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### Are children safe in public transport? grave sexual abuse; A case report

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**Background:** Sexual harassment and assault on public transport is a widespread global issue that poses serious threats to the mental and physical well-being of victims, and Sri Lanka is no exception. While milder forms of harassments are more common in such instances and grave sexual abuse and rape are rarely reported.

**Case study:** This case study reports a serious case of grave sexual abuse involving a female child on public transport in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by reduced passenger numbers. The incident came to light following a complaint by a bus conductor who observed suspicious behavior involving a middle-aged man and the child. Initially, the child did not disclose any details of the incident. However, clinical examination revealed petechial hemorrhages on the soft palate, while other physical findings were unremarkable. Laboratory analysis of oral cavity swabs tested positive for spermatozoa. This case highlights rare but grave sexual violations that occur, even in seemingly public and monitored environments. The COVID-19 pandemic may have inadvertently increased vulnerability due to decreased passenger volume, creating opportunities for perpetrators to act with reduced risk of detection. The initial non-disclosure by the child underscores the common challenge in detecting abuse, particularly among children, who are afraid, confused, or unwilling to speak out. This emphasizes the critical role of vigilant third parties such as in this case, the bus conductor and the importance of a thorough medicolegal evaluation, even when overt signs are minimal.

**Conclusions:** The detection of spermatozoa from oral swabs serves as crucial forensic evidence, reinforcing the need for timely and comprehensive forensic assessments in suspected cases of child sexual abuse.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, grave sexual abuse, forensic evidence, public transport, child safety, medico-legal examination, child sexual abuse.