Working Women**

<b>Time Spend</b>	<b>Number of Women in Percentage (approx)</b>
Less than one hour	18
Less than two hours	19
Less than three hours	34
More than three hours	29
Source: Survey data	

**Table-8 : Average Daily distance Travelled by the Working Women**

<b>Distance in Kilometers</b>	<b>Number of Women in Percentage</b>
Less than 2 KM	32
Less than 5 KM	20
Less than 10 KM	13
More than 10 KM	35
Note: Multiple responses	
Source: Survey data	

Difficulties in commuting by the working women are not uncommon in Bangladesh. According to the survey information, over 85 percent working women face difficulties in getting transports during peak hour. The figure is 46 percent during off peak hour. Poor accessibility for women to existing bus and other public transportation services are evident in the city. To save time and to reach workplace in time many women are forced to depend on unsafe or more expensive modes of transport (Mini Case-4). Still around 57 percent women commuters could not reach their office in time frequently or in several instances every month. About 51 percent working women reported their dissatisfaction in regard to their commuting to their offices.

**Mini Case-4: Shefali is forced to Rely on Costly and Unsafe Travel Modes**

Shefali is a school teacher and belongs to a middle income family. She completed her post graduation in English from Dhaka University two years back. She stays with her husband and in-laws in Yatrabari in their ancestral home. Commuting is really a tough task for her, as she cannot avail direct buses from that place to Dhanmondi due to fewer buses in that route. CNGs (auto rickshaw) or taxis (Taxi cabs) are the only alternative modes for commuting to her work place. Being a woman she tries to do some household work, packs food for herself and husband and starts for her office at around 7'o clock in the morning. Generally it takes lots of time and energy to get a taxi or CNG at the rush hour. Moreover, on most occasions, taxi and CNG drivers do not want to go by meter. They try to exploit commuters, especially the women passengers by taking much higher fare. The tussle to get taxi or CNG makes her late to the office on many occasions, which affects her performance at workplace. Moreover, certain incidents of Malam Party (putting poisonous ointment into the eyes for snatching) and chhintai (snatching) made the modes risky especially for the female folk. She has to spend 20 percent of her salary to meet her transportation expenses.

Note: Interviewed on January 04, 2014; name of the interviewee is changed.

Sometimes, women face harassment on crowded public modes of transportation. Thus for many rickshaw is the preferred mode. This is, however, costly and is not affordable by the working women of all classes. In this connection the government's decision to ban rickshaws in a number of streets of Dhaka has been affecting transport choice accessible to most women and thus their mobility. Pedestrians and women traveling on rickshaws face mugging in many instances. Using rickshaw as commuting mode is hazardous and unsafe for many working women.

In Dhaka city, car owners commonly engage drivers for driving their cars. The number of owners driving their own cars is very small and very rare in the case of women. There are several reasons that include multiple uses of cars by the family members and safety of the cars in the absence of adequate parking in most workplaces. Most of these drivers are not professional and experts. In many cases, they own fake license and they may be hired at low wages. Thus there is lack of general awareness and knowledge among drivers and almost absence of true traffic rule followers. Sometimes attitude towards the women drivers are not acceptable. The environment is not at all congenial for the women who can drive their own cars (Mini Case-5).

**Mini Case-5: Culture bounds Afrina to depend on Unprofessional Drivers**

Afrina belongs to a well-educated and high-income group family. She works in a law firm. She lives with her husband in Gulshan and her law firm is located in the Motijheel commercial area. She drives well. Her mode of commuting is her own personal car, but she does not like to drive the car and hired a driver. Two years back she started driving

but the lack of general awareness among general people, ill mentality of co-drivers, negative attitude towards women drivers, and lack of true traffic rule followers have compelled her to leave driving. In Bangladesh, most of the people depend on drivers, who are generally lowly educated, and many of them have even false driving license. As a whole performance of these drivers is not upto the mark and sometimes their driving is very risky. She is capable of driving but she is compelled to depend on drivers, who are not truly professionals.

Note: Interviewed on December 07, 2013; name of the interviewee is changed.

Due to the faulty transport system and socio-economic status of women, the working women of the Dhaka city face difficulty both at home and workplace. In the workplace, being late is the most common occurrence followed by tiredness and exhaustion (table-9). As women have to perform a number of other family responsibilities, they are also getting affected due to the commuting problems of the working women. Many could not reach their desired destination and home in the right time and fail to serve their respective families (table-10). These affect a working woman's reputation both at workplace and at family.

<b>Table-9 : Types of Difficulties faced at Workplace by the Working Women</b>	
<b>Common Difficulties</b>	<b>Number of Women in Percentage</b>
Late in office	57
Late or absent in official Meetings	4
Bad reputation due to late coming	6
Feel tired and exhausted at office	46
Mental or Physical pressure of difficulty	20
Getting negative comments from colleagues/Boss	2
Note: Multiple responses; Source: Survey data	

<b>Table-10 : Types of difficulties faced by the Working Women at Home</b>	
	<b>Number of Women in Percentage</b>
Delay or Non-Performing Kitchen shopping	26
Unable to help child in studies	14
Inability in attending social gathering	36
Difficulty in accompanying family members to the Doctors	18
Difficulty in sharing time with Child/Husband	14
Unable to take dinner together with family members	20
Difficulty in getting leisure for relaxation and own health care	50
Note: Multiple responses; Source: Survey data	

### **5. Concluding Remarks**

Considering the different socio-economic conditions of man and woman, a gender-aware transport system is the need of the time for urban Bangladesh that would increase women's mobility, productivity, and ensure sustainable economic growth. It is important to develop specific policies and transportation planning models that take into account gender differences in different modes of transportation. A design of long-term plan for integrated metropolitan transportation with a clear vision of proper placing of train, bus and taxis as well as motorcycle and non-motorized transport is needed. Ensuring accessibility is the most crucial factor at this moment that is expected to take care of the time, money and comfort of the women commuters. There should be specific guiding rules to be followed by bus owners, staffs, and commuters and their proper enforcement to ensure safety, security, and convenience of the women commuters on the street. However, awareness development among common people of all groups and gender is the most crucial aspect that can make the progress rapid and smooth. The existing evidences suggest that for sustainable development it is appropriate to address women commuting issues by policy makers and advocacy groups of the country alongside other major gender sensitive issues.

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