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Gender & Mobility: differences & risk factors

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Are people experiences of mobility influenced by gender dynamics ? Based on which factors?

Yes, there are gender differences in the modes used, in the patterns of travel and in the risks associated with mobility.

Diapo

Studies generally show that:

- More women than men have no mode of transport available at all and walk.
- More women than men are depending on public means of transport.
- Women are less likely than men to have access to motorized means of transport.
- Women are less likely than men to use bicycles or other intermediate mean of transport.

In the majority of industrialized countries, men are much more likely to be car drivers than women, while women are more likely to be car passengers or walkers. More women than men use public transport, especially to go to work, although men use trains more than women.

In the countries from the Global South, the lack of access to transport services affect women more than men. They can spend long hours carrying water and walking to farm plots. In some areas where water is scarce, due to time-consuming water collection, girls are half as likely as boys to attend school. Carrying loads on their heads is a major health risk for women. They may suffer a higher accident rate when walking on congested roads with heavy loads.

Diapo

Women and men also travel for different reasons. Men travel for work-related reasons, while women also travel to non-work-related places such as shops, schools, health centres and day-care centres.

Women are also more dependent on public transport than men, especially when they have low incomes. They generally make shorter, more frequent and more

scattered trips during the day. Women are also frequently accompanied by children or elderly parents and carry bulky loads for errands. Women's complex household and caring responsibilities usually require them to make multiple stops.

Diapo

Men and women experience different risks in their mobilities.

First, there are considerable gender differences in personal safety. Women are more vulnerable to attack and harassment than men. And that may deter them from using public transportation. Many women simply avoid travelling after dark.

Diapo

Finally, there are also large differences between men and women in road crashes. Globally, almost 3 times more males than females die from road crashes. That is the largest sex difference in mortality rates from unintentional injury (WHO, 2002).

This increased risk of fatal crashes for men is observed in all regions of the world and in all age groups and mostly in all transportation modes. However, all other things being equal, women have a higher risk of lower limb injuries, because their small size is not yet well considered by vehicle manufacturers.

These more frequent crashes in males are related to greater risk exposure, particularly as a motor vehicle driver, more frequent use of alcohol, more frequent offences and crash risk behaviours.

These crashes also have different consequences for men and women. Women may find it difficult to arrange childcare or to pay for domestic help in their absence. It should also be considered that men are often the sole providers of household income. Their injuries or deaths mean a loss of income endangering the family and additional work for the mother.

What can we observe in terms of main risk factors in mobility and gender?

Diapo

Gender differences in mobility needs are strongly related to the division of labour in families and societies. In almost all societies, the stereotypical role of men is that of the breadwinner, who leaves home to work in the morning and returns in the evening. Women, however, generally assume a triple role: breadwinner, housewife and community manager, providing care for the youngest and oldest members of the family.

Access to motorized transport itself is also determined by cultural roles. Around the world, car ownership is associated with success, power and social status. Even in car-owning households, it is often only men who drive. The various studies show that, even if they are heads of household or employed, women have less access to motor vehicles and are less likely to have a driving licence than men. This difference is most significant in urban areas, and means that women are more dependent on public transport than men.

Gender roles also affect the behaviour of men and women in their mobility. Male stereotypes value competition, domination and risk-taking, often perceived as a sign of virility. Boys are therefore, from early childhood, urged to face their fears, to have confidence in their physical abilities, to feel invulnerable, to take risks.

Female stereotypes value caring for others, obedience, compliance with adults and rules. Girls are educated at an early age to obey adult demands, to avoid risk and to comply with rules. This has an impact on risk-taking in general, which women avoid much more than men, and all the more so in road traffic, where risk-taking and offences are often mixed up.

Overall, women's access to vehicles and services is often more constrained by socio-cultural conventions than by physical barriers. The particularity of the transportation field is that it combines the effects of gender roles with beliefs and stereotypes directly related to the field. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that mobility is also a means of freedom and empowerment that societies find very difficult to accept from women. Ways to travel far away from home are, from the outset, the object of beliefs that they are incompatible with femininity and the role of women.

Diapo

This is especially true for cycling. It represents an attractive alternative mode of travel for short and medium distances and chain journeys. Unfortunately, it has long been shown as a risk of virilisation of women, as this quote from the end of the 19th century shows. Willard (1991, orig. 1895): *“The chief concern of those morally against women riding bicycles centered on the belief that women would become wild and wicked if left unchaperoned. ... One American writer claimed that the 'unfettered liberty' of bicycling would 'intoxicate' women to immoral acts. Others argued that bicycling was the number one reason for an increase in the 'ranks of girls who became outcast women'. ...”*

And unfortunately, that's still the case today. In industrialized societies, girls still often stop riding bicycles at puberty. Women's use of bicycles is also not well perceived in the countries from the Global South. In Mozambique, for example, bicycles offered to women have been taken back by their husbands, and women's resistance may have led to domestic violence. In male-dominated local cultures, women's bicycle use could be seen as inappropriate and un-feminine, describing these women as virile and 'unfit for marriage'.

Diapo

These beliefs obviously also affect the use of the car. From the beginning, driving is seen as unfeminine, too messy, and requiring quick decision-makings and emotional control that women do not possess. Driving is too dangerous for women, and women are too dangerous to drive, as explained in this quote. Thus, in 1906, it was stated : *"In short, it is very likely that driving will never become a woman's profession, because there is no career where the usual imperfections of the character of the sex, once described as weak, can lead to such frightening results."* Labadie-Lagrave, Les Annales, 1906.

Diapo

In his historical study on women drivers in the United States, Berger noted that these stereotypes survived more as a joke. in 1986 *“Still, it survives today, probably more as a joke than a believable stereotype, but nonetheless a testimony to its importance in an earlier time and a reminder of the sexism that continues to exist in American society”* Berger, 1986, p262. Unfortunately, stereotypes of women behind the wheel are still prevalent today. Studies have shown that these social

beliefs are already shared from childhood in industrialized countries. Men are seen as naturally competent drivers, which is expressed in their risk-taking behind the wheel. Women's caution and compliance are seen as signs of their intrinsic incompetence to drive.

As women have learned to feel vulnerable, these beliefs affect their access to different travel modes. Largely spread and shared, they affect women's self-confidence in their driving skills and can explain why they choose not to drive, ride or cycle even when they have the opportunity to do so. Because these transportation modes are considered to be too dangerous for them, by the men, but also by the women themselves.

They also have effects on the individual travel behaviours. For women, the fear of a crash will lead to cautious and law-abiding behaviour. For men, a sense of competence and self-confidence will lead to more driving risk-taking. These are a simple and easy way to confirm men's virility, but they also lead to their over-representation in car crashes.

How could we take gender concerns into account in the design and implementation of Safe Mobility strategies? Practical example & good practices you would like to share?

Diapo

Transport is traditionally a male-dominated sector. As they are in the majority in jobs, they are also in the values promoted. Transport systems and urban spaces are often designed by and for the needs of men and do not take sufficient account of the needs of women.

Infrastructures are designed first and foremost for users of motorized modes, most often men. Cycling is beginning to be better integrated into the public space, but for the moment it is mostly used by men.

The public transport lines that have been set up, their schedules and frequencies are designed primarily for workers, most often men. They are not designed for journeys with multiple stops or for the staggered timetables most often used by women.

Women's needs in terms of safety and security in transport and public spaces must also be considered. This concern for personal safety has important implications for the design of public spaces and of transport interchanges, waiting areas and staff. Specific needs of women have also emerged on injury prevention and vehicle ergonomics.

It is therefore necessary to understand their travel needs and identify the tools to meet them. This also requires that women be represented and participate at every stage of urban and transport planning. Government agencies and NGOs, community-based organisations and women's groups which could assist in planning and implementation should be identified and consulted.

Diapo

Some solutions are already implemented, such as on-demand stops or women-only carriages. But women are not a homogeneous group. Their needs vary depending on whether they have access to a personal vehicle, their family responsibilities, whether they work outside of the household, and whether they are reluctant to use public transport. These differences have to be considered

according to income, age, family and professional situation, location, ethnicity, and level of education.

As a result, it seems very difficult to export good practices from one local situation to another, without considering the specific characteristics of each population. But methods of understanding needs can be shared. For example, the implementation of exploratory walks with women, day and night, allows to uncover dysfunctions and points of improvement in the safety and security of women on the street.

Diapo

All these considerations allow to consider women's specific needs we can observe in our societies, but didn't change anything of women's multiple tasks that explain their specific needs. This is a first step, but not the last step.

The final objective should be to change the traditional gender roles, the gender division of labor and the gender stereotypes on the general and transportation field.

It is a very big but important task, when you see how widely they are shared around the world and how big the gender gap still is. Gender stereotypes are very strong and very shared, by both men and women. It does not seem possible to eliminate them, but it is possible both to change them and to make people aware that they are beliefs and not facts. It thus seems possible to make individuals understand that these beliefs do not define them.

In my opinion, the work should focus in particular on the feeling of vulnerability, which is felt too much by women but not enough by men. It seems to me that this is partly responsible for women's fear of transport, and at the same time for understanding men's risky behavior. Women need to learn that they are not as vulnerable as they are told, and men need to learn that they are more vulnerable than they think.

It seems to me that NGOs, through the actions they implement with the youngest children in partnership with the various education stakeholders, are in a position to bring significant added value in this field. This is all the more important in the field of transport, which is dominated by men.