UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC SPACES IN WOMEN'S SAFETY PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

In India, the capital city of New Delhi into the global limelight for the brutal gang rape of a 23-year-old woman traveling on a bus in the year of 2012. This wasn't the first time that sexual violence had been perpetrated on the streets in Tamil Nadu. Day to day many problems women are facing in society. Clearly then, public spaces that are and should be by definition open to all, weren't equally accessible to all. women's fear of public space limits their freedom and enjoyment of public life and restricts their ability to benefit from opportunities and convenience (Deegan, 1987; Day et al., 2003. women's fear of public space limits their freedom and enjoyment of public life and restricts their ability to benefit from opportunities and convenience (Deegan, 1987; Day et al., 2003. In this background, this research study tries to analyse the public safety of women in Tiruchirappalli City with an objective to explore the issues and challenges of women's safety in public places and in transportation especially in Tiruchirappalli City. This research study is an exploratory in design. Both primary and secondary data have been collected for this research.

Keywords: Safe city, Public safety, women problems, violence

Introduction

Public spaces defined as "open, publicly accessible places where people go for group or individual activities" (Madanipour, 1996). UN report on Habitat clearly states that the eradicating discrimination, harassment, and violence against women in public places is the need to achieve gender parity by empowering all females. Sustainable Development Goals 11.7 and 5.2 are advocating to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. However, safety of women in the public places is still under threat. In India, irrespective of their caste, class, religion, gender and regions women are living under unsafe feeling both in private and public spaces. As considering the violence against women in public space are not given much attention and discussion by the mainstream society till the Nirbaya's brutal gang rape in capital city of New Delhi into the global limelight in the year of 2012. Even before this brutal violence, there were

various sexual violence had been perpetrated in the streets of country from city to remote villages. The violence committed against women in public spaces are indicated public spaces by definition open to all, weren't equally accessible to all. Women's fear of public spaces limits their freedom and enjoyment of public life as well as restricts their ability to benefit from opportunities and convenience (Deegan, 1987; Day et al., 2003). The 2012 Delhi gang rape case and followed by this justice Varma Committee report have increased awareness among people and made certain changes in Criminal Amendment Acts. However, many of the women in different parts of country/states are exposed to physical aggression, sexual harassment and other forms of unwelcome behaviours by men in public spaces.

The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu State announced in the assembly (2018), that a 13-point action plan was unveiled by the government post - Delhi Gang Rape the installation of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) in all public buildings and the booking of offenders in the Goondas Act of 1982, that provides for non-bailable retention up to one year. The government has executed the rule that educational institutions, hospitals, cinema theatres, banks, ATM counters, shopping malls, petrol bunks, and jewellery shops would be covered under the Tamil Nadu Urban Local Bodies (Installation of Closed-Circuit TV Units in Public Buildings) Rules, 2018. Tiruchirappalli City Corporation is a major Tier- II town in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and the administrative headquarters of the Tiruchirappalli District. This city is credited with being the best living, cleanest city and safer city in Tamil Nadu State. In this background, this research study tries to analyse the public safety of women in Tiruchirappalli City with an objective to explore the issues and challenges of women's safety in public places and in transportation especially in Tiruchirappalli City.

This research study is an exploratory in design. Both primary and secondary data have been collected for this research. Sixty respondents who were traveling regularly and accessing public spaces selected for data collection by using purposive sampling method. Structured mailed questionnaire has administered as toll for collecting data through online. Collected data have been analysed qualitatively by using percentage cum tabular analysis

Review of literature

The UN women (2011) defines public spaces as including streets and other neighbourhood spaces, public spaces of work such as markets and water distribution sites, public transportation, routes to and from schools and educational institutions, festivals, parks, sports facilities and other public recreational spaces and key public facilities such as toilets among others Social relationships between men and women lead to the understanding that the city as a built space is not gender neutral. These relationships are seen to be marked by dominance and resistance to dominance. Thus, in this scenario one must have a gender perspective when analysing the 'construction of public space and citizen safety policies (Vargas, 2006-2007). Waltzer (1986 cited in Valenine 1989) denies public place as 'the space we share with strangers, people who aren't our relatives, friends or work associates.' With these public spaces are attached pre conceived onions as well as fears, arising from many varied

factors, as discussed ahead. Women in most developing cities have witnessed an increase in the number of public transport threat threats to safety and security (Choudhary et al.,2018).Studies have shown that women who use public transport are at risk of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, including verbal harassment, extortion, inappropriate touching, indecent exposure, and rape (UN Women, 2014). According to traditional gender roles in India, women belong to the private sphere, the area of patriarchal protection, whereas the public space is seen as inherently dangerous and belonging to the men (Dhillon and Bakaya 2014).

Unequal Public Places

Generally, people are accessing public places and different mode of transportation to meet out their needs and transforming their knowledge and skills for social development. However, the experiences of an individual's / groups are differ based on their given gender identity. The below table reveals that in how and what extend women are encountering issues and problems while accessing public spaces and travelling for different purposes.

Problems Encountering by Women in Accessing Public Spaces

Women Safety	No .of the Respondents	Percentage
Yes	12	20
No	48	80
Vulnerable Gender*	**No.of the Respondents**	**Percentage**
Female	42	70
Male	12	20
Transgender	30	50
Unsafe Public Places*	**No.of the Respondents**	**Percentage**
Bus	52	87
Bus Stand	43	72
Markets	23	38
Outside College/School	12	20
Entertainment Places	38	63
Kind of violence*	**No.of the Respondents**	**Percentage**
Stalking	42	70
Sexual Harassment	24	40
Sexual Assault	20	33
Eve teasing	33	55
Kidnapping	3	5
Impact*	**No.of the Respondents**	**Percentage**
Fear of being alone	55	92
Mental Stress	35	58
loss of confidence	16	27
Lack of mobility	47	78

Unsafe of Time		
Morning	5	3
Afternoon	10	17
Evening	5	3
Night	25	47
All	15	25
Causes		
Poor maintain	39	65
Alcoholism	48	80
Poor lighting	25	42
Lack of respect for women	15	25
Safe Transport Mode		
Auto	30	50
Bus	45	75
Car	12	20
Train	10	17
Cab	17	28
Kinds of problem in Transport		
Sexual abuse	36	60
Crowd	17	28
Theft	25	42
Intentioned conductor	19	31
Lack of regard for Traffic Rules	10	17
Victimizer Ages		
Under 16	10	17
17-25	39	65
26-35	15	25
36-45	18	30
46-55	10	17
Reasons for Unsafe		
Travel alone	30	50
Easy Targets	21	35
Lack of knowledge how to protect	19	32
Frequency level of Affecting		
More than 5 times	9	15
Everyday	4	7
2-5 times	12	20

1 time	35	58

In this research, majority (80 per cent) of the of the respondents felt that public spaces in Trichy city is unsafe to women and 20 per cent of them are felt safe for women. Moreover, they expressed lack of safety mechanism such as limited patrolling in peak hours, poor lighting in streets/lanes and connecting points, insufficient dissemination of helpline numbers at different places are the primary reasons mentioned. The lack of safety measures making the situations more vulnerable especially women (70 per cent) and trans people (50 per cent) are more vulnerable while comparing others. Also, they stated women and trans persons are easy targets for stalking, eve-teasing, sexual harassments. Similarly, these people are encountered embarrassments, humiliations in public spaces and accessing every day with indescribable experience. As comparing the women's safety at various public spaces, 87 per cent of the women respondents are voiced buses are most unsafe. Almost all women had experience of physical harassment, misbehaviour through men. Followed by bus stand/stops (72 per cent), entertainment places (63 per cent) and markets (38 per cent) are unsafe of places for women. Whereas, women are facing multiple form of violence in public spaces the research participants stated that women are facing certain problems very frequently in public spaces such as stalking (70 per cent), sexual harassment (40 per cent) and teasing(55 per cent) which includes cat calling, lewd remarks, unwanted sexual contacts like rubbing and fondling. Despite in fact already women are facing many problems at home and work places in their day to day life; these kind of unsafe environment of public places also further worsening as well as directly affect their well-being.

The problems faced by women in public spaces have been created lots of impact in their routine access. Majority (92 per cent) of the research participants are reported that women are got fear to access/ travel alone, hesitance to reveal family members, fear of psychosis, mental stress, losing confident, restricted mobility after faced such problems. Irrespective of time either day light or dark nights all the time women are facing the risk threats. The intensity only differs, they reported that night time (47 per cent) most unsafe time as comparing afternoon (17 per cent) especially busy public places like bus stands, railway station entertainment places, around 25 per cent reported all timings are unsafe to women. One of the main reasons to causes of women unsafety (80 per cent) said by them was consuming alcohol and locating wine shops in the public places. Next to this (65 per cent) they have reported lack of maintaining the public places such as women public toilets, waiting halls, mother breast- feeding hall . poor lighting (42 per cent) and disrespecting women's needs and concern (25 per cent)

Travel and Transportations

A lot of people are traveling every day and commuting one place to another to do their task and meet out needs. Among these majority of the people are relying public transport. Equally Women and girls are also travelling for various objectives mainly for employment and education regularly. As studying the women's safety in transportation, 75 per cent of them are reported that bus is safest transport to women because most of the time the co-passengers are supported whenever the problematic situation occurs and likewise offenders also scare to make

nuisances. Moreover, they have expressed auto (50 per cent), registered cab (28 per cent) are safe transport to short time travel as tracing /tracking mechanisms are available at present. Only 17 per cent of participants are reported that train also safe however women are felt more scare the train travel due to theft issues. Women are frequently experience various forms of verbal and non- verbal abuses and violence in public transportation. More than half of the participants (60 per cent) shared, women are facing sexual abuse (like sexually motivated touching, obscene gestures, sexual comments, grabbing), theft (42 per cent) and harassment by conductors (31 per cent), Misbehaviours of crowd (28 per cent). Considering the age of the Victimizer, under 16 – 55years age group of women have suffered in public spaces. The majority of them are fall under the category of 17 – 25 years age group who are the women coming out for their education and employment purpose. Among them 58 per cent reported that they have victimised one time in the public places. Twenty 20 per cent of them reported that they have suffered 2-5 times in public places, and 22 per cent of them are encountered every day in different ways at public places.

Findings:

❖ Seventy percentage of the research participants reported that women have affected stalking in public spaces. nearly 1 in 3 women and about 1 in 6 men are stalked at some point during their lifetimes by men.

❖ More than half (67 per cent) of the respondents said that night time more unsafe time for women.

❖ Opinion of safe transport, (75 per cent) reported that bus is safe transport because most of the time the passengers are in buses and supporting the problematic situation

❖ Sixty per cent of the respondents expressed women have experienced sexual abuse (sexually motivated touching, obscene gestures, sexual comments, grabbing,) travelling in bus.

❖ Ninety-two per cent of the respondents have fear of travel alone, mental stress, loss of confident, and restricted mobility after faced the problem,

❖ Observed that majority of the victimizers are under between 17 – 25 years age group, as these age group women are coming out for their education and job so most of the time they suffered at public places.

❖ Almost all the women are encountered abuses one time in public places when they are accessing

Suggestions

❖ Awareness should be given to all about decent public behaviour and display helpline numbers visibly at various place of public spaces

- ❖ Public safety measures such as lighting in streets/lanes/ connecting pathways, patrolling, police helpline desks should be improved in the city
- ❖ To prevent sexual harassment/abuses in transports should sort out by fixing surveillance cameras in bus
- ❖ Consuming alocol in public places should be strictly purnished and removal of wineshops located in rowded public laces an urgent need ,it is one the main root cause for unsafe public places.
- ❖ Safety auditing should be conducted by corporation periodically to ensure the public safety of women.

Conclusion

This research study has explored the different dimensions and constrains faced by women while access to resources in general; public spaces in particular. Moreover, it has been reflected the reality of existing structural gender inequalities and how public spaces are gendered. The problems encountered by women in public spaces are not much to come for mainstream attention and debate due to prevailing gender insensitivity in society. Also, unequal access to public spaces directly either restrict or control over the women's mobility, participation in development process and affects whole process of women's empowerment. Until to rethink, give priority to develop policies and strategies to crate gender-neutral to ensure accessing safe public spaces otherwise to attaining the sustainable development goal 11.2 will become a greatest challenge i.e., By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

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