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# Making public commutes safer for women

## In conversation with Reyasat Chowdhury of Shuttle

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For any working woman or student, having to use public transportation is the bane to their life. A study conducted by BRAC shows that 94 percent of women commuting in public transport have faced harassment in verbal, physical, and other forms. While that is the case, many Bangladeshi women are forced to avail public transportation due to the lack of options, leaving them susceptible to harassment. Although many ride sharing services exist in the premises of Dhaka there are hardly any services dedicated to women that ensures a safe commute. This is where "Shuttle" is making a difference. We recently sat down with Reyasat Chowdhury, co-founder and CEO of Shuttle, to learn more about this revolutionary transportation service for women.

**What's the story behind Shuttle?**

**Reyasat:** For decades, women have felt unsafe commuting in public transports. Even though lack of safety in the main issue, there are other reasons why women do not like public transport. The insufficient number of buses catering to the ever-growing population and the availability of seats comes to mind.

Besides that, using CNG auto-rickshaw or other ride sharing services for commute is expensive and inconvenient for an everyday commuter. We realised the dire need to end this problem and hence, we conversed with over 300 female university students and office-goers to identify their key issues in commutes. After a thorough

analysis of the insights that we'd received, we came up with the idea to create a pickup and drop-off transportation service that is safe, comfortable and affordable for women. We launched the pilot project in July 2018 for selected universities to test if customers actually find it useful. To our surprise, we received tremendous response and even without



promoting the service, we observed a huge growth in our customer base. This boosted our confidence and now we are expanding rapidly to cater more people.

**How is Shuttle different from other ride-sharing services?**

**Reyasat:** Well, firstly, Shuttle is a service that caters only to women. Shuttle runs on specific routes with specific pickup and drop-off points on a fixed schedule.

Starting from 6.30 AM to 7.30 PM, Shuttles are always available on specific routes. We provide our service in air-conditioned minibuses where 10-11 women can commute together at an affordable fare. A verified and trained trip manager is assigned in every vehicle to ensure the passengers' safety. Starting from picking up the passenger to drop-

ping her off at her destination, the trip manager is responsible for a passenger's safe commute.

**How did Shuttle gain customers' trust and what's the process for selecting trip managers?**

**Reyasat:** We have a Facebook group for our customers called "Shuttle for Women" which has been very effective in this regard. Shuttlers stay connected to

each other and share all their concerns, feedback and complaints with us in the group. We ourselves (the founders) reply to each and every post and try to solve their problems instantly. Building this community helped us a lot in gaining customers' trust. We also have a hotline that's open from 6 AM to 9 PM every day.

Before appointing our trip managers and drivers we make sure they are verified and trained. They have to submit all the necessary documents (NID, passport size photo, CV, driving license). They are also required to fill up and submit a detailed form provided by Shuttle. After a trip manager/driver is shortlisted, he/she has to go through a training period and after closely monitoring their progress, we appoint them.

**What's can we expect in the future for Shuttle?**

**Reyasat:** Currently, we are operating on seven routes and we are increasing the number of routes every month. Within the next year or so, we want to focus on covering the entire city. After that, we have plans to expand beyond Dhaka. We cater to students and working women now but in the future, we want to come up with transportation solutions for other sectors such as garment workers and hopefully further work towards ensuring that no woman in Bangladesh has to worry about their safety in transportation anymore.

To find out more about Shuttle, visit [www.shuttlebd.com](http://www.shuttlebd.com)