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A Gendered View of Mobility and Transport: Next Steps and Future Directions

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# A gendered view of mobility and transport: Next steps and future directions

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## RESEARCH TOPIC

Equal access to services, amenities, and economic opportunities requires equal levels of mobility. But mobility varies widely among social groups – and women face especially large physical, economic, cultural, and psychological barriers to their travel. These barriers are heightened by transportation policies which often neglect or entirely disregard how women get around. How can policymakers and planners better incorporate the needs of women into the transportation system?

Reviewing literature and feminist theory, researchers at UCLA detailed how women's mobility needs differ from those of men, and how those needs may vary among women due to age, class, and race or ethnicity. With this context, researchers then outlined next steps for transportation policies and

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Scholars should prioritize context-specific research on gender and mobility.** Although more attention on women's mobility has resulted in an increase in scholarly work, there has not been enough focus on identifying how social, cultural, and geographic contexts impact gender and mobility. This research is essential to the development of gender-sensitive transportation policies.
- **Policymakers at both federal and local levels should enact women-friendly transportation policies.** Removing the barriers to women's mobility means making intentional, proactive public policy choices. Locally, tools such as neighborhood safety audits – where women directly identify the specific elements in their community which prevent them from travelling safely – can create immediate positive changes.
- **Urban planners and designers should act with the needs of women in mind.** Appropriate urban design, such as incorporating universal design elements, can enhance women's access to neighborhood amenities, shorten trip lengths, and make travel safer and more comfortable.

# STUDY

Researchers reviewed literature from the Global North and Global South to qualitatively examine both historical and contemporary issues and challenges affecting women’s mobility. Researchers also drew from feminist theory to discuss why travel patterns are characterized as “gendered” and how needs vary among different women. Lastly, researchers reviewed transportation policies and practices in the Global North and Global South to outline next steps in improving women’s mobility.

Barriers	Type of barrier	Impact on women’s travel patterns	Group affected
Cultural	· Religious norms/practices	· Banning women from public settings, public transit, bicycles	· Women in some Muslim countries
	· Women as primary caregivers for children and parents	· Shorter trips · Accompanied by others in travel	· Women in Global North & Global South
	· Women primarily responsible for domestic chores	· Trip chaining/ hypermobility · Carrying large items during travel	· Women in Global North · Women in Global North & Global South
Economic	· Lack of economic resources for private automobile	· Transit dependency	· Poor men and women in Global North & Global South
	· Having to live in peripheral shanty towns/colonies	· Lack of access to public transportation · Localised mobility patterns; many foot trips	· Poor men and women in Global South · Poor men and women in Global South
	· Automobile-oriented urban form/sprawl	· Overreliance on private automobiles	· Women in Global North
Physical	· Lack of adequate infrastructure for walking	· Long time spent on transportation	· Women in Global North & Global South
	· Limited transit networks	· Unsafe and uncomfortable travel	· Women in Global South
	· Fear of harassment and victimisation	· Avoidance of public transit, bicycles	· Women in Global North & Global South
Psychological	· Parental fear of stranger-danger	· Avoidance of particular transit routes · Travelling only during the daytime · Travelling only accompanied with others	· Women in Global North & Global South

# MAIN FINDINGS

- **Travel patterns vary by gender.**  
Women in both the Global North and Global South tend to commute shorter distances to work and are more likely to take public transportation in urban areas than men. Some discrepancies in travel patterns between men and women are closing as cultural attitudes about women’s roles change.
- **Barriers to mobility vary between women.**  
Mobility conditions vary widely in different countries because of different sociocultural norms, available economic resources, and public policies. Distinctions also vary within countries due to factors including race and ethnicity, age, income, and cultural and educational background.
- **Policy responses to women’s mobility needs have been uneven.**  
Transport for London, for example, recently consulted with women’s groups to produce a series of initiatives targeted to increasing the safety and comfort of women transit riders. However, few transit agencies in the United States or elsewhere have conducted similar initiatives.