

# **Women's Safety Audit**

**A Report on the Safety Audits Conducted in  
Dhakuria, Bagha Jatin and Ballygunge Stations, Kolkata  
July – August, 2012**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

Parichiti – A Society for Empowerment of Women, is a women's organisation whose main objective is to assert the identities and claim the rights of women who are unrepresented and underrepresented in public discourse and action.

While working with WDWs who use local trains, it was found that most of them face different forms of violence, sexual harassment, apathy and a lack of support from co-travellers and public officials (police, rail authorities) that threaten their safety in public spaces. Parichiti, in association with Jagori, a women's organisation in Delhi, has conducted a 3-station pilot safety audit to capture what kinds of spaces are perceived as unsafe or inaccessible to WDWs and determine the factors that play a role in contributing to greater safety and inclusion for WDWs, in railway stations and rail routes.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this pilot study conducted at Dhakuria, Bagha Jatin and Ballygunge stations were to:

- Determine what kinds of spaces are perceived as unsafe or inaccessible to WDWs
- Establish factors that play a role in contributing to greater safety and inclusion for WDWs, in railway stations and routes;
- Assess how they access support services, for redressal;
- Gain insights from several key stakeholders on safety issues of women;
- Use key findings of the study to raise awareness and advocate greater safety for women.

## **Methodology**

The study methodology was participatory and based on feminist research principles. Qualitative data collection tools like Focus Group Discussions (FGD), key informant interview or in-depth interview were used, other than the Women's Safety Audit (WSA) diagnostic<sup>1</sup> tool. The data was primarily collected by Parichiti staff, supported by selected WDWs.

## **Overview of findings**

Most poor and semi-skilled workers work in severely risky situations. These workers, especially women domestic workers, are stigmatised and looked down upon and looked on suspiciously too. Their services are not recognised as legitimate 'work' and they are harassed on all fronts – in the homes where they work, while they travel and also by fellow commuters. The numbers of such workers are on the rise exponentially. This is a fact that everyone is aware of. However it seems that there is no place in the city for WDWs and for them to work and travel with dignity. While conducting the pilot study, we found several basic amenities missing or not available in the stations and on trains, such as clean drinking water, toilets for women commuters, waiting areas in case of emergencies, access to travel-related information in regional languages, and hardly any facilities for physically-challenged persons. We have incorporated these deficiencies in our study, which affect not only women commuters/women domestic workers, but all commuters.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations to Rail/Civic Authorities are primarily focused on adequate infrastructure both on trains and in stations, availability of information, access to station authorities, facilities for physically challenged commuters, definite spaces for hawkers. The recommendations to the GRP include increased pro-active presence in all stations.

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The main aims of Parichiti are to:

- Work with sections of poor women and girls
- Facilitate efforts to organise them
- Promote solidarity amongst marginalised women and girls
- Understand their group identity, and
- Take steps to demand and secure their rights.

At present, Parichiti works with Women Domestic Workers (WDWs) and adolescent girls.

Parichiti started its work with daily commuters, specifically WDWs who come into the city everyday on trains, which is very characteristic of Kolkata. These WDWs are the 'marginalised among the marginalised'.

While working with WDWs who use local trains, it was found that most of them face different forms of violence, sexual harassment, apathy and a lack of support from co-travellers and public officials (police, rail authorities) that threaten their safety in public spaces. Parichiti felt that if the needs of the marginalized are addressed, then the needs of the general will also be addressed. A campaign for a safer Kolkata could start by looking at the concerns of the most marginalized. The Women's Safety Audit therefore was a good place to start, to analyse the safety concerns of these specific women, without whose labour the city would come to a grinding halt.

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**Total No. of interviews: 33**

**Total No. of FGDs: 2 (1 at Dhakuria, 1 at Bagha Jatin, each consisting of 6 members)**

**Total No. of WSAs - 3**

## **Women's Safety Audit: Orientation Workshops**

Jagori conducted two orientation workshop with Parichiti on Women's Safety Audit – January 10-12, 2012 and 6-8 June, 2012. The objectives of the first workshop were to:

- Understand gender dynamics in public spaces
- Share about Jagori and Parichiti's ongoing work
- Understand and develop skills on how to conduct Safety Audit
- Conduct Safety Audit on one train route
- Strategize and formulate the next plan of action

The second workshop started with a recap of the January workshop, followed by updates on activities of Parichiti since the workshop, discussion of demo audit, recap of tools, study design, categories of documentation and related templates, and project timelines and other project details.

On 26 and 27 June, 2012, Parichiti organised an orientation workshop for its new staff members. The Women's Safety Audit was introduced in this workshop to both old and new staff members, which included the concept and background of the safety audit, and the tools that are used for the audit. A demonstration of the audit was conducted with the entire team at Dhakuria station.

## **Overview of findings**

Most poor and semi-skilled workers work in severely risky situations. These workers, especially women domestic workers, are stigmatised and looked down upon and looked on suspiciously too. Their services are not recognised as legitimate 'work' and they are harassed on all fronts – in the homes where they work, while they travel and also by fellow commuters.

The numbers of such workers are on the rise. However it seems that there is no place in the city for WDWs and for them to work and travel with dignity. What we are trying to establish through this study is that these women who come into the city every day and provide a necessary service are completely ignored by civic and rail authorities. Their daily travel on train is fraught with discomfort and harassment.

While conducting the pilot study, we found several basic amenities missing or not available in the stations and on trains, such as clean drinking water, toilets for women commuters, waiting areas in case of emergencies, access to travel-related information in regional languages, and hardly any facilities for physically-challenged persons. We have incorporated these deficiencies in our study, which affect not only women commuters/women domestic workers, but all commuters. The objective of this study is to establish WDWs as bona fide passengers and recommend facilities and services which allow them to travel comfortably and safely with dignity.

### **Bagha Jatin Station**



Rush to get on the train



Broken water taps

### Dhakuria Station



Poorly lit over-bridge



Locked ladies toilet, signage in English only

### Ballygunge Station



No facilities for challenged commuters



Forced to wait on the edge of the platform

### **Socio-cultural perspective**

- In our study, there were several situations of harassment reported by WDWs in the 'general compartment'. There is not much protest from any of the commuters – there is a lack of support from their co-passengers and WDWS suffer their embarrassment in silence. They have accepted such situations as part of their life.
  - Some non-WDW commuters reported aggression from WDW commuters when the latter assert their right to sit on their way to work.

- The whole issue of the ladies' compartment/train is controversial. And in an equal world, we would not ask for either ladies' trains or ladies' compartments. However, till that happens, more 'only women' spaces would be needed to provide safe and harassment-free travel.
- Women as travellers are not recognised – they are restricted to a single 'box' - ladies compartment. In a ten bogey train, there are 8 compartments for men and only two for women. Women commuters have the right to move freely and without any restrictions. They should also be able to access 'general' compartments without fear of violence or assault. Other commuters should also recognise the right of women to travel in all compartments.
- Hawkers, vendors etc (route and station) all have the right to earn a living. The State has to ensure that they can earn a dignified living. This includes domestic workers.
- Women can't stay outside the home beyond a certain specified time frame; their mobility is extremely restricted. They are treated differently depending on the time they reach home.
- Rail authorities have to make stations safe and comfortable for women commuters. In case of a train emergency, does a woman feel 'safe' waiting at a station?
- Good infrastructure such as means of communication in the form of a phone, waiting area, strengthens the ability to resist unsafe situations.

## Particulars of findings

পারুল বলে, 'গরীব লোকদের জন্য কিছু নেই। টিকিট না কাটলে ধরা পড়লে এমন জায়গায় নিয়ে গিয়ে ছেড়ে দেবে, সেখানে কোন গাড়ি নেই'।

(Parul said, 'there is nothing for poor people. If I don't buy a ticket and get caught, they will take you to such a place where there are no trains').

1. The interviews and FGDs pointed to the fact that the number of trains needs to be increased. This was also backed up by our observation.
2. Each train also needs to have more bogies for women commuters.
3. A special 'ladies train' that has been introduced at 8.00 am is usually empty as WDWs take much earlier trains beginning at 4.00 am.
4. The 2 smaller stations that were part of the pilot study, Dhakuria and Bagha Jatin, are extremely neglected and have no civic amenities; basic utilities such as toilets, waiting areas for women when trains run late or are cancelled, are not available.
5. The open men's urinals in Dhakuria and Bagha Jatin are an absolute nuisance and stink up the entire area.
6. The dilapidated condition of the trains also compromises the comfort and safety of women commuters.
  - a. There are no toilets on these trains.

7. Basic and emergency information are not available at these stations, such as emergency contact numbers, train timings.
  - a. It would be ideal to have this information available in regional languages.
  - b. Commuters, especially women commuters, should be aware of persons to contact in case of any sort of emergency.
  - c. There is no signage either in Dhakuria or Bagha Jatin to indicate where the Station-in-charge is available.
  - d. In case of Ballygunge, there is no signage for the GRP, who can only be reached by crossing the tracks near platform 4.
8. A checklist of circumstances when the emergency chain can be pulled should be available both on the train and in the station. This should also be available in regional languages.
9. The 'general compartment' is known among WDWs as 'gent's compartment'.
10. WDWs generally travel very early in the morning when they come into the city to work, and usually return before sunset. So they were not keen to talk about the conditions/ situation in the evening.
  - a. An interesting observation was that even though women commuters prefer to use the ladies' compartment in the mornings, they prefer to use the 'gent's compartment' after 7 pm.
11. In all three stations, there were not even basic facilities like ramps for persons with disability. There are no ramps or escalators. Clear announcements would help all commuters but are essential for visually challenged commuters.
  - a. Almost all interviewees felt that there should not be any compromise with providing facilities for commuters with disabilities.
12. Many commuters said that they were very rushed and found it easier to cross over the tracks rather than use the over-bridges.
13. The lack of infrastructure in stations and on trains makes the entire process of travelling unsafe and uncomfortable.
  - a. In Dhakuria – 54 lights not working, shade broken
  - b. In Bagha Jatin – out of 85 lights, more than half don't work, shade broken
  - c. In Ballygunge – none of the fans were working on platforms 3 and 4. Rail authorities need to be more vigilant and responsible for the safe travel of commuters.
  - d. When commuters don't use the over bridge for various reasons, the rail authorities must intervene and ensure that commuters don't use the tracks to cross over to platforms, but use the over-bridge every time.
  - e. WDWs should also have easy access to the 'ijjat ticket'. This too should be the responsibility of rail authorities. Most WDWs who were interviewed said that the process to get this ticket is extremely tiresome and time-consuming. They have to run around in circles trying to get the papers that will get them the ticket.



মজির্না, পারুল, আল্পানা বলে ‘আমাদের ইজ্জত টিকিট নেই। এই টিকিট করতে প্রচুর ঝামেলা। এই আনো, সেই আনো, এর কাছে যাও, ওর কাছে যাও, MLA এর কাছে যাও, গিয়েও কোন লাভ হয় না, খালি ঘোরায়’। তাই করা হয়নি।

(Marjina, Parul and Alpana said, ‘We don’t have Ijzat ticket. There’s a lot of hassle to get this ticket. Get this, get that, go to this person, that person, go to the MLA, not that it’s of any use; they only make you go round and round. So we haven’t made the ticket.’)

14. Rail authorities are notoriously ill-behaved when it comes to commuters especially WDWs who are caught travelling without a ticket. There have been several reports of lady ticket checkers stripping women naked looking for money. Such violence cannot be tolerated. All commuters must be treated with dignity.

“একবার টিকিট চেকারের পালায় পড়েছিলাম, ২৫০টাকা দিয়ে ছাড়া পেয়েছি। একটা মেয়ের মাসিকের সময়ও কাপড় খুলে টাকা নিয়েছে মহিলা টিকিট চেকাররা। ধরা পড়লে ন্যাংটো করে, জামা কাপড় খুলে টাকা খোঁজ করে নেবে।

(Once I was caught by a ticket checker, paid Rs. 250 and was let go. A girl was once strip searched by lady ticket checkers during her menstrual period. If you’re caught, they strip you naked to look for money.)

15. Commuters have come to accept the shortcomings of the system. The lack of a forum for commuters makes it difficult for them to take any proactive role to assert their right through any continuous process.

## **Findings from Demonstration Audit held on January 12, 2012** ***Dhakuria station to Diamond Harbour station***

- At Dhakuria Station, we had contacted the Station Supervisor. It was difficult to find out the In-charge of the station. The toilet for the women is kept under lock and key. We were informed that the women passengers can access the toilet by depositing their tickets. It was also observed that the toilets for both men and women were overflowing and people avoided over bridges while crossing the tracks. The shade was under construction and thus unable to offer any kind of safety. Further the infrastructure was not disabled friendly.
- Since the shed is under construction, the people have no protection from weather. There is no infrastructure for the disabled people and the compartments in trains designated for persons with disability are full with general passengers. Further, the passengers informed that the drinking water was not safe.

After safety audit in Dhakuria Station we got on general compartment of Diamond harbour local and our roles and responsibilities had changed. We started interview of the commuters regarding safety issue. After reaching Diamond Harbour we got on ladies compartment and started interview. After taking interview we gathered and shared our experience. We came to know:

- Women passengers face sexual harassment in general compartments of the train. While the women passengers avoid travelling in general compartment during the daytime to protect themselves from harassment, they prefer travelling in general compartment after dark for safety.
- Non availability of toilets in the trains and constant smoking within the train compartment cause discomfort.
- In the compartment, GRP is not available in commensurate to number of passengers. One or two GRP is not enough for a compartment.
- Snatching occurs frequently, especially after dark.
- Commuters complained against WDWs that they travel without ticket, occupy more space and use bad language with fellow commuters
- Women demanded **Women GRP** in ladies' compartments for their safety.
- Male commuters also ride in ladies compartment.

## Recommendations: Rail Authorities

### Infrastructure

- Adequate seating arrangements, covered areas, lights and fans are necessary
- Adequate lights near the entrance on the platform, on and near the over bridge are required
- Women's toilets which can be accessed by commuters and not kept under lock and key as in Dhakuria station. The open toilet for men in Dhakuria and Bagha Jatin station overflows onto the platform and creates a nuisance for commuters. Toilets should be cleaned and maintained regularly. They should also be located in a place where passers-by are not inconvenienced.
- It is necessary for governments to plan ahead instead of responding to increasing urbanisation. Therefore, women's toilets should be incorporated into the design of new trains.
- Facilities for clean drinking water
- Facilities for physically challenged persons; instead of having one complete compartment on the train for them, it is better to include them in all compartments, along with ramps for them to board a train. The station premises must also have ramps and escalators for easy access.
- Regular announcements in English and the local languages are required. This is especially required in case of cancelled or late trains.
- Increased number of ticket counters are needed so that passengers are not kept waiting
- Regular cleaning and upkeep of station premises and trains are essential.

- Rail authorities should also provide information and services so that WDWs can easily get the 'Ijjat' ticket.
- Railway personnel must treat WDWs who are bona fide passengers with respect. While it is their job to fine persons travelling without tickets, they should do so without harassing the commuter or behaving inappropriately.

### **General Information**

Stations and trains should have pertinent information available in both English and regional languages. These include:

- Signage to indicate office of station-in-charge
- General and emergency information, timetables in Bengali along with English
- Information on when to use emergency chain
- Availability of medical help, emergency shelter

### **Hawkers on platforms**

While we recognise that hawkers have the right to earn a livelihood, it must be pointed out that the amount of space they occupy in the stations and on the platforms seriously jeopardises the safety of women commuters. In our study we found that most WDWs find it useful to have hawkers on the platforms and on the trains, as they hardly get any time to shop when they come into the city to work. Therefore, rail authorities should negotiate with hawkers so that both groups of people can share this public space comfortably and safely.

## **Recommendations: Government Railway Police (GRP)**

There is hardly any presence of the GRP in the smaller stations like Dhakuria and Bagha Jatin. In fact, in the latter, the GRP has to be called from nearby Jadavpur station in case of an emergency. In Ballygunge, the GRP are located quite a distance from the busy platforms of 1 and 2. They are located after platform 4, and the rail tracks have to be crossed to reach them.

We recommend:

- Increased GRP presence at all stations, including women GRP.
- Pro-active presence so that women commuters can travel without any fear.

## **Conclusion**

Public spaces and facilities must be inclusive and an effective way to achieve inclusion is to plan for the needs of marginalised communities. Women domestic workers are marginalised by class, caste, gender and occupation. So, addressing their needs will ensure that needs of many sections of commuters are addressed. For example, having clean women's toilets at stations will benefit all women commuters.

The demand for safe cities and better facilities for women is a means to emphasise women's democratic rights. Women have a right to safe mobility and efficient services and an inclusive public transport system that addresses the need of women domestic workers to safe, comfortable, affordable and dignified travel is an asset to democracy.

## Annexure

### 1. WSA Team members

<b>Parichiti Staff</b>	<b>Ayeshaa Sinha</b> <b>Shubhra Das</b> <b>Moumita Chakrabarty</b> <b>Mallika Das</b> <b>Sanchita Chowdhury</b> <b>Ranjita Dey</b> <b>Anchita Ghatak</b>  <b>Consultant: Krishna Mira Roy</b>
<b>Women Domestic Worker</b>	<b>Uma Gayen</b> <b>Kobita Naskar</b>
<b>Parichiti Staff</b>	<b>Ayeshaa Sinha</b> <b>Shubhra Das</b> <b>Moumita Chakrabarty</b> <b>Mallika Das</b> <b>Sanchita Chowdhury</b> <b>Ranjita Dey</b> <b>Anchita Ghatak</b>  <b>Consultant: Krishna Mira Roy</b>
<b>Women Domestic Worker</b>	<b>Uma Gayen</b> <b>Kobita Naskar</b>

### 2. Sample Tools



Audit\_Checklist\_Station\_July 9\_2012.pdf



WSA\_All\_StakeholdersQns.pdf

### 3. Excerpts from interviews

➤ **Hawker at Bagha Jatin station**

**Have you ever seen any woman being harassed? What did you do then?**

I see it all the time. Are you crazy? The way things are nowadays, I'll be beaten up if I say anything.

➤ **Hawker at Dhakuria station**

**Have you ever seen any woman being harassed? What did you do then?**

Yes, I once saw a shopkeeper drag a woman up by her hair because she was sitting right in front of his shop. If I protested he would have sworn at me; so I kept quiet.

➤ **WDW at Bagha Jatin station**

**Are there any RPFs on the train? If so, are they of any help?**

Yes, they are there, but they don't take us seriously; so we can't depend on them.

➤ **WDW at Bishram Ghar (Parichiti's drop-in centre)**

**Are there any special arrangements for disabled persons?**

Not in the ladies' compartment. It's there in the gents', but ordinary passengers occupy the seats, disabled persons have a problem.

➤ **Councillor of Dhakuria area**

**What arrangements are there for the security of women on the way to the station?**

There are no special arrangements for the security of women. There no GRP personnel on duty during the day. The Administration has done nothing at all.

### 4. Excerpts from FGD

**How do ticket checkers behave with you? Do they harass you?**

Ticket checkers fine random amounts in case someone is caught travelling without a ticket. That can range from 40 rupees to 250 rupees. They even abandon you in places where no transportation is available. Lady ticket checkers forcibly strip commuters naked looking for money, even during menstruation.

**Do all of you have Ijjat tickets?**

It's a real hassle to get this ticket. You have to get this paper, that paper, go here, go there, go to the MLA, not that it's of any use. That's why we haven't gone.

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<sup>i</sup> The WSA diagnostic tool includes the four steps of Preparation, Audit Team Formation, Audit Walk, and Recording and Recommendation.