

Claiming the City: How India's Urban Spaces Exclude Women and How to Fix Them – A Case Study of New Delhi

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Abstract

This paper analyses the layered risks, vulnerabilities, and everyday negotiations faced by women in open public spaces in diverse sites across India, with New Delhi as a representative and highly stratified urban case. It examines how specific Urban design competences, planning attitudes, and governance mechanisms have in the past resulted in exclusionary and not safe environments for women. Based on crime reports, government statistics, academic literature, and field-based observations, the article shows that despite progressive legislation and numerous policy initiatives, women's mobility, autonomy, and spatial citizenship continue to remain constricted due to a lack of infrastructure for them, coupled with patriarchal planning paradigms as well as weak implementation of safety-oriented measures. Using an intersectional analytical perspective, this paper provides evidence on how caste, class, religion, and other social identities such as disability and LGBTQ identity intersect to magnify women's vulnerability to urban risks and perpetuate structural forms of disadvantage. Positioning these layered inequalities in relation to spatial and design failure, the paper contends that the exclusion of women from public space is both socially entrenched and institutionally perpetuated by planning and regulatory regimes. Cross-national lessons learned from feminist urban interventions and gender-responsive policies in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia show the potential for participatory design, community-based audits, and comprehensive approaches to safety to change the perception of place. Serving as a bridge between theory and practice, the paper develops an approach towards feminist and gender-sensitive urbanism that prioritizes lived experiences, accessibility, care, and collective safety as key planning principles. It demands institutional transformation as well as multi-sectoral coordination through mechanisms of strong accountability, which is not beholden to protectionist logics but rather enables women to exercise visibility, agency, and substantive rights in the shaping of just and sustainable urban futures.

Keywords: Economic engagement, landscape, urban planning, urban spaces, women safety

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INTRODUCTION

The urbanization of India, which currently has over 460 million individuals residing in cities as of 2023, has transformed the landscape and the economic prospects of the country [1]. Yet this urbanization has been driven by extreme gender disparities that are expressed spatially in the way public spaces are planned and used. Women in Indian cities move around every day within spaces that were not planned with their safety, mobility requirements, and varied experiences in mind [2]. The urban planning paradigm has historically prioritized functionality,

aesthetics, and economic considerations while systematically neglecting women-specific vulnerabilities and needs [3].

The issue of women's safety in public spaces gained national attention following the 2013 Nirbhaya case in Delhi, which sparked widespread protests and policy reforms [4]. But for all the legislative and policy measures, statistics show a grim reality: crimes against women keep increasing, and Delhi repeatedly ranks as one of the most unsafe cities for women in India [5]. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022 report states that Delhi reported 14,158 crimes against women, a rate of 186.9 crimes per 100,000 population, much higher than the national average [6].

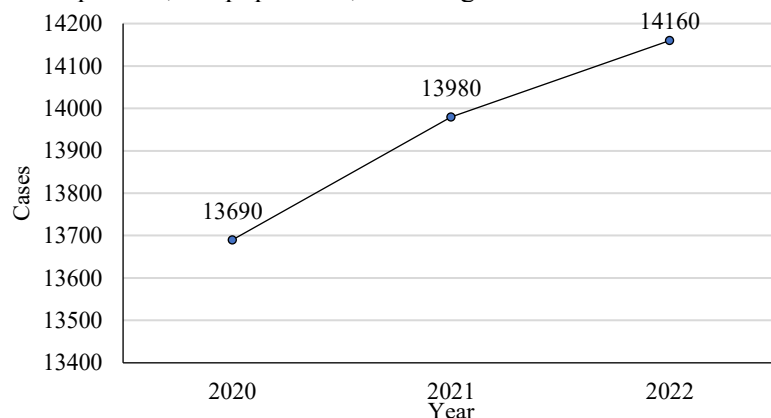


Figure 1. Trend of crimes against women in Delhi showing a steady increase from 2020 to 2022.

This paper draws from the theoretical work of feminist urban planning and the right to the city as a concept to analyze how urban design shortcomings, policy failure, and intersectional discrimination impose systemic obstacles to women's secure engagement with public life (Figure 1). With New Delhi as the main case study, this paper dissects the multifaceted relationship between urban infrastructure, social hierarchies, and policy implementation that leads to the exclusion of women from public spaces. [7].

This study fills an important void in urban studies literature by integrating quantitative crime reports and qualitative accounts of women from various social identities and offering practical recommendations based on the best international practices. The timeliness of this analysis is highlighted by the economic engagement, with research indicating that issues of safety have significant effects on women's education and career decisions [8].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist Urban Planning and the Right to the City

The major theoretical basis for this study is rooted in feminist urban planning theory that emerged in the 1970s when women planners first called for the consideration of women's experiences in city design and planning [9]. Feminist urbanism is critical of conventional paradigms of city planning based on patriarchal orientations, in that cities have been planned mainly for economically productive, able-bodied men, not for the varied needs of all urban citizens [10].

The idea of the *right to the city*, initially formulated by *Henri Lefebvre* and extended further by feminist theorists, offers a lens for analysing women's exclusion from space. The right includes not just access to urban facilities and services but also access to participation in urban governance and the power to organise urban spaces to suit one's requirements [11]. For women, such a right has been systematically withdrawn through spatial planning that gives precedence to male mobility patterns and neglects women's security concerns.

Women's Safety and Urban Design

International studies have confirmed strong links between urban design features and women's perceptions of safety. Such studies repeatedly identify principal environmental determinants of

women's feelings of security: good lighting, clear visibility, busy frontages, well-maintained public spaces, and easy access to emergency services (Urban Planning and Women's Safety: A Research [12]. The lack of one or more of these features generates exclusionary spaces that, in practice, exclude women from an equal role in public life.

Studies in Indian cities have confirmed such trends. Research in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru finds that women's mobility is heavily restricted by safety concerns around harassment and violence, with a majority of the women indicating they avoid specific areas, restrict travel in certain periods, and adapt behavior to minimize perceived threats Affairs, [13] [14]. Such spatial exclusion has far-reaching consequences for women's access to work, education, health care, and social engagement.

Intersectionality and Urban Vulnerability

Recent literature has highlighted the relevance of intersectional analysis in framing women's urban lives. The intersectionality model, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, shows how intersecting identities like caste, class, religion, disability, and sexual orientation produce distinct patterns of discrimination and vulnerability (Intersectionality in India: Analyzing Caste, Class, and Gender Dynamics, [15]. This analysis is especially important for the Indian context with its multifaceted social hierarchies.

Studies on the lives of Dalit women in Indian cities provide a clear example of how gender and caste discrimination intersect to generate increased exposure to sexual violence [16].[17][18]. Likewise, investigations of Muslim women, trans individuals, and women with disabilities illustrate specific patterns of exclusion and intimidation in public areas (Intersectionality and Gender Equality: Addressing Multiple Forms of Discrimination in India, n.d.) [19]. Such intersectional insight is necessary for crafting an inclusive urban policy that responds to the range of needs for all women.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods strategy that integrates quantitative analysis of crime data with qualitative analysis of policy reports, field reports, and testimonies. The methodology adheres to existing frameworks for research on urban safety, drawing especially from the Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls initiative methodology by UN Women [20]. The case study approach is centered on New Delhi with comparative analysis from other cities in India and with global examples. Delhi was chosen as the lead case study because it is the national capital, there is an abundance of data, and it represents one of the most urbanized and researched Indian cities when it comes to issues of women's safety. It is also the city with the highest average of crimes against women [21].

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Evolution of Women's Safety Policies in India

India's strategy towards women's safety has changed dramatically since independence, with key pieces of legislation such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence, the Sexual Harassment of Women, and the Criminal Law, this legislation provided crucial legal safeguards but has been plagued by implementation issues.[22]

The 2012 Nirbhaya case was a turning point that resulted in the creation of the Nirbhaya Fund in 2013 with an outlay of ₹7,712.85 crore for projects on women's safety (Development, 2025). Through this fund, several initiatives were initiated, such as One Stop Centres (OSCs), Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112), Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs), and the Safe City Project.[23].

Delhi's Policy Landscape

Delhi's governance pattern poses its own challenges for women's security, since policing is handled by the Union Government, and state and local authorities are responsible for municipal services [24]. This has resulted in coordination lapses and implementation deficiencies.

The Delhi government has introduced several women-centric policies, such as free transportation for women by bus, initiated in 2019, women-only compartments on the metro, and different safety apps. Nonetheless, studies suggest that these steps, though positive, do not tackle the underlying urban planning and design problems that generate unsafe spaces [25].

CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN'S SAFETY IN INDIAN CITIES

National Crime Statistics and Trends

The National Crime Records Bureau statistics expose worrying trends of crimes against women in India. India registered 4,45,256 cases of crime against women in 2022, which is a rate of 66.4 per 100,000 population, much higher than 57 per 100,000 in the year 2020 [26]. This comes to around 51 cases of crime against women per hour [27].

The most prevalent types of crimes against women are husband or relatives' cruelty (31.4%), kidnapping and abduction (19.2%), assault with intent to outrage modesty (18.7%), and rape (7.1%) [28]. These rates, however, are only for reported crimes, with studies indicating that actual occurrences are much greater because they are underreported.

Delhi as India's Most Unsafe City for Women

Delhi is always the most unsafe metropolitan city for women in India. NCRB statistics indicate Delhi registered 29.04% of the crimes against women reported in the top 19 cities of India in 2022, while its population share was much lower.[29]. Delhi saw three rape cases on average per day, with 1,204 rape cases being registered in 2022.

Delhi's crime rate of 186.9 per 100,000 population is well above the national average and demonstrates the city's specific challenges in making women safe. These include rapid urbanization, inefficient infrastructure, inefficient urban planning, and the lack of adequate law enforcement presence in much of the city.

Spatial Patterns of Violence and Harassment

A study in Delhi indicates certain spatial patterns of harassment and violence against women. [30]. A wide-ranging survey by UN Women and Jagori discovered that roads (50%) and public transport (39%) are found to be the most unsafe public spaces, followed by markets (22%) and points where women wait for public transport (12%) [31].

Notably, the research also concluded that most instances of violence take place in broad daylight (74%) and not at night (13%) [32]. This conclusion defies the general perception as to when women are most at risk and points to the insufficiency of security arrangements that are mainly in the evening.

The survey picked out leading causes of safety issues as poor lighting, poorly maintained pavements or their non-existence, insufficiently designed men's public toilets, and discriminatory social attitudes [33]. These results highlight the intimate connection between city design failure and women's safety.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES

Caste-Based Discrimination and Safety

There are compounded vulnerabilities for Dalit women because of the intersection between caste and gender-based discrimination. Evidence shows that sexual violence against Dalit women is employed as a means of caste assertion by upper-caste men in order to maintain social hierarchies (Intersectionality and Gender Equality: Addressing Multiple Forms of Discrimination in India, n.d.) [34]. In urban areas, this is evidenced by exclusion from specific neighbourhoods, differential treatment by the police, and greater exposure to harassment.

Research in cities such as Bengaluru exposes how segregation by space on caste grounds produces variable access to infrastructures of safety. Spaces with higher densities of Dalit inhabitants generally experience poor lighting, a lack of police presence, and poor public amenities [35]. This inequality in space aggravates the issue of safety for Dalit women.

Religious Minority Women

Muslim women in Indian public life are subjected to special challenges because of religious discrimination combined with gender vulnerability. Studies show that Muslim women are specifically targeted for harassment based on their religious identity, especially when they cover themselves with hijab or other religious identifiers (Intersectionality and Gender Equality: Addressing Multiple Forms of Discrimination in India, n.d.).[36]. The discrimination is further amplified in the existing political environment, in which communal tensions impact the everyday encounters in public spaces.

The spatial aggregation of Muslim communities within specific urban locations, usually defined by poorer infrastructure and services, aggravates these safety issues. Research indicates that high Muslim concentration areas tend to be less invested in public infrastructure, such as safety-related amenities (Intersectionality and Gender Equality: Addressing Multiple Forms of Discrimination in India.) [37].

LGBTQIA Individuals and Transgender Women

Transgender people experience disproportionately elevated levels of violence and harassment while out in public. Studies reveal that transgender individuals are nearly twice as likely to be harassed while in public as other groups

(Intersectionality and Gender Equality: Addressing Multiple Forms of Discrimination in India) [38]. Both the public and law enforcement officers are the primary perpetrators of violence against transgender people, making for a highly vulnerable circumstance.

The absence of gender-neutral facilities in public places also further marginalizes transgender people. The majority of public toilets, transport facilities, and other conveniences are constructed on a binary gender presumption, posing further challenges to the safe use of public places [39].

Women with Disabilities

There are several barriers confronting women with disabilities in accessing public places safely. Urban space in Indian cities, in general, is not planned or built with accessibility, resulting in physical barriers and restrictions on mobility and enhanced vulnerability [40]. Studies indicate that the absence of proper footpaths, accessible public transport, and accessible design renders women with disabilities mobility-dependent, enhancing their risk of harassment and abuse.

The intersection of disability and gender creates unique safety challenges that are poorly addressed by current urban policies. Women with visual impairments report being harassed under the pretext of receiving help, while women with mobility disabilities face additional challenges in escaping threatening situations [42].

North-Eastern Women

Women from Northeast India are discriminated against based on their physical features and cultural background, impacting their security in Indian cities. Research records the racist remarks, stereotyping, and sexual harassment faced by the North-Eastern women based on generalizations about their nature and lifestyle.[43].

This discrimination is especially acute in cities such as Delhi, where North-Eastern women feel unsafe because of both general gender-based harassment and targeted racism. The intersection of racial

and gender discrimination produces specific vulnerabilities not well treated by existing security policies.

URBAN DESIGN AND PLANNING FAILURES

Infrastructure Deficits and Safety

Indian cities are also plagued by major infrastructure shortages that have a direct effect on women's security. Inadequate street lighting stands as one of the major issues, with the Delhi government in 2016 acknowledging more than 7,000 dark spots, or poorly lit areas, throughout the city [44]. Dark spots establish settings for harassment and violence and restrict women's mobility, especially in the evening. (Creating safe and empowering public spaces with women and girls,)

The lack of properly maintained footpaths compels women to walk on roads, making them more susceptible to traffic accidents and harassment. A Delhi study shows that there is not enough pedestrian-friendly infrastructure in most areas, compelling women to take insecure routes that subject them to risk [45]

Public toilet facilities are another essential infrastructure shortage. The limited availability and poor state of women's toilets in public places compel women to restrict their time spent in public places or visit unhygienic facilities. Research shows that the apprehension of harassment in the vicinity of public toilets largely restricts women from using public

Poor Urban Planning and Design

Urban planning in Indian cities has traditionally been a gender-blind strategy that does not consider women's particular needs and mobility patterns. This is realized in various ways:

Land Use Planning

Mixed-use development that would allow for *eyes on the street* and natural surveillance is frequently absent. Instead, numerous areas have long stretches of single-use zones that get deserted after working hours, making it an unsafe place to be.

Transportation Planning

Public transportation systems are planned with consideration for peak-hour commuting behaviour characteristic of male workers and overlooking women's more intricate travel patterns involving multiple short trips for care work and home responsibilities.

Design of Public Spaces

Parks, public markets, and other public spaces are usually not well-designed with safety-boosting features like clear visibility, good lighting, and active supervision. Most public spaces have secluded areas, shrubbery, and poor maintenance that afford opportunities for harassment.

Insufficient Participatory Planning

One of the basic flaws in Indian urban planning lies in the lack of effective involvement of women, especially women belonging to marginalized groups, in the planning process. Studies reveal that decisions regarding planning usually fall to male-dominated institutions without proper consultation with the women occupying public spaces.

This exclusion from participation results in women's knowledge of unsafe areas, their individual mobility requirements, and their suggestions for the improvement of safety not being integrated into decision-making on planning. It has been found through studies that if women are included in safety audits and planning, their suggestions greatly enhance the safety and accessibility of public space.

CASE STUDY: NEW DELHI

Delhi's Urban Challenges Profile

New Delhi, as the national capital and third-largest urban agglomeration of India, offers a case study of complicated urban safety issues. The city's population of more than 30 million is expected to grow to 36 million by 2030, putting extra pressure on infrastructure and services already present.

Delhi's urban structure is marked by stark spatial disparities, with high-income planned colonies existing alongside sprawling slums. This spatial segregation produces differential exposure to safety infrastructure, with marginal groups experiencing considerably greater exposure to harassment and violence.

Crime Patterns and Spatial Analysis

Data from NCRB shows certain trends in the crime against women in Delhi (Delhi tops in crimes against women in 2022: NCRB data, 2023). The 1,204 rape cases in 2022 in the city were not evenly spread across districts, and some had higher intensities of occurrences. According to police data analysis, outer Delhi districts with high levels of urbanization and poor infrastructure are the ones that report more crimes against women.

Public transportation becomes a specific area of vulnerability. Delhi Metro, even with women's coaches, still reports cases of harassment. Bus transport records even greater degrees of harassment, and surveys reveal that 89% of Delhi college women have been harassed on public transport.

Government Initiatives and Their Limitations

There have been several well-publicized safety measures introduced in Delhi, including:

- (a). *Safe City Project*: Initiated under the Nirbhaya Fund, the ₹500 crore project focuses on the installation of 2,760 AI-powered CCTV cameras throughout the city. The first phase commissioned 3,500 AI-powered cameras by October 2024, integrated with facial recognition and real-time alerting systems (3,500 AI-enabled cameras to guard Delhi under 'Safe City' project from October 1, 2025).
- (b). *Women's Free Bus Travel*: Launched in 2019, this was introduced to enhance women's use of public transport. Although valued by customers, studies conclude that it has had a limited effect on lessening harassment and perceptions of safety.
- (c). *Women Helplines and Emergency Services*: The 181 Women Helpline and other emergency services are a crisis response but fail to target the root causes of urban design, which lead to unsafe environments.
- (d). *Himmat App*: This women's safety app enables women to send out distress messages but has been criticized for its technical deficiencies and poor response systems.

These efforts notwithstanding, crime data reveal ongoing spikes in reported crimes, indicating that technology-oriented and response-based measures are not enough to mitigate the systemic urban planning flaws.

Specific Urban Challenges in Delhi

- (a). *Metro and Public Transport*: Although Delhi Metro has made women-only coaches and other safety features, overcrowding of trains and poor security at platforms continue to raise safety issues. Bus transport that caters to a bigger population suffers more critically from poor lighting at bus stops, lack of maintenance, and poor security.
- (b). *Market Zones*: Conventional markets such as Karol Bagh, Sarojini Nagar, and Chandni Chowk pose specific problems with crowding, narrow streets, low illumination, and weak police cover. Women indicated high levels of harassment here.
- (c). *Residential Areas*: Even in developed residential colonies, the absence of appropriate street lighting, poor security, and lack of maintenance of common places generate safety issues. Unauthorized colonies have more serious issues with no proper roads, lighting, or security measures.

- (d). *Educational Institutions*: Perimeter areas of colleges and universities, especially Delhi University, register high rates of harassment. Despite the presence of educated youth, such areas usually do not have adequate safety facilities and effective grievance redressal mechanisms (Understanding Women's Safety: Towards a Gender Inclusive City, Research Findings, Delhi).

POLICY GAPS AND IMPLEMENTATION FAILURES

Coordination Challenges

Delhi's distinctive governance arrangement, with policing by the Union Government and municipal services by multiple state and local governments, poses huge coordination challenges. This fragmentation causes policy implementation gaps and a lack of integration of safety measures between different urban systems.

A study by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) and Jagori came up with various operational challenges, such as the absence of coherent budgetary deployment, poor coordination among agencies, and poor monitoring mechanisms. These are the governance issues that have a direct impact on the effectiveness of women's safety measures.

Poor Budget Allocation and Utilization

Despite the creation of the Nirbhaya Fund with considerable allocations, utilization levels are low. Until 2022, just 33% of the Nirbhaya Fund had been drawn down, reflecting implementation issues and bureaucratic hindrances. Such underutilization is a reality even as cities project imminent needs for enhancing safety infrastructure.

Budget analysis shows that safety measures tend to emphasize visible projects such as CCTV cameras over robust infrastructure upgrades addressing fundamental urban design aspects. The prioritization of technology over infrastructure upgrades indicates a misinterpretation of women's safety demands.

Weak Enforcement Mechanisms

Even where laws and policies are in place, enforcement is lax. According to research, conviction rates for crimes against women are as low as 19%, while those for all crimes are 47%. Such a low rate of convictions, together with slow legal procedures, deters reporting and devalues the deterrence of laws.

Police sensitivity training and specialized women's crime units have been instituted but are beset with resource limitations and a lack of institutional support. Research indicates women's trust in the police is low, and only 11% of harassment is reported to the authorities.

Gender-Blind Urban Policies

The majority of India's urban planning policies are still gender-blind and do not incorporate gender analysis or women's involvement in decision-making. Master plans, zoning, and infrastructure policies do not usually have separate provisions for ensuring the safety of women or gender-responsive design.

Lack of gender impact assessments as a requirement for urban projects implies that possible adverse impacts on women's safety are not diagnosed or mitigated at the planning stage. This reactive strategy results in expensive retrofitting of safety features instead of proactive inclusive design.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Latin American Interventions

Latin American cities have led the way in developing some groundbreaking strategies for women's safety in the city, which are instructive for Indian cities:

- (a). *Quito, Ecuador*: As a pilot city for UN Women's Safe Cities program, Quito conducted participatory safety audits with women's organizations, resulting in improvements to public lighting infrastructure, bus stops, and market spaces (Safe Cities for Women: Latin America and

the. Quito also created a legal code with specific provisions addressing sexual harassment in public places.

- (b). *Mexico City*: The city launched woman-only buses and introduced panic buttons in public transport, which resulted in dramatic drops in harassment rates (Mexico - Reducing Violence Against Women through Interventions in Public Transport. These specific interventions were paired with awareness campaigns and bystander intervention programs.
- (c). *Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*: The city deployed community-led mapping of risky locations in addition to infrastructure upgrades and community engagement programs. This process ensured that interventions responded to locally identified priorities (Safe Cities for Women: Latin America).
- (d). *Santiago, Chile*: Santiago's integrated strategy involved gender-responsive urban planning regulations, enhanced street lighting, and the provision of women-friendly public areas with enhanced visibility and natural surveillance.

Sub-Saharan African Innovations

Sub-Saharan African cities have established regionally tailored measures that tackle safety as well as economic empowerment:

- (a). *Kigali, Rwanda*: The city mainstreamed gender into city planning through the inclusion of women in neighbourhood planning committees and gender-responsive budgeting. The strategy led to enhanced public infrastructure and enhanced women's economic engagement.
- (b). *Johannesburg, South Africa*: The city did inclusive gender-sensitive planning that encompasses violence prevention and economic empowerment through enhanced access to markets, transport, and services. The strategy captures the nexus of safety and economic inclusion.
- (c). *Cape Town, South Africa*: The city implemented innovative financing models for safety measures, such as collaborations with private businesses and community groups to enhance lighting and security in slums.

East Asian Models

East Asian cities provide lessons on comprehensive policy instruments and technological innovations: Seoul, South Korea: Seoul's Safe City for Women 3.0 initiative is one of the most ambitious municipal strategies on women's safety.

- Ansimi mobile application with 24/7 safety services
- Safe Return Scouts program of provision of accompaniment services
- Women's Safety Sheriffs of periodic safety audits
- Gender-sensitive protocols of disaster management

The focus of the program on a change from *hardware (infrastructure)* to *software (social values)* through public education and campaigns of awareness has yielded substantial results.

Tokyo, Japan: Tokyo has introduced universal design concepts in public transport and public spaces, providing safer and more accessible environments for everyone. The city uses *CPTED* principles to focus on crime prevention through environmental design.

EFFECTS OF UNSAFE URBAN SPACES ON WOMEN'S LIVES

Economic Impacts

Unsafe cities have significant economic impacts on women's education and job participation and involvement in the economy. Empirical evidence in Delhi indicates that safety issues play a significant role in the educational and employment decisions of women, with most women being willing to pay large premiums for safer routes.

A research survey of Delhi University students found that women are willing to pay an extra cost of ₹17,500 (USD 250) a year to travel along what they feel are safer routes. This safety tax is equal to 7% of the average Delhi per capita annual income and severely limits women's economic choices.

The wider economic effects are:

- *Decreased labour force participation:* Women's desire to work in a particular place or during a particular time is restricted by concerns over safety
- *Limited educational options:* Female students select colleges based on proximity as opposed to quality because of concerns over safety
- *Higher costs of transport:* Women prefer more costly but safer means of transport
- *Decreased entrepreneurship:* Women's options for undertaking street vending or market activities are restricted by concerns for safety

Social and Psychological Impacts

The perpetual dread of violence and harassment produces a great deal of psychological strain and social isolation among women. Polls show that 40% of women do not feel safe while traveling alone at night in their own cities. This fear gives rise to coping strategies that restrict the social involvement of women:

- *Temporal restrictions:* Women stay away from public areas during specific times, especially after dusk
- *Spatial avoidance:* Women stay away from specific areas or routes, restricting their access to services and opportunities
- *Modified behaviour:* Women modify their dress, attitude, or activity to minimize perceived risk
- *Social isolation:* Harassment fear leads to a reduction in women's social and recreational activities

Health and Well-being Impacts

Insecure urban settings have direct effects on women's mental and physical well-being. Restricted use of public spaces also constrains women's participation in physical exercise and leisure activities. Threat and tension due to safety issues result in mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

The provision of public facilities, especially public toilets, impacts women's health by constraining their usage of public spaces for a long duration. Inadequate quality or unsafe toilet facilities compel women to restrict their fluid intake or stay away from public spaces altogether, resulting in health issues.

Impact on Democratic Participation

Exclusion of women from public arenas has wider democratic implications in terms of participation and citizenship. The lack of access to public areas safely constrains women's engagement in political demonstrations, public gatherings, and civic processes. Spatial exclusion equates to less political voice and representation.

Studies show that women's restricted access to public space impacts their capacity to develop social networks and act in collective action. This has long-term effects on women's empowerment and social change.

SUGGESTED URBAN DESIGN PROPOSALS FOR INCLUSIVE CITIES

Feminist Urban Planning Model

Based on international best practice and research evidence, this paper suggests an integrated feminist urban planning model for Indian cities. The model is constructed on four key principles:

- *Participatory Planning:* Effective involvement of women of different backgrounds at all levels of urban planning, from assessment to implementation and monitoring. This involves setting up women's planning committees at ward levels and the representation of marginalized women in decision-making forums.
- *Intersectional Design:* Understanding that women have different experiences depending on caste, class, religion, disability, and other identities. Urban interventions need to consider the specific needs of all women, not only privileged ones.

- *Safety by Design*: Incorporating safety in all aspects of urban planning, adhering to *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)* principles modified according to Indian settings.
- *Comprehensive Approach*: Understanding that safety cannot be addressed through isolated measures but needs a holistic transformation of several urban systems.

Infrastructure Upgrades

- *Lighting and Visibility*: Systematic improvement of street lighting with emphasis on pedestrianized areas, bus stops, marketplaces, and pathways to basic services. Installation of solar-powered lighting systems for cost savings and environmental sustainability.
- *Pedestrian Infrastructure*: Construction of continuous, well-maintained sidewalks with sufficient width to accommodate a variety of users, such as women with strollers, older women, and disabled women. Incorporation of street furniture such as benches and shelters.
- *Public Toilets*: Creation of clean, secure, and well-kept public toilets for women with good lighting, security, and maintenance. Introduction of innovative solutions such as community-managed toilet blocks and mobile toilet units.
- *Transport Infrastructure*: Gender-sensitive bus stop, metro station, and other transport facility design with sufficient lighting, unobstructed sightlines, and security. Introduction of request-stop services for women at late hours.

Technology-Enabled Solutions

Though acknowledging the fact that technology cannot replace fundamental infrastructure upgrades, technology use can be strategically leveraged to support women's safety:

- *Smart City Integration*: Incorporation of safety aspects within smart city projects such as *IoT-integrated* streetlights, emergency call stations, and real-time surveillance systems.
- *Safety Apps*: Creation of easy-to-use safety apps offering real-time alerts on secure pathways, emergency services, and complaint channels.
- *Crowdsourced Safety Data*: Deployment of platforms for reporting safety issues and assessing the safety of various areas by women and gathering useful data for planning interventions.

Policy and Governance Reforms

- *Gender-Responsive Budgeting*: Deployment of gender budgeting measures that ensure proper resource allocation for women's safety infrastructure and impose gender impact assessments for any urban project.
- *Institutional Mechanisms*: Creation of institutional mechanisms specifically for women's safety, such as gender cells in city planning departments and women's safety committees at the city and ward levels.
- *Legal Framework*: Enhancement of legal structures to deal with harassment in public places and ensuring speedy justice by introducing fast-track courts and enhanced police training.
- *Monitoring and Evaluation*: Creation of robust monitoring frameworks with gender-disaggregated indicators to monitor progress towards enhancing women's safety.

Community-Based Interventions

- *Safety Audits*: Periodic participatory safety audits are carried out with women from various communities to locate danger spots and suggest areas of improvement. These audits shall be undertaken at various times of the day and during various seasons to reflect diverse experiences.
- *Community Policing*: Focusing on strengthening community policing programs with particular emphasis on women's safety, such as police personnel training in gender sensitivity and operation of women's help desks at police stations.
- *Awareness Programmes*: Introduction of wide-ranging awareness programmes among men and women to counteract gender stereotypes and foster respectful conduct in public places.
- *Bystander Intervention*: Training schemes to facilitate bystander intervention when harassment occurs and social norms establishment that render harassment unacceptable.

Economic Empowerment Integration

- *Market Infrastructure:* Upgrading of market infrastructure with particular focus on meeting the needs of women vendors, such as secure storage facilities, adequate lighting, and hygienic toilet facilities.
- *Livelihood Support:* Combining livelihood support programs with safety enhancements, acknowledging that economic empowerment improves the ability of women to access safe spaces.
- *Financial Inclusion:* Ensuring that safety enhancements facilitate women's participation in the economy through enhanced access to financial services, markets, and job opportunities.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Phased Implementation Approach

Due to the scale of interventions needed, a phased implementation strategy is required:

- *Phase 1 (Immediate - 1 year):* Fill critical gaps in safety infrastructure, such as lighting upgrades, minimum toilet facilities, and emergency response. Put in place institutional mechanisms and initiate participatory planning.
- *Phase 2 (Short-term - 2–3 years):* Carry out integrated transport improvements, scale up community-based intervention, and institute monitoring systems. Initiate pilot projects on innovative solutions.
- *Phase 3 (Medium-term - 3–5 years):* Expand those interventions that are found to work, incorporate technology solutions, and enact across-the-board policy reforms. Emphasize sustainability and institutionalization.
- *Phase 4 (Long-term - 5+ years):* Complete the comprehensive transformation of urban areas with complete integration of gender-responsive planning in all urban development initiatives.

Financing Mechanisms

- *Government Financing:* Broaden and enhance utilization of available funds, such as the Nirbhaya Fund, while creating specifically earmarked budget lines for women's safety in city budgets.
- *Public-Private Partnerships:* Create innovative financing schemes that involve private sector involvement in safety enhancement without compromising public oversight and accountability.
- *Global Partnership:* Utilize international funding and technical support for pilot projects and capacity building programs.
- *Community Contributions:* Involve communities in contributing to safety enhancement through volunteer hours, local resources, and advocacy.

Capacity Building

- *Government Officials:* In-depth training programs for city planners, municipal officials, and police officers on gender-responsive planning and women's safety.
- *Community Leaders:* Capacity building for women's organizations, community leaders, and civil society organizations to effectively contribute to planning processes and advocate for safety enhancement.
- *Technical Competence:* Building local competence in gender-sensitive urban planning through collaboration with universities and international agencies.

Monitoring and Evaluation System

- *Baseline Surveys:* Baseline surveys that cover the current state of women's safety and monitor progress over time.
- *Regular Monitoring:* Periodic monitoring of safety factors such as crime rates, infrastructure development, and mobility patterns of women.
- *Impact Evaluation:* Yearly assessment of program effects on women's safety, economic empowerment, and quality of life.

- *Feedback Mechanisms:* Ongoing feedback mechanisms through which women can provide information about safety issues and assess the impact of interventions.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Implementation Challenges

There are several key challenges to be overcome for effective implementation:

- *Resource Constraints:* Financial limitations and other competing urban priorities can restrict the scope and speed of implementation.
- *Institutional Resistance:* Current institutional practices and structures can resist changes necessary for gender-responsive planning.
- *Political Will:* Long-term political commitment over electoral cycles is required for long-term change.
- *Social Attitudes:* An extremely entrenched social climate and gender norms have to be changed by sustained effort over the long term.

Technical Limitations

- *Data Availability:* Limited availability of gender-disaggregated data on urban mobility, safety, and service access constrains evidence-based planning.
- *Technical Capacity:* Limited technical capacity in gender-responsive planning among urban professionals requires significant investment in capacity building.
- *Measurement Challenges:* Difficulty in measuring improvements in subjective safety and establishing causality between interventions and outcomes.

Addressing Limitations

- *Pilot Projects:* Starting with pilot projects in selected areas to demonstrate feasibility and build evidence for scaling up.
- *Partnerships:* Fostering strong partnerships with civil society, academic institutions, and international organizations to draw on expertise and resources.
- *Adaptive Management:* Using adaptive management practices that enable learning and course correction from experience.
- *Long-term Vision:* Sustaining long-term vision and achieving short-term wins to generate momentum and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For National Government

1. *Policy Framework:* Create detailed national guidelines on gender-responsive urban planning that require women's safety to be considered in all urban development initiatives.
2. *Funding Mechanisms:* Create specific funding mechanisms for women's safety infrastructure and enhance usage rates of available funds, such as the Nirbhaya Fund.
3. *Legal Reform:* Enhance legal mechanisms concerning harassment in public spaces and provide quick justice through enhanced judicial procedures.
4. *Institutional Development:* Develop national institutions for gender-sensitive urban planning with sufficient technical and financial capacity.

For State and Local Governments

1. *Master Plan Integration:* Incorporate gender-responsive planning requirements into master plans and development control regulations at the city and state levels.
2. *Budget Allocation:* Institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting practices and provide sufficient allocation for women's safety infrastructure in municipal budgets.
3. *Institutional Mechanisms:* Set up gender cells in city planning departments and women's safety committees at city and ward levels.

4. *Capacity Building*: Invest in capacity building of urban planners, municipal officials, and police forces in gender-responsive planning and women's safety.

For Urban Planning Professionals

1. *Professional Development*: Take training in gender-responsive planning and feminist urban design principles.
2. *Practice Integration*: Incorporate gender analysis and women's participation into standard planning procedures.
3. *Innovation*: Create innovative solutions that are responsive to local contexts and use international best practices.
4. *Advocacy*: Push for policy reforms that compel gender-responsive planning and women's engagement in city development.

For Civil Society Organizations

1. *Advocacy*: Keep pushing for women's rights to the city and governments' accountability for upgrading safety.
2. *Capacity Building*: Develop capacity for effective participation in urban planning processes and safety audits.
3. *Documentation*: Document the experiences and needs of women to use as evidence for advocacy with policy.
4. *Partnerships*: Develop partnerships with government, academic, and international agency partners to access resources and expertise.

For International Organizations

1. *Technical Assistance*: Offer technical assistance and funding support for pilot projects and capacity development programs.
1. *Knowledge Sharing*: Enable knowledge sharing among cities and countries undertaking innovative women's safety interventions.
2. *Research Support*: Fund research into effective interventions and their replication in various contexts.
3. *Advocacy*: Promote advocacy for policy reform and greater investment in women's safety.

CONCLUSION

This thorough analysis discloses that the dangers women are confronted with in Indian public spaces are not random events but organized results of the failure of urban planning, policy insufficiencies, and intersectional discrimination. The indications from Delhi and other Indian cities present that even though there exist enormous legislative frameworks and policy programs, women's mobility freedom and accessibility to public spaces are extremely limited.

The findings of the research highlight a few key points: Firstly, crime reports of rising cases of violence against women, despite numerous safety measures, suggest that present methods are inadequate. Delhi's consistent ranking as the most unsafe city for women, with a crime rate of almost three times the national average, indicates more fundamental structural problems within urban planning and governance.

Second, intersectional analysis makes evident that various categories of women experience compounded threats that need to be met with differentiated policy interventions. Dalit women, Muslim women, transgender people, women with disabilities, and North-Eastern women all experience distinct intersections of discrimination that are inadequately met by existing one-size-fits-all solutions for women's safety.

Third, comparative analysis at the international level shows that fully inclusive, participatory strategies embracing infrastructure development, policy change, and social transformation measures can produce wide-ranging improvements in women's safety and urban inclusion. Cities such as Seoul, Barcelona, and Vienna offer models that can be replicated in Indian contexts.

The solutions proposed underlie that developing safety cities for women demands intrinsic change of paradigms in urban planning, rather than just the addition of safety components to current systems. Such change should be centred on feminist urban planning values that take into account women's varied experiences and foster their active engagement in determining what makes cities liveable.

The economic estimation demonstrates that unsafe cities have large costs not only for individual women but for society at large through lower economic contribution, stunted human capital formation, and slowed-down social development. Investment in the safety of women is thus not merely an issue of rights but economic imperative.

However, achieving this transformation faces significant challenges, including resource constraints, institutional resistance, and deeply entrenched social attitudes. Addressing these challenges demands ongoing political dedication, sufficient financial resources, and enduring social transformation initiatives

The need to act on these issues is further compounded by India's urbanization, which will add millions of women to cities in the next few decades. It will be up to the decisions made today in urban planning and policy whether these women find cities to be places of opportunity and empowerment or exclusion and vulnerability.

Finally, making cities safe for women is not just a matter of preventing crime - it is a matter of empowering women to fully engage in city life and claim their right to the city. This means rethinking the city as a place for all its residents, where diversity is valued and inclusion is inherent in the very make-up of urban life. Only through such a radical makeover can Indian cities realize their potential as drivers of growth and justice.

The findings in this paper necessitate an urgent and sustained response from all stakeholders - government, civil society, urban professionals, and communities - to make Indian cities safe for all women to live, work, and flourish in. The price of not acting is not only one of individual pain but of the wasted potential of half of the city's population and the cities that they live in.

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