WOMEN, WORK AND TRANSPORT

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VOLUME 16

WOMEN, WORK AND TRANSPORT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Tessa Wright, Lucy Budd and Stephen Ison

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the scope and contents of Women, Work and Transport. The situation concerning the extent of women's participation in the transport workforce worldwide is detailed and the challenges facing women transport workers in different world regions and transport modes is highlighted. The chapter describes the structure, contents and key contributions of each of the 21 chapters that are presented in this volume and signposts readers to key material. Although the chapter necessarily highlights some of the many challenges women face when working in highly masculine cultures, this wide-ranging international collection of evidence of the experiences of women transport professionals in both the Global North and Global South also provides numerous suggestions for how employers, governments and trade unions can address, and ultimately overcome, gender segregation in transport. The chapters acknowledge the dramatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the transport sector, while also pointing to some of the opportunities provided by new greener forms of transport and automation, as well as noting the risks for women workers.

Keywords: Women; employment; gender segregation; transport; Global North; Global South

INTRODUCTION

Women play an essential role in the transport workforce worldwide, working in formal and informal jobs in public transport, road freight and logistics, rail,

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aviation and maritime sectors, in ports and in active travel. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, their experiences of work have received less attention in the academic literature than other male-dominated sectors, such as construction. Women account for less than a fifth of the global transport workforce, showing a decline in the decade to 2018 from 20 per cent to 18 per cent, according to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Ng & Acker, 2020). Higher-income regions of the world have a higher percentage of female workers in transport than lower-income areas, with a female participation rate in North America of 23 per cent, 19 per cent in EEA and Turkey and 8 per cent in Africa and in Asia (Ng & Acker, 2020, p. 15). However, these figures may be an under-estimate owing to the high levels of informal work in many countries, including in the transport sector, which is very difficult to record.

Although women are found in all occupations across the varied transport sectors, they are more likely to undertake administrative or customer-facing occupations, which are less highly remunerated than typically male driving or technical roles and are found in smaller numbers in managerial positions overall. While 40 per cent of workers in aviation are women, most of them work as flight attendants or in customer service-related roles, with an estimated 5 per cent of the global commercial airline pilot population being women. Similarly, women represent only 2 per cent of the world's 1.2 million seafarers, while an estimated 28–30 per cent of cruise ship workers are women (Ng & Acker, 2020).

This book brings together international evidence of women's experiences of working in all transport modes across countries in the Global North and the Global South. The 21 chapters reveal the everyday challenges faced by women working in highly masculinised environments, including gender stereotypes about women's lack of suitability for transport work, gender-based violence and harassment, limited opportunities for promotion and progression, inflexible work patterns, poor working conditions and lack of gender-specific facilities. The book is structured around transport modes, comprising sections on: public transport, road transport, logistics and active travel, rail, air and maritime transport, with several chapters examining each mode. In addition, there is a final section focussing on issues of governance and the role of trade unions in the transport sector. However, there are many themes that cut across modes, such as women's difficulties in entering and progressing within transport occupations, gendered perceptions of skills and abilities for transport work, experiences of harassment and bullying, lack of suitable facilities and working patterns and lack of adequate data on women in transport.

The transport sector has been severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in widespread furlough (payments to those unable to do their normal work) and redundancies, across the sector, but especially in aviation. The effect of the pandemic on women's work in transport is addressed in selected chapters. However, the book reveals how women have succeeded in transport occupations, with the support of mentoring schemes, leadership programmes and trade unions. Chapters also highlight that new opportunities to challenge occupational gender segregation are emerging as the transport sector transforms through automation, digitisation and the transition to low-carbon technologies. The chapters

in the book demonstrate that improving transport access for all users requires a more gender-balanced workforce, and that transport planners, funders, the local and national state and trade unions are all key to achieving this outcome.

The book reflects the global and local nature of transport work: for example, some chapters examine experiences of work in different transport modes in national settings, namely Australia (Chapter 2), the islands of Malta, Cyprus, Madeira and Gran Canaria (Chapter 3), Kenya (Chapter 4), India (Chapter 9), the UK (Chapters 6, 8, 10–13 and 19) and the USA (Chapter 14). Other chapters are regional in scope, for example, examining work in road transport in Africa (Chapter 5), or comparative, exploring types of jobs that involve active travel – walking and cycling – in high, medium and low-income countries (Chapter 7). Several chapters offer a global perspective, reflecting the international nature of the maritime sector (Chapters 15–17) and port work (Chapter 18). Finally, two chapters discuss how trade unions support and organise women workers in the international civil aviation sector (Chapter 20) and across transport modes worldwide (Chapter 21).

The 38 authors of the 21 chapters include not only academic scholars on the transport sector, but experts working in transport who bring valuable insider perspectives. These include an aviation executive (Chapter 12), education, training and technical management experts (Chapter 16), transport policy specialists (Chapter 19) and trade union officers, media and communications specialists (Chapter 21).

Overall, the book is wide-ranging in its conceptual and methodological approaches to researching work in transport, including chapters based on original quantitative and qualitative research data, as well as autoethnographic data and reviews of existing literature. Transport work itself is also conceptualised broadly within the volume, recognising that some transport scholarship adopts the term mobility, or mobilities, to acknowledge the significance of the ability or freedom to move and its relationship with equality, accessibility and safety, and gendered work and care patterns. Chapter 6, for example, is concerned with 'the politics of everyday freight mobilities' through focussing on those who move things around – freight and logistics workers – using a gender lens; while Chapter 7 foregrounds the 'mobility of care' in shaping women's work and travel patterns, exploring paid and unpaid occupations that involve walking and cycling.

Public transport is the focus of the first section, which contains a historical perspective on women's work in passenger transport in Corinne Mulley's chapter, highlighting the long-established tradition of male dominance in the public transport sector. Later chapters suggest that this has not changed significantly. Mulley provides a valuable introduction to the many issues facing women transport workers, discussed throughout the book, through interviews carried out with two bus industry experts in New South Wales, Australia, one a woman who started as a bus driver but progressed to a senior position in the state government's transport ministry, and a man born into a family that ran a long-established bus company, later becoming managing director. The experience revealed by these vignettes points to the numerous actors needed to increase women's participation in transport – employers, regulators, governments, trade unions and workers themselves.

The challenges faced by transport operators wishing to increase gender balance in the workforce are discussed by Maria Attard and Loukas Dimitriou in a chapter focussing on the islands of Malta, Cyprus, Madeira and Gran Canaria. Working hours and skills were identified as challenges when recruiting women workers, but operators believed there were business benefits from attracting more women to the industry. The chapter highlights that the future need for 'green skills' requires new training programmes and therefore offers opportunities for women. Gender-based violence encountered by women working in public transport is the focus of Anne Kamau and Tessa Wright's chapter, drawing on research in Kenya. Like the other chapters in this section, it addresses the actions needed from a range of participants, including employers, unions and transport authorities, to make public transport safer for passengers and workers alike. ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work may offer a valuable framework for measures to reduce gender-based violence in the transport workplace.

The second section centres on *road transport*, including *freight, logistics* and *active travel*. Gina Porter and Nyaboke Omwega draw on a range of published sources and their own ethnographic research to examine the masculine culture of road transport work on the African continent, but also to highlight women's formal and informal labour, often mirroring their common domestic roles, supplying cooked food, alcohol and sex to male road workers, and undertaking back-breaking work in the lowest paid porterage roles and head-loading goods. Occasionally women have entered more lucrative areas, especially through ownership of commercial vehicles, but this remains rare. The COVID-19 pandemic has had detrimental impacts on women transport workers' jobs and incomes, when services stopped running, or operated at reduced capacity and revenue. However, the chapter considers the potential for overcoming current barriers and suggests improvements to training and support for women's entrepreneurship that could provide significant benefits across the sector. Freight driving in the UK is a similarly masculine world, according to Debbie Hopkins and Nihan Akyelken, yet driver shortages may provide an impetus to improve conditions to attract more women drivers. The chapter notes the changes in freight and logistics work brought about by platform and gig work, offering possibilities for more flexible shift patterns, but the authors also warn of the poor working conditions on offer. Automation in the sector is also said to bring opportunities for women workers, yet may draw on notions of typically feminised service or customer-facing work. A more diverse characterisation of freight sector jobs could better portray the range of driving roles, skillsets and activities that the job entails, to move beyond a masculinised idea of freight work. At the other end of the technological spectrum, Jennifer Bonham and Barbara Koth explore occupations, paid and unpaid, that involve walking and cycling as an integral part of collecting and delivering people and things. With increasing awareness of the health and environmental benefits of active travel, the chapter offers a timely discussion of the gendered nature of jobs involving walking and cycling, such as food delivery, waste picking and rural health work, and the importance of walking and cycling for facilitating unpaid care work. By presenting evidence from countries across the income spectrum, the chapter reveals the significance of walking and cycling for women's paid

and unpaid collection, delivery and care work, enabling the authors to challenge the view that transport work is entirely male dominated. However there remain significant questions over which work is paid, how well it is paid, who receives the payment and what resources and equipment are available to whom.

The *railway* sector is also heavily male dominated, as the three chapters in this section show. Kathryn Thory examines the experiences of women leaders in UK rail, finding a highly gendered culture in which senior women demonstrate narratives of aesthetic femininity – through highly feminine dress codes, but adapted to the work contexts of rail (boarding trains, visiting depots and so on) – revealing a postfeminist logic of individual choice, natural sex differences, personal initiative and empowerment. Such individualised strategies, even when successful, do little to change the 'macho' culture and gendered exclusionary practices found in the rail sector. The small numbers of women working in the rail sector in India face similar challenges, although as the world's eighth biggest employer, Indian Railways is increasingly concerned about the need to increase gender diversity, according to Leena Sachdeva's chapter. Yet her interviewees experience familiar gendered assumptions about women's suitability for technical or managerial work, as well as poor and unsafe working conditions, lack of facilities, absence of role models and poor accommodation of their family responsibilities. Change is needed both in societal gender attitudes towards women's work, and from Indian Railways in supporting a positive work culture, career pathways and equal opportunities for women employees. Hazel Conley, Mostak Ahamed and Tessa Wright introduce an intersectional perspective on the experiences of bullying and harassment suffered by UK rail employees. Through a quantitative analysis of a survey of trade union members in higher-graded management and supervisory positions, the chapter identifies a clear picture of bullying for women, ethnic minority, and disabled workers. Yet an intersectional analysis finds that older, ethnic minority women were more likely than other categories to be bullied at work. The chapter highlights the challenges of quantitative intersectional analysis, but also its importance for fully comprehending the diversity of experiences of workers in a male-dominated sector.

The global *aviation sector* is highly gender segregated, with women concentrated among cabin crew and in customer service roles. This section contains four chapters that concentrate on male-dominated occupations within the industry. Only 5 per cent of commercial airline pilots worldwide are women, therefore efforts to increase this number need to pay attention to pilot training, according to Faye McCarthy, Lucy Budd and Stephen Ison. Through interviews with women and men ab initio (initial) pilots undergoing training at two UK-based Flight Schools, the chapter reveals that women cadets adopt a range of strategies to negotiate potential conflicts between their developing personal and professional identities. The chapter offers recommendations to flight training schools and airlines wanting to encourage more women to enter the profession, such as ensuring a minimum number of women cadets on each programme, encouraging women mentors and role models, and for airlines to ensure talent is retained, for example, by examining the effects of maternity or parental leave on career progression and promotion. Mentoring programmes can be vital for the retention

of women in male-dominated occupations, as evidenced by Susan Durbin, Ana Lopes, Stella Warren and Judith Milne in their exploration of the alta online mentoring platform, established to support women in the UK aviation and aerospace industry. Alta is a joint project between academics and industry, established to overcome the difficulties of identifying mentors and matching mentors to mentees. The chapter reveals that the platform has been able to create positive support networks, facilitate access to senior women in the industry and showcase real life examples of how to navigate a male-dominated industry. Women's leadership in UK airports is addressed in Amarachi Amaugo's chapter, which provides further evidence of the masculine culture of aviation. While Amaugo's analysis shows that there has been an increase in the number of women in senior management roles, the most senior executive positions remain dominated by men. The chapter supports Durbin et al.'s findings in recommending mentoring as a way forward, and additionally concludes that talent management and succession planning for executive roles focussed on increasing women in leadership should be prioritised. Stephanie Douglas focusses on the resilience required by airline pilots doing a safety-critical job, introducing a gender perspective. Based primarily on US research, the chapter reveals that female pilots experience high levels of occupational stress due to the adverse workplace climate for women. Douglas concludes that efforts to build employee resilience need to pay attention to gendered experience, and organisations must provide resources such as social support from colleagues, leaders and supervisors, developmental feedback, and overall improvements to the organisational culture.

The *maritime sector* is the most global and also the most male dominated in transport, although in common with the other sectors examined in this volume, it is also internally gender segregated, with women more commonly found in employment on cruise ships, for example. In the first of four chapters on the maritime sector, Momoko Kitada provides an overview of gendered employment patterns across the sector, in jobs at sea, in ports and on shore. Further, this chapter reviews a large body of international literature to give an account of the barriers to the attraction, recruitment, retention and leadership of women in the maritime sector. Like other parts of the transport industry, the maritime sector features sexual harassment and bullying, where gender equality policies and procedures tend to be absent. Kitada discusses the future of shipping, in particular innovations in smart and green shipping characterised by digitalisation and energy efficiency, and the implications for gender. While many of the women seafarers who work in catering and hotels, on ferries and cruise ships, are expected to lose their jobs, autonomous shipping also creates a new labour market of shore-based remote work, more compatible with balancing work and family life. Cargo shipping employs very few women, so Marie Grasmeier's autoethnographic account of going to sea offers valuable insights. As well as her own fieldnotes from going to sea as a trainee nautical officer over about 12 months, Grasmeier's chapter analyses five interviews with prospective nautical officers from Germany at different stages of their training. Her extracts reveal the persistence of the trope of the strong, wild male seafarer, and uncover the boundary work that men employ to position women seafarers as exceptional and out of place at sea.

Maritime careers are also explored in Heather McLaughlin and Colm Fearon's chapter, which reports on industry initiatives to promote maritime careers among women, but argues that more needs to be done. It uses the lenses of career-decision, career decidedness and career self-efficacy to understand what would make the maritime industry more attractive to women. Based on this evidence, the chapter suggests a number of measures that should be introduced to encourage more female participation in the maritime workforce, aimed at schools, colleges, career counselling services and employers. The port sector is discussed in the chapter by Sisangile Nduna and Christa Sys, which finds that ports have significantly greater female participation than shipping. A historical review of the literature finds scant research on women in seaports, while gender-disaggregated data on port employment are also limited. However, the chapter analyses data collected by the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) TrainForTrade Port Management Programme to show that the five-year average rate of female participation in port labour (2015–2020) was 17.5 per cent. Europe had a higher female participation rate of 24.8 per cent, followed by Asia at 16.6 per cent. The analysis found encouraging levels of female participation in management positions, with women generally found in corporate support functions such as finance, marketing and administration, while men tend to occupy positions requiring technical and engineering skills, which attract higher salaries.

The final section of the book foregrounds the role of government, industry and the trade unions in improving women's position in the transport workforce. Addressing government and industry, the chapter by Hebba Haddad, Jo Field and Alex Bennett presents survey evidence from the experiences of 567 women and men working in the UK transport sector, and discusses how this formed the basis of a White Paper presented to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Transport in 2021 (informal cross-party groups with no official status within Parliament). The survey revealed gender differences, for example, men reported fewer difficulties in progressing their transport careers than women. In addition, 12 case studies were collected to inform the White Paper recommendations. In response to the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on the transport industry, they recommend the creation of a greener transport system, with gender equality and diversity as a central feature of UK Government recovery plans. Transport has higher rates of union membership than other sectors, but the final two chapters reveal that more needs to be done to organise and represent women workers. The complicated nature of the employment relationship in civil aviation is revealed in the chapter by Jocelyn Finniear, Mrinalini Greedharry and Geraint Harvey, such as the cyclical demand for air transport which can mean that the expectations of labour and management are in conflict. As the section on aviation in this volume revealed, women's presence in the sector is uneven, and this is reflected in limited trade union organisation. Yet the chapter identifies some examples of women organising in unions that provide a model for development within unions representing members in civil aviation. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) represents nearly 20 million women and men globally across all transport modes. Dalila Mahdawi and Jodi Evans draw on their experience of working with women in transport to illustrate the persistence of many

barriers to women, such as male hostility, sexual harassment and violence and lack of sanitary facilities. The ITF has been working with its affiliated unions in many countries to exploit the potential of ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work to tackle gender-based violence in transport (see also Chapter 4). The chapter notes that COVID-19 has accelerated the move to new technology, with associated job loss, and particular impacts on women. The ITF is therefore calling for gender-responsive economic stimulus packages to support recovery. Finally, the chapter argues that trade unions need to do more to persuade women that they take equality seriously, and to redouble efforts to attract and retain women members.

As a whole, this book contains a wide-ranging international collection of evidence of the experiences of women working in all transport modes in the Global North and Global South. While highlighting the many challenges of working in highly masculine cultures, it also provides numerous suggestions for overcoming gender segregation in transport by employers, governments and trade unions. It shows that innovations in transport technology and the shift to greener transport offer both risks and opportunities for women in the transport workforce.

REFERENCE

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