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Chapter 20

London, UK

Abstract

This chapter reports the results of a survey on sexual transit crime with 109 respondents. An analysis of the types of sexual harassment experienced by students found that 70 respondents (59 %) reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment at least once in the last three years, either walking to, waiting for, or on board some mode of transport. In total only five students said that they had reported experiences of sexual harassment on transit, and 17 said they had not. These small numbers do not allow a more detailed exploration. Overall, 30% of respondents reported rarely or never feeling safe when either using or waiting for the bus either during the day or after dark, compared to 18% who reported the same for the train or tram. The main precautionary responses identified across both bus and rail were avoiding carrying purses or wallets, and traveling only during daytime. The chapter briefly summarizes the main findings from the case study and makes suggestions for research and practice.

Keywords: sexual violence, groping, precaution, safety perceptions, transit environments

Introduction

London is the capital city of England and the United Kingdom (UK). Based upon the 2011 census, its population is 8.17 million, although it is estimated that the city has witnessed a 7% growth over the last six years, reaching 8.77 million (*ONS, 2018*). Indeed, the 2011 Census showed that more than one in three London residents were born in a country outside of the UK. Levels of deprivation in London are very uneven, as the city contains both highly affluent areas and neighborhoods with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country.

In the academic year 2017/18, there were nearly 382,000 students studying at one of 40 Higher Education (HE) institutions in London. Just under 253,000 of these students were studying at undergraduate level (66%), while 129,000 were graduate students (34%). Thirty percent of all HE students in London were international students; of those, 32% were from the European Union (EU) and 68% non-EU (*London Higher, 2019*).

Fifty-nine percent of HE students in London are female, and 33% of all students are aged 25 years or older. Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students accounted for 48% of all UK students in London, which is relatively high when compared with the figure outside of London (19.5%). The average proportion of students in London with a self-declared disability was 11%.

London experiences high levels of travel; indeed, in 2017 there were 26.8 million trips on an annual average day in the city. Of these trips, 9.88 million (36.9%) occurred on public transport (*Transport for London, 2018a*).

Transport for London (TfL) is the integrated transport authority responsible for delivering public transport services. The Mayor's Transport Strategy has set a goal for 80% of all trips to be made on foot, by bicycle, or by public transport by 2041. Therefore, there is a strong emphasis on health, safety, and the quality of people's experience in the strategies of London's transport authority (*Transport for London, 2018a*).

TfL operates the majority of London's public transport services, including the London Underground, London Buses, the Docklands Light Railway, London Overground, TfL Rail, London Trams, London River Services, London Dial-a-Ride, and Victoria Coach Station. In addition to public transport, TfL is responsible for congestion and road traffic issues in certain parts of London (*Transport for London, 2018a*). Customer satisfaction surveys of the main public transport modes (bus, underground) suggest that, overall, there are fairly high levels of passenger satisfaction in London, and average responses have ranged between 85 and 90 out of 100. These scores have risen consistently, albeit slowly, over recent years. TfL has also developed a metric that measures the extent to which Londoners believe that TfL cares about its customers (including users of all modes); typically 45 to 50% of people agree with this statement (*Transport for London, 2018a*).

Transit Crime

In 2017/2018 there were approximately eight crimes per one million passenger journeys on pan-modal transport in London. The pan-modal transport crime figure and rate are based on the aggregate crime and passenger journey figures for the bus, London Underground, Docklands Light Rail, Trams, and London Overground Rail networks. This figure is higher on the London Underground (nine crimes per one million passengers) than the bus network (7.9 crimes per one million passengers). There were 784 sexual offenses on buses in London and

1183 sexual offenses on the London Underground in this time period, both less than one offense per million passenger journeys (*Transport for London, 2018b*).

Sexual Harassment on Transit as Experienced by University Students in London: Survey Findings

We circulated an online questionnaire to students at University College London (UCL). This was distributed electronically to a number of undergraduate classes in the Faculties of the Built Environment and Engineering Sciences. There were 4000 registered undergraduate students in these faculties (2017/2018), approximately one-fifth of all UCL students. There are no dedicated transport services for college students in London nor student passes, thus it was not possible to recruit students using student travel services. We received a total of 119 valid responses. Therefore, there was a response rate of approximately 3% of the students contacted (4000). However, this should be set against the context of the total HE student population in London (382,000). Of these 119 responses, 69 identified as female (58%), 47 as male (39%), and two as other. The majority (92%) of respondents were between 18–29 years old, which is expected with a HE student sample.

Victimization

An analysis of the types of sexual harassment experienced by students found that 70 respondents (59%) reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment at least once in the last three years, either walking to, waiting for, or on board some mode of transport.

However, some precaution is necessary here as in answer to a later question about whether they reported this or not 48 of these people selected “I have not been a victim of sexual assault or harassment in a public transport transit environment” as an answer. These 48 people, however, also reported experiencing one or more of the behaviors identified in Table 20.1. This indicates that some students did not recognize as sexual harassment a number of sexually explicit and harassing behaviors, a phenomenon that was also observed in a number of other cities.

The most common forms of harassment experienced across all modes were “Calling you babe, honey, sweetheart (or similar),” followed by “Sexual comments (about clothing, looks),” and “Unwanted sexual looks or gestures” (Table 20.1).

Table 20.1: Commonly experienced harassment of London students.

Issue	Number of reports
Calling you babe, honey, sweetheart (or similar)	204
Sexual comments (about clothing, looks)	94
Unwanted sexual looks or gestures	90
Whistling	70
Using obscene/abusive language	37
Unwanted sexual teasing, remarks	36
Stalking (a stranger following you)	34
Groping, touching inappropriately	30
Making kissing sounds	20
Indecent exposure	15
Showing pornographic images	10
Asking you personal questions about sexual life	9
Asked to have sex by a stranger	8
Unwanted kissing by a stranger	6
Masturbating in public	3
Other	3
Pulling or playing with your hair	1

Figure 20.1 shows the number of survey participants who reported each type of sexual harassment for each stage of travel (walking to, waiting for, and riding on the bus or the train). This demonstrates that the highest form of harassment (calling you babe, sweetheart, or similar) was higher for the walking components of the journey on both bus and rail, and was generally (except for the walking part) higher on bus trips than rail trips. Sexual comments (about clothing and looks) were more frequent on bus than rail journeys, as were unwanted sexual looks and whistling (except for walking to/from train stops).

Respondents were also asked to provide details of any other types of harassment they experienced which were not covered by the above categories. Examples of other responses included: “Overcrowding – pushing each other about and talking aggressively to make way for themselves on the tube,” “Attempted theft,” and “Stranger started a conversation by a cheeky comment.”

Figure 20.1 about here

When asked about whether respondents had been exposed to other serious crime, assault with weapon, robbery, or rape while on the bus train tram at the bus stop or train/tram station or walking to from the stop or station in the last three years, only one respondent had been exposed to this crime type and nine knew someone who had been. Finally, 11 students reported having been exposed to theft, pickpocketing, jewelry snatching, or robbery while on public transport journeys. As there were not many of these experiences reported, it was not possible to explore differences between groups.

Reporting

In total only five respondents said that they had reported experiences of sexual harassment on transit, and 17 said “No.” These small numbers do not allow a more detailed exploration. Of the five respondents who reported their experience to someone, two reported to only one person: the train operator or the police. The other three people reported to different groups of people, such as the bus driver, the train operator, the bus or railway company, to friends, to spouse, to parents, or other family members.

The 17 people who did not report to anyone listed the following reasons:

“I did not believe that they will catch the criminal”

“I did not think the crime was serious”

“I did not wish to remember/re-tell/re-live this”

“I was embarrassed”

“I was afraid of the police”

“To avoid more trouble”

“I couldn’t be bothered”

“It was small and happened quickly whilst passing lots of people”

Students were also asked about the reactions of bystanders. Seven respondents reported that someone had witnessed the incident; 15 reported that there were no witnesses, while 97 did not answer this question. Of the seven reports of a bystander, one said the bystander “came forward and talked to me,” five said “they pretended not seeing what was happening,” and one said “they watched at a distance what was happening.”

Safety Perceptions

Overall, 30% of respondents (n = 36) reported rarely or never feeling safe when either using or waiting for the bus either during the day or after dark, compared with 18% (n = 22) reporting the same for the train or tram. Breaking down by gender, 30% of women in the sample (n = 21) reported being worried on buses, compared with 32% of the male respondents (n = 15). On the trains and trams, 26% of women in the sample reported being worried (n = 18), compared with 9% of the male respondents (n = 4). *Figure 20.2* compares how safe respondents felt when using different forms of transport during the daytime and nighttime. It was evident that respondents are more worried in the nighttime than in the daytime.

Only one (1%) respondent reported never feeling safe when using the bus during the day, compared with nineteen (16%) who said they rarely or never felt safe when using the bus after dark. Similarly, for waiting for the bus, 3% felt safe rarely or never when waiting at bus stops during the day, while 28% felt safe rarely or never when waiting after dark.

Figure 20.2 about here

Similar patterns were observed for the train or tram (*Figure 20.3*). None of the respondents said they either rarely or never felt safe when using the train or tram during the day, compared to 9% (n = 11) who said they rarely or never felt safe when using the train or tram after dark. Similarly for walking to or waiting for the train, only one respondent rarely or never felt safe when waiting at train or tram stops during the day, while 18% (n = 21) felt safe rarely or never when waiting after dark.

Figure 20.3 about here

Student Perceived Problems

Respondents were asked about characteristics of the social and physical environment which might influence their perceptions of safety on public transport. In total, 55% of people selected drunk people as their top problem, followed by begging (41%), poor illumination (33%), poorly guarded, empty stops (32%), pickpocketing (30%), vandalism (28%), litter (20%), obscene language (20%), robbery (19%), sexual harassment (16%), verbal/physical threats (15%),

violent crime (13%), drug use/sales (8%), and jewelery snatching (7%). It is interesting to note that sexual harassment was not identified by respondents as one of the significant issues that students report being concerned about on public transport, despite nearly 60% reporting experiencing an incident in the past three years. There was not a big difference between men and women in this perception, as 7% of women and 6% of men reported sexual harassment as a prominent concern.

Precautions

The final section of the survey asked about precautions users took on public transport journeys. *Figure 20.4* shows this for all users by travel mode, and *Figure 20.5* presents the results by male and female respondents. The main precautionary responses identified across both bus and rail were avoiding carrying purses or wallets, and traveling only during daytime. Some respondents also dress a certain way, travel with someone, and avoid wearing jewelry. In general, more precautions were taken on buses than trains. Sitting near the driver was an approach taken more on buses, as train operators tend to sit in separate compartments on trains. Some also traveled only in well-lit places and only if other people were around. Again the most popular responses for females was traveling only during daytime and traveling with others. Precautionary behaviors were higher among female than male students for all categories except for avoiding carrying wallets or purses. Female students avoided certain routes, traveled in well-lit places and only when other persons were around, at much higher levels than males.

Figure 20.4 about here

Figure 20.5 about here

Student Suggestions

When asked to identify the most important things that can make traveling by transit safer, the three key issues identified were more lighting at bus stops (40%), the presence of/visible police on routes (28%), and digital timetables at stops (23%). Only a small proportion (less than 10%) suggested female-only buses and trains, and no respondent suggested the use of CCTV cameras. There were a number of additional comments given in the “other” category of the survey, and these included:

“Difficult to answer, it depends which bus stops. On a busy high street, one feels safer than a residential street. I would say in less busy areas having nearby policy presence/help button or some kind of digital solutions that helps alert relevant

authorities in case of a problem would be helpful and would make people feel safer”

“None of the options seems – from my male perspective – to solve the issue behind the problem”

“More guards and those who are there more responsive/caring”

“To be honest in London the main issue with night tubes and trains are drunk people, I am lucky enough to commute in central London so never felt in danger, I suppose longer commute with less people in the carriage might be stressful”

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter has identified some of the key findings from the London HE student survey. The response rate was smaller than other cities, and students form a small proportion of all users on the very extensive and highly used London transport network. From the responses some of the key issues that could be identified are that a large proportion (60%) reported experiencing incidents of sexual harassment, although it was not perceived as one of the three biggest perceived on the network, which were drunkenness, begging, and poor lighting. However, there were a number of precautionary behaviors identified that users took including not traveling after dark or alone. Such precautionary behaviors were greater among females, and also among bus users. Concerns over feelings of safety increased during the nighttime for both bus and train rides, with greater worry in the walking and waiting parts of the journey.

Key responses identified were more visible policing, better lighting, and digital timetables at bus stops. Whilst the sample size was low, many of the results are comparable with TfL’s own surveys. Some future recommendations include consideration of how to increase visible policing, or at least staff guardianship at a time when a pressure on resources means a more automated service with less staff, and the possible impact of a more digital service on feelings and experiences of safety and sexual harassment.

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Figure 20.1: Volume of each type of harassment experienced by London students, by mode

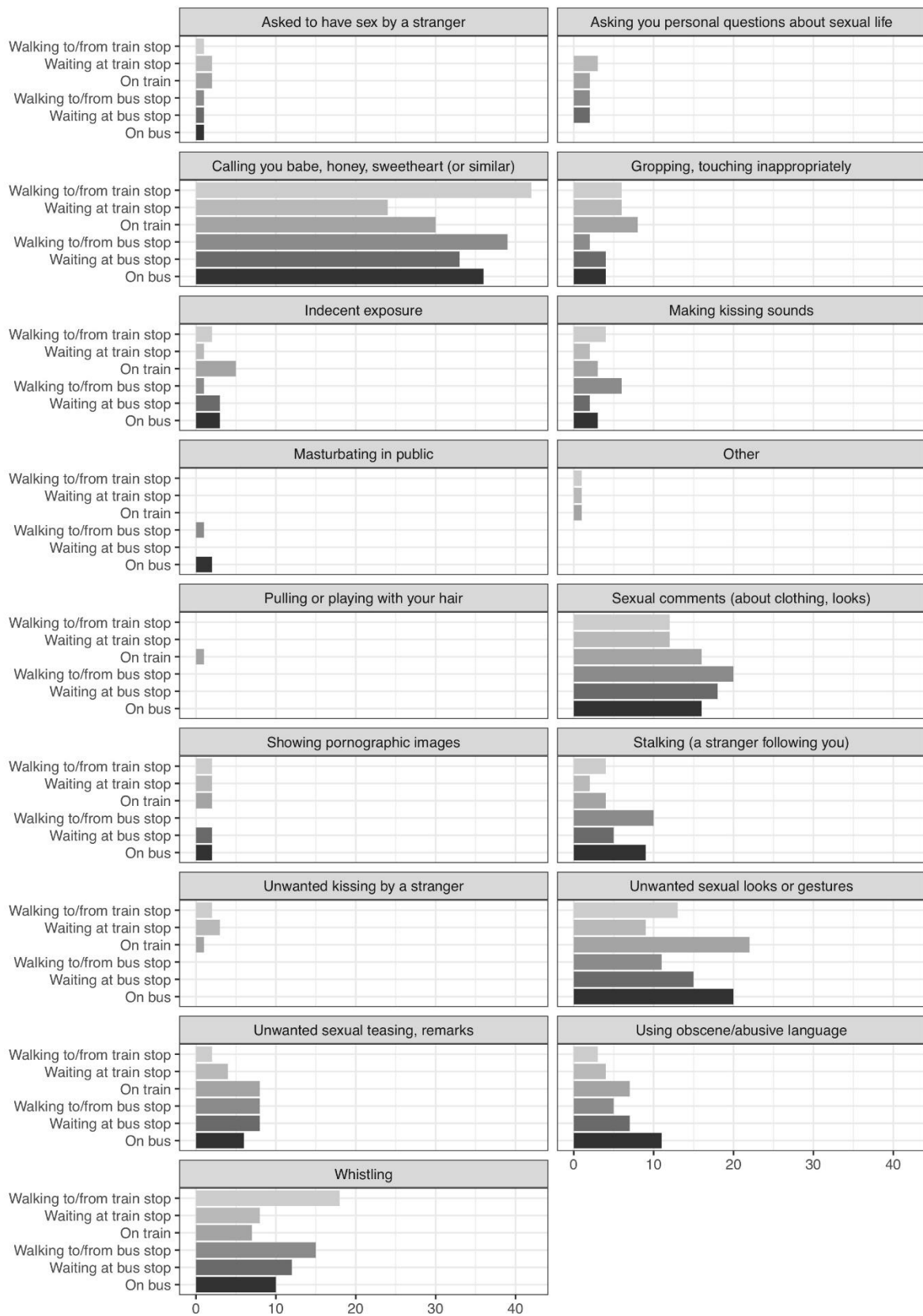


Figure 20.2 London students' feelings of safety on the bus during daytime/nighttime.

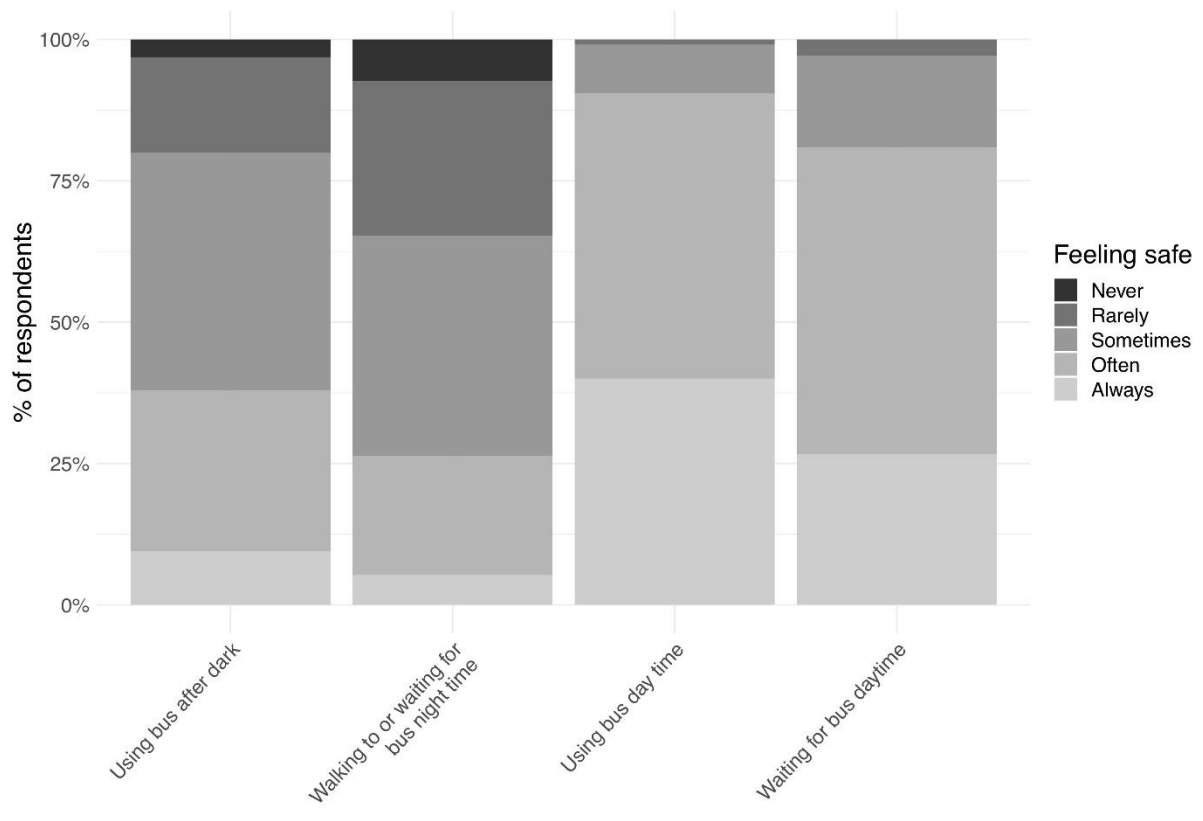


Figure 20.3 London students' feelings of safety on the train/tram during daytime/nighttime

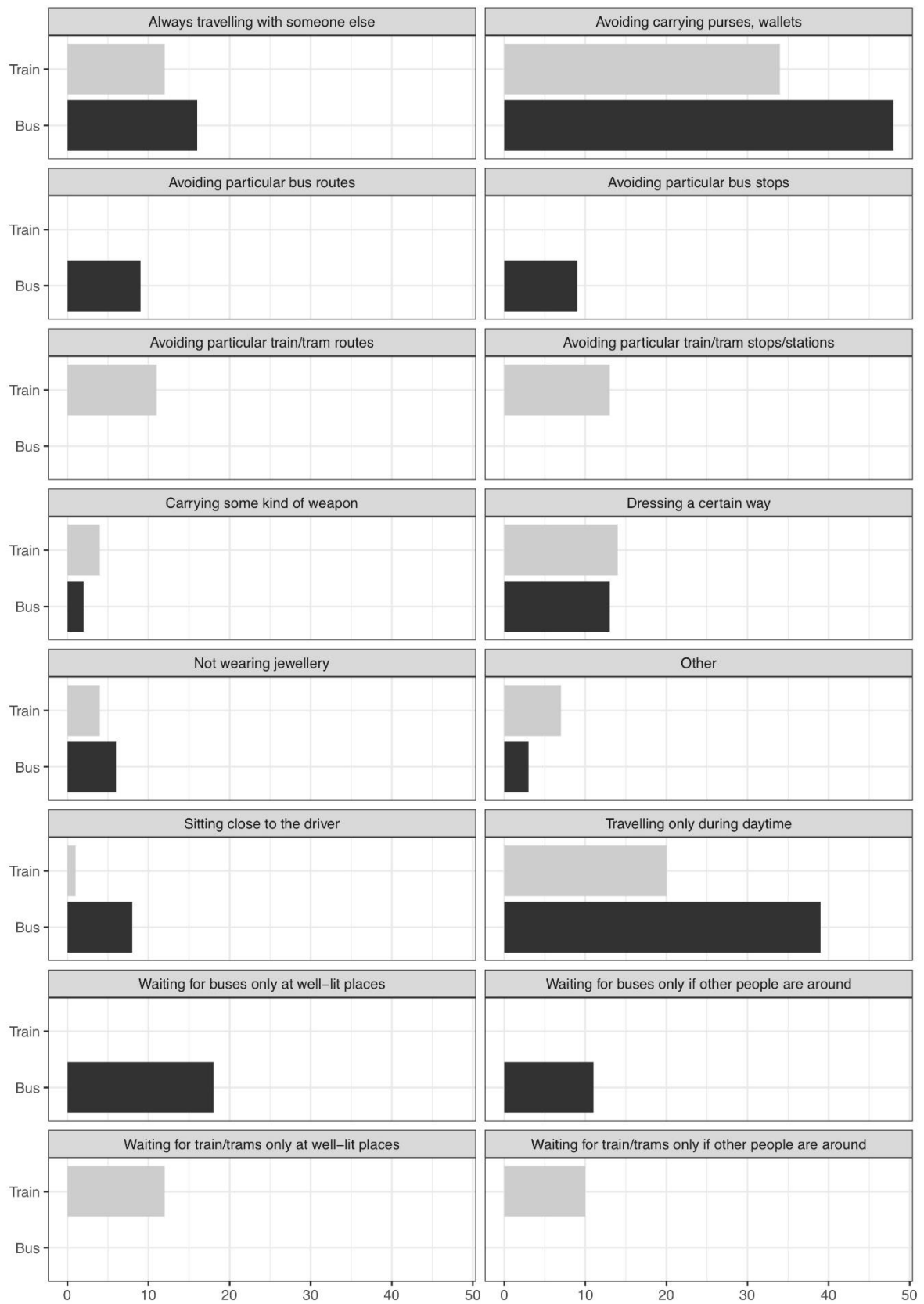


Figure 20.4 Precautions taken by London student transit users

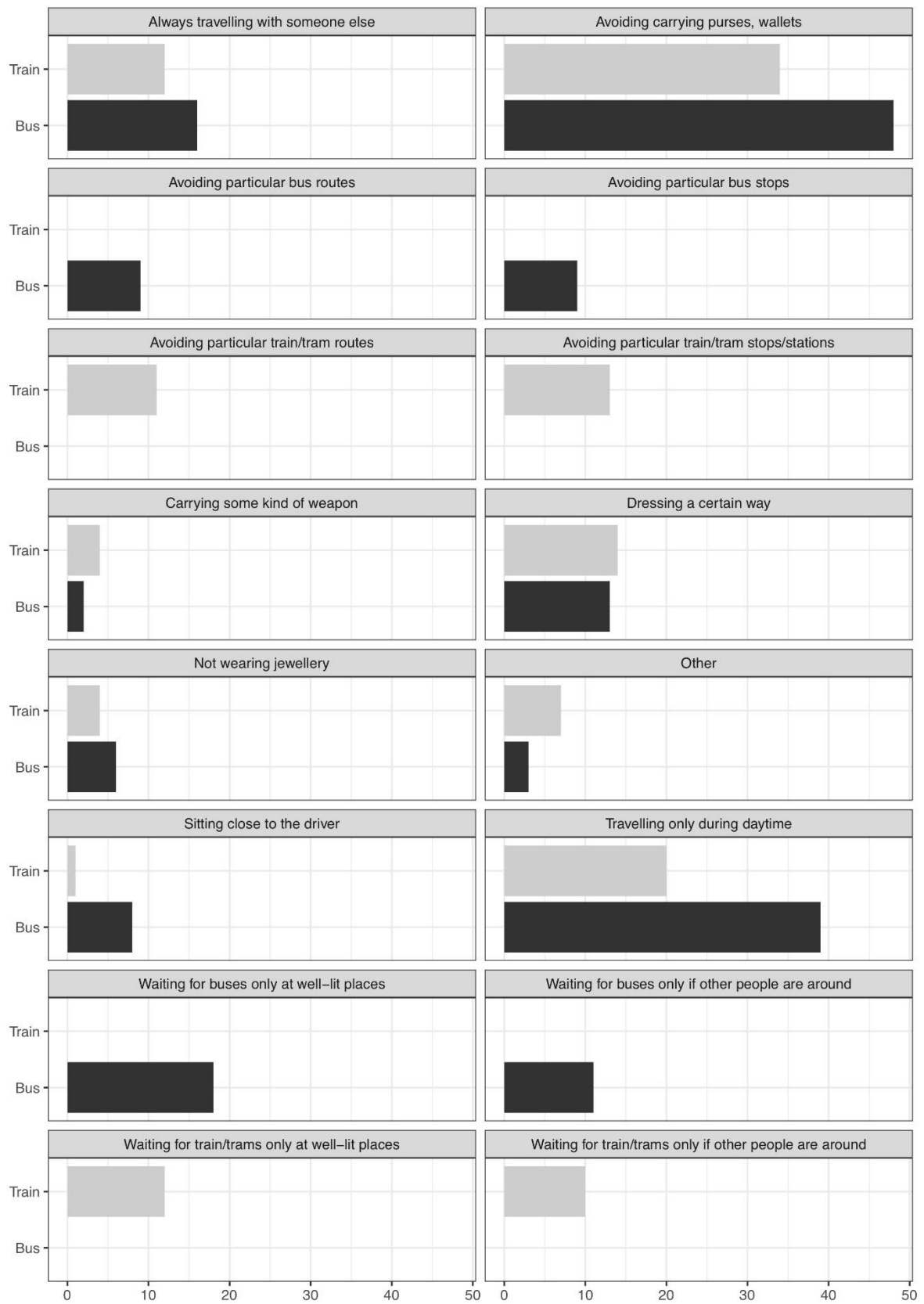


Figure 20.5 Precautions taken by London student transit users, by gender

