



NYU

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL
PUBLIC HEALTH

New York City Transit Workers: An Essential Workforce

**Multilevel Interventions to Reduce Risk of Adverse
Impacts of Covid-19 and other Bioevents**

**National Academies
Indoor Air Management of Airborne Pathogens:
Public Transportation
Virtual Forum**

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NYC Transit

Facts

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (**MTA**) is the largest public transportation network in North America

- The largest transit workforce in the country -- 40K Employees.
- \$18.5 billion operating budget.
- In 2019, average weekday subway ridership was 7.7 million.
- 2.2 million people per day ride the buses.
- Nearly 6K buses and roughly 7K subway cars.

NYC Transit Workers & COVID-19

- In March 2020, NYC transit workers (MTA) were thrust into the role of frontline workers- they provided a “pandemic lifeline” to NYC

In the first wave (Mar 15 - June 30)

[From **March 22 - June 13th** NYC was in “pause”.... lock-down]

- **March 6, 2020** MTA memo *forbidding facemasks*
- In the first wave- the workforce—experienced **high** rates of infection (15%), quarantine or home isolation (>10k), high rates of hospitalizations, and a high number of fatalities (125), which was the most of any agency in NYC
- MTA workers **also mourned the loss** of family members, friends, and co-workers

The initial Response.....

- By March 20th, face masks were allowed
- Aerosol transmission was not initially recognized
 - CDC on May 7, 2021
 - WHO on Dec 23, 2021

NYC Transit: Early Interventions

- **April 17, 2020** mandatory **face mask use** required by workers and riders

Transit worker harassment, verbal abuse, and physical assault

- **May, 2020** nighttime cleaning of subways and buses and use of UVC light for sterilization

TWU Local 100 Covid-19 Pilot Study:

NYU School of Global Public Health partnered with leaders from the Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 to conduct a **pilot study** of TWU members in **August 2020**. We collected survey data from **645 members**, which closely matched the demographics of TWU members.



Pilot Study Results (N=645) Aug, 2020

- 80% were male
- 70% were racial or ethnic minorities Mean age was 51 years old
- 45% were in public facing positions with 30% of these in the bus division
- By Aug, 2020, nearly 40% had been under quarantine
- 39% had at least one chronic condition



Key Findings: Covid-19 and Mental Health

- A large proportion of workers (24%) reported a history of Covid-19 infection.
- High levels of fear and concern were reported among TWU members:
 - 90% were afraid of getting infected at work
 - Lack of **Any PPE** was associated with increased fear
 - Nearly three-quarters (72%) were fearful of long-term health impacts of Covid-19
 - 71% were fearful for the personal safety (security) at work
 - 69% were concerned about being infected in the community
 - 91% knew someone infected, 76% knew someone who had died of Covid-19. Yet.....Originally Only 30% intended to be vaccinated
- A large majority (over 80%) reported Mental Health problems (e.g., felt nervous, anxious or on edge, had trouble sleeping or eating problems) because of the pandemic
- The most serious source of MH problems reported; *“fear for safety at work”*

Early Interventions for Transit Workers

- Several **workplace interventions** were rolled out
 - MTA opened an **on-site vaccination** hub with the goal of vaccinating 1,000 workers per week
 - MTA also provided four hours in **bonus wages** for workers who get vaccinated (two hours for each dose they receive)
 - Worker's not vaccinated must be tested weekly- **vaccine is not mandatory** due to crew shortages
 - Symptom monitoring at work, including workers being sent home because they have symptoms or were possibly exposed at work
 - Increase in **availability of personal protective equipment**, Plexiglas shields in buses, safety supplies, and implementation of new sanitation protocols
- NYC launched **community interventions** massive testing, tracing and vaccination programs
- About **70-80% of MTA workers have been vaccinated** thus far

Recognition of Loss and Bereavement

TWU, Local 100 mourned the loss of family members, friends, and co-workers





Maintenance Of Way

Emily Borshchak - SSI
 Thomas Cho - LSI
 John Choi - SSI
 William Day - SSI
 Scott Egan - SSI
 Andrew Gossard - PSE
 Richard Hill - SSI
 Harvey Knight - CSEM
 Henry Gossard - SSI

Khariq Mahdadi - PSE
 Joseph Madsen - PSE
 Andrew Morris - SSI
 Robert Smith - LSI
 Robert Smith - PSE
 David Smith - SSI
 Courtney Smith - SSI
 Brian Tappan - LSI
 Michael Lutz - SSI

Manhattan & Bronx Surface Transit Operating Authority

Chad Crut - SSI
 Ed Salas - SSI
 Dennis Pagan - SSI
 Wayne Fyatt - SSI
 Gary Lee - SSI
 Scott McKnight - SSI
 Joe Moss - SSI

Walter Schuster - CM
 Brian Scott - SSI
 Philip Smith - SSI
 Kenneth Smith - SSI
 Lloyd Smith - SSI
 Robert Smith - SSI

Car Equipment

Fred Smith - SSI
 Leo Smith - SSI
 Chris Smith - SSI
 Joe Smith - SSI

Shelly Smith - SSI
 Bob Smith - SSI
 Patrick Smith - SSI
 Thomas Smith - SSI

The war against COVID-19 could not have been fought without the valiant transport workers on the front lines. We will never forget our fallen union brothers and sisters. May they rest in peace.



Stations

Debra Collet - CTA
 Ra-Gun Yang - SA
 Thomas Kari - CTA
 Robert Kari - CTA
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Rapid Transit Operations

Gary Cherry - CTA
 Philip Davis - SSI
 Stanley Yang - SSI
 Philip Davis - SSI
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MTA Bus/School Bus/Private Operations

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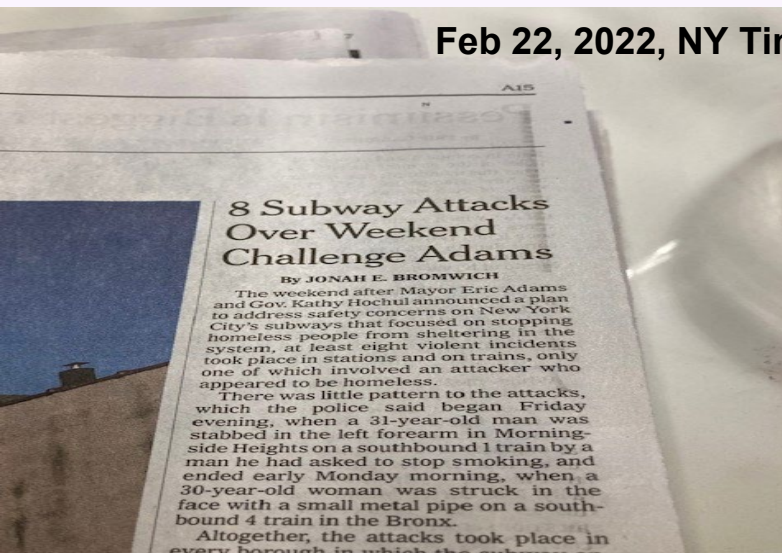
TA Surface

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The TWC Local 100 members are proud to be the most diverse and largest union in the world. We are committed to providing the best service to our customers and the highest quality of work for our members.

Feb 22, 2022, NY Times



Current Challenges

Rider Safety

Jan 15, 2022

Woman Dies After Being Pushed Onto Subway Tracks in Times Square

The police said Michelle Go, 40, of Manhattan, was shoved in front of an R train as it approached a 42nd Street platform in Manhattan on Saturday morning. NY Times



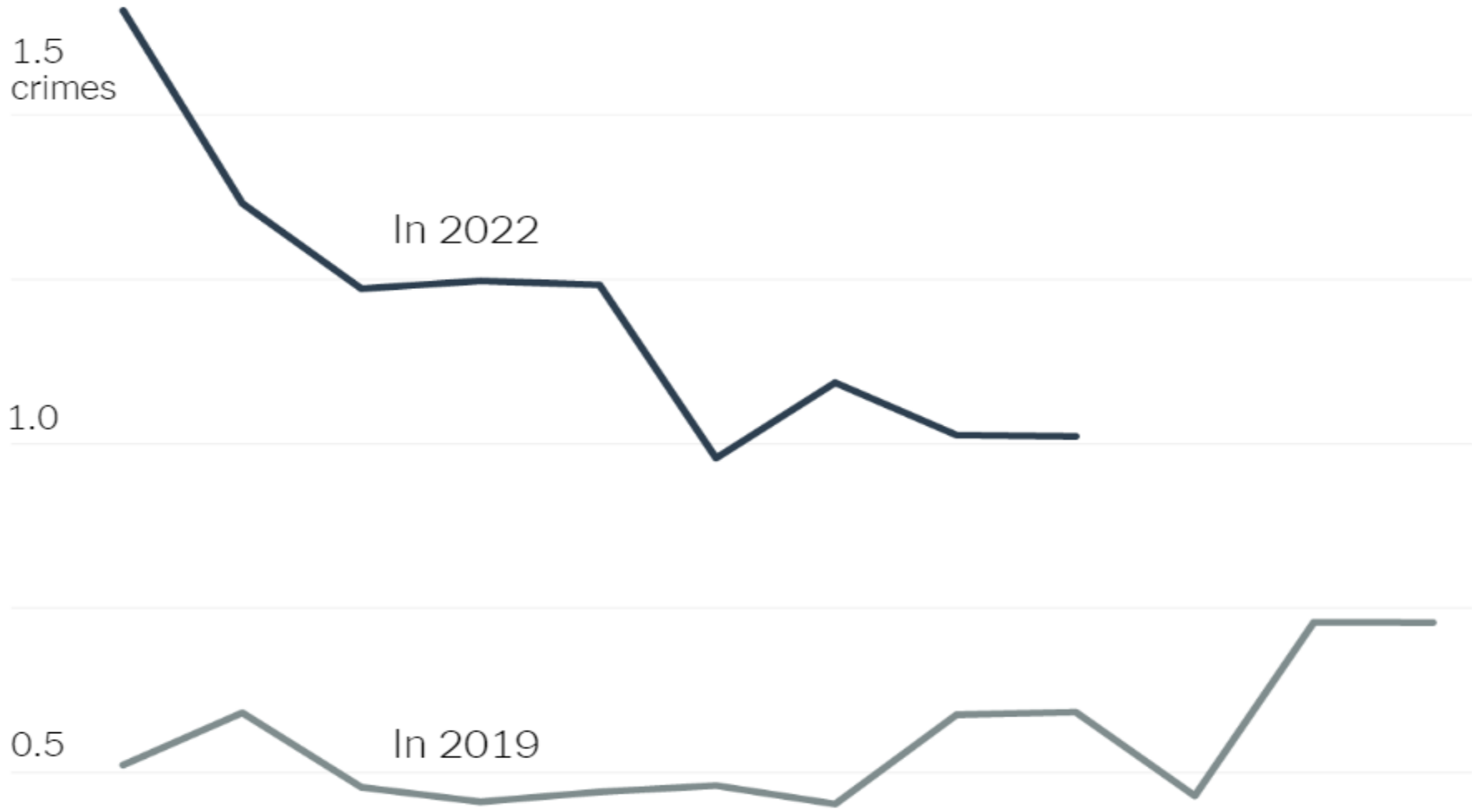
**23 People injured April
15, 2022 Subway Shooting**

**Retirements, transfer to other
NYC agencies, exit from
workforce**



NYC Mass Transit Violent Crimes 1.2/1M rides

Violent crimes per million subway rides



Study Overview

- NIH recently funded our 5-year, 5-phase study, in partnership with the **Transport Workers Union (TWU)**, Local 100. This study is **designed** to:
 - (1) Evaluate **multi-level interventions** (to-date) on worker health and well being (Implementation of the Pandemic Plan of 2012).
 - (2) Develop and implement interventions to **reduce risk and enhance worker resilience** using participatory action research and community-engaged framework.
 - (3) Disseminate findings to provide input into **policy** changes and inform operations to **protect** these and **other non-healthcare essential workers** during other pandemic events.

Potential Strategies for Improvement

- Improved coordination and support with federal, state, and city health authorities
- Create a joint labor and management Emergency Management Committee
- Implementation of Hierarchy of Controls in the Workplace
- Improvement of pandemic preparedness plans
- Policies that ensure rapid scale-up necessary testing, contact tracing, vaccination of workers
- Establish policies and programs that support the mental health and wellbeing of transit workers during and in the aftermath of disasters
- Improve communication and training to heighten worker awareness of how to protect themselves during infectious disease outbreaks
- Provide reasonable job accommodations for those workers who are increased risk for infection
- Implement safeguards to address increased violence towards transit workers
- Standard cleaning and sanitation protocols for both normal operations and during bioevents

Opportunities for Future Action

Providing Equal Protection for non-traditional frontline workers

- Many of these workers are employed in public facing jobs (transit, food chain, retail pharmacy, etc.)
- Many are members of racial/ethnic minority groups
- Despite serving indispensable role during the pandemic, many continue to earn low wages and receive limited benefits and substandard access to care
- Stark example of **occupational health disparities** because they did not have the same level of preparedness and worksite controls provided to other frontline workers

Thank you



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Co-Director, GPH Disaster Certificate Program

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“NYC Transit Workers and COVID-19: Impact of Multilevel Interventions “