



Policy Briefing

November 2023

Women and girls' safety on Scotland's railway

Sexual harassment, abusive and violent behaviour towards women and girls is prevalent and is perpetrated in various settings, including on public transport and can affect both passengers and staff.

In November 2023, RMT surveyed our women members working at ScotRail, to ask about their experiences of these behaviours on Scotland's railway.

Sexual harassment encompasses a wide range of behaviours which can be verbal, physical or non-verbal including sexual assault, cat-calling, flashing, up-skirting, touching.

In our survey:

- 1 in 3 women ScotRail workers said they had been sexually harassed at work in the last year. Of those, more than 80% did not report the incident/s.
- The most common reason cited for not reporting was a concern that the report would not be taken seriously.
- More than half said they had witnessed sexual harassment being perpetrated against women and girl passengers in the last year.
- Three-quarters said that they think that sexual harassment on Scotland's railway is becoming more of a problem.

Workplace violence encompasses a wide range of behaviour including verbal abuse, racial abuse, physical assaults, threats, being spat at.

In our survey:

- More than 70% of women members at ScotRail said they had experienced workplace violence in the last year. Of those, more than 8 in 10 were lone working at the time.
- 98% said that more action needs to be taken against the perpetrators of violent and abusive behaviour towards rail workers.

- Less than a quarter of women ScotRail members said they feel safe at work.

As the Scottish Government's own research has found, the presence of staff at stations, in ticket offices and on trains makes women and girls feel safer when travelling.

In our survey:

- 98% of women ScotRail members said that a further extension of Driver Only Operation (DOO) would worsen the safety of women and girls on the railway.
- Similarly, 95% said that cuts to ScotRail ticket office hours would worsen women and girls' safety.
- 95% said that increasing staffing on trains and at stations would improve the safety of women and girls on public transport.

Some of the comments from our members include:

"Usually drunk men in groups of more than two, a mixture of provocative words, rude words, sexual jokes, sexual innuendos, name calling when you don't respond, dirty rude awful names which make you want to leave the train but you know that you can't"

"A male passenger shouted she's getting it whether she likes it or not when I entered the coach he was sitting in."

"I feel that reporting sexual verbal abuse would be ignored and not taken seriously"

"There is absolutely no deterrent for any sort of anti-social behaviour on the railways as far as I can see. I personally have appeared in court on numerous occasions and have never seen anybody convicted yet."

"Violence in all forms is an everyday and every journey occurrence."

"People notice when there is no staff and use that to their advantage not to be caught"

"Lone women and girls travelling late at night have stated they don't feel safe when there isn't other staff on board DOO services"

"Ticket offices are a safe haven in often isolated stations. Having ticket office staff to talk to or report behaviour too is much safer than having to speak to a help point and have nobody to protect you"

"It needs to be managed better... Ticket examiners have men asking them on a weekly basis for sex in the bathrooms, it's not reported because it doesn't get taken seriously."

Measures to tackle violence against public transport workers

Our survey results clearly indicate the scale of the problem and the need for more action to be taken by employers and the Scottish Government.

The survey reinforces RMT's view that properly staffed transport networks are vital for supporting passenger, and staff safety. As the Scottish Government's own research has found, women and girls feel safer travelling when there are staff at stations, in ticket offices and on trains. Their report, published in March 2023, also recommended the Scottish Government look at increasing staffing at stations and on trains.

It is therefore concerning that the Scottish Government's progress towards acting on the recommendations of its March 2023 report appears to be slow. At the same time, and in clear contradiction to their findings of its own research, it still has not ruled out cuts to ScotRail ticket office hours and ScotRail has recently proposed rolling out DOO on more of the network.

RMT welcomes the recommendation in Scottish Labour's recent report into ending violence against women and girls that it will continue to call on the Scottish Government to *"prevent any reduction in ticket office opening hours, commit to no cuts to staffing on trains"*.

It is vital that the Scottish Government not only rules out cuts to ScotRail ticket office hours and any further extension of DOO, but also commits to expanding staffing across the rail network.

It is clear from our survey that women feel that issues around sexual harassment and workplace violence are often not taken seriously and that there is a lack of action against perpetrators which exacerbates the issue. RMT believes that transport employers must have a robust, zero-tolerance approach to perpetrators of violence, sexual harassment and abuse of transport workers. This involves properly supporting staff who are victims, having accessible reporting procedures in place, and policies on tackling sexual harassment and violence.

The issues raised in our survey are tied to RMT's wider concerns about the prevalence of anti-social and abusive behaviour on Scotland's railway. We have been campaigning for the Scottish Government to introduce legislation which creates a specific offence for abusing or assaulting transport workers, mirroring legislation which already exists for the blue light and retail sectors.

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