

Perceived Safety of Women in Public Spaces: Analyzing Challenges and Policy Interventions in the NCT of Delhi

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Abstract

Perceived safety of women in public spaces is an important concern that affects their mobility, social participation, and economic opportunities in a significant way. The present study explored the predictors of women's perceived safety in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, which is often reported as unsafe for women as the country is characterized by gender-based violence, harassment, and urban insecurity. Using a mixed methodology, the study incorporates primary survey and interview data with secondary crime reports, spatial mapping, and urban safety audit data to identify determinants of women's insecurity. The results also show that bad street lighting, absence of police patrolling, unsafe public transport, and poor last-mile connectivity contribute to women's fear of crime. More problematic social and cultural factors—including low participation on the community level, gender circles, and the lack of women-friendly urban design—have contributed to safety concerns. These comparative examples drawn from international case studies, in cities such as Bogotá, Mexico City, and London, show that integrated urban safety strategies—combining uplifted infrastructure, pre-emptive law enforcement, and community-led safety initiatives—can dramatically improve women's safety. The findings lead the study to suggest policy points such as gender-sensitive urban planning, increased law enforcement, better public transport infrastructure, and technological safety interventions. In conclusion, public space safety for women is a crucial component in making Delhi a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable urban ecosystem. This shows that for a safer and accessible Delhi, we need to have multi-sectoral strategies, and the efforts need to be holistic and integrated.

Keywords: *Perceived Safety, Women's Safety, Public Spaces, Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning, Crime Prevention*

1. INTRODUCTION

Public spaces are crucial for the dynamics of social interaction, economic participation, and urban mobility. Yet for Delhi women, these very spaces can morph into precarious spaces characterized by vulnerability, harassment, and a constraining geographical freedom, rooted in gender-based violence, pathological urban infrastructure, and societal norms. Delhi's National Capital Territory (NCT) has repeatedly been named one of the most unsafe cities for women in India, with a high degree of reported street harassment, lack of safety while using public transport, and restriction on nighttime mobility (Grover, 2016). The way women feel about safety is key to the way they experience the city—how, when, and where they move about, and how this impacts their access to education, employment, and social life. Despite initiatives by the government—from women-only metro coaches to extensive CCTV surveillance and helpline numbers—harassment and crime fear are inescapable. The fear of verbal harassment, physical assault, and stalking prevents women from using public transport, walking alone at night, and being able to freely access public spaces. According to Bansal et al. (2022), poor street lighting, lack of police patrolling, and poorly maintained public infrastructure are among the significant contributors that collude to restrict the mobility of people. From an urban development perspective, limiting women's movement due to concerns about public safety not only exacerbates social and gender inequalities but also prevents achieving the benefits of full participation of women in public life.

The objective of this study is to understand women's perceptions of safety in public spaces in Delhi and, in particular, how urban design, law enforcement, and social initiatives can affect these perceptions. Bringing together survey data, crime data, and comparative case studies, the research looks at how the

physical infrastructure, social environment, and policies shape women's experiences of safety. This study is framed by the research questions:

1. What are the major determinants affecting women's perceived safety in public spaces in NCT of Delhi?
2. How do built environment features—like lighting, visibility, and surveillance—relate to perceived safety?
3. What urban planning and policy interventions can be made to facilitate greater safety for women in public spaces?

Answering these questions, this study aims to generate actionable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and law enforcement agencies to foster a safe and inclusive urban space for women in Delhi. The study additionally benchmarks Delhi's safety measures against global best practices from world cities that have effectively implemented gender-sensitive urban planning and community-led safety measures. It boils down to not merely being a law enforcement challenge but an urban development challenge calling for multi-sectoral synergy and comprehensive public policy interventions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Particularly in fast urbanizing areas where gender-based mobility disparities are clearly visible, research on women's perceived safety in public spaces has attracted increasing attention. Many studies have looked at how women's experiences of safety are shaped by the junction of urban infrastructure, public policy, and societal views. With an emphasis on Delhi specifically, this section summarizes important research on the built environment, social and cultural aspects, crime patterns, and governmental initiatives affecting women's safety in public areas.

2.1 Built Environment: Women's Safety

Women's fear of crime is much influenced by the physical features of public places including lighting, visibility, and access to security services (Grover, 2016). Particularly at night, poorly illuminated streets, separated pedestrian pathways, and secret areas (like alleyways and underpasses) make women more vulnerable (Dhawan & Ali, 2018). Studies by Boomsma & Steg (2014) show that poor street lighting fuels more fear and avoidance behavior, therefore restricting women's free access to public areas.

Furthermore shown to have conflicting effects on safety impressions are the presence of police patrols and CCTV cameras. Although surveillance systems could discourage crime, they are not always enough in stopping harassment since many offenders use busy areas where it is difficult to detect (Zurawski, 2010). On the other hand, cities like Bogotá and London that have used well-lit, mixed-use urban design techniques—that is, those that have witnessed considerable increases in women's safety—have shown (Gupta et al., 2025).

2.2 Social and Cultural Aspects Affecting View of Safety

Beyond infrastructure, women's experiences in public areas are much shaped by social dynamics and gender norms. Mahambare et al. (2025) underline that socially created worries of violence often restrict women's movement and may or may not coincide with real crime rates. The "social policing" of women's behavior—that is, discouragement of them from going alone or at night—further highlights spatial gender inequities.

Women's fear of harassment is higher in male-dominated public areas, such crowded bus stops and metro stations, where they frequently encounter unwelcome attention, verbal abuse, or physical touch, according to Bansal et al. (2022). Women-only spaces in transportation systems (such as reserved metro coaches) have been generally embraced as a positive intervention since the presence of other women in public locations tends to boost views of safety (Tayal & Mehta, 2021). But gender-segregated environments support the idea that women's safety calls for isolation rather than systematic changes, therefore neglecting the underlying reasons of insecurity (Borker, 2024).

2.3 Safety of Women and Crime Trends in Delhi

Delhi has been regularly classified as among the most dangerous cities in India for women. Studies show among the most often reported crimes against women street harassment, stalking, and sexual assault in public places (Nangia et al., 2019). With 51% of Delhi's women reporting instances in public

transportation, the Hollaback! International Survey (2015) revealed that over 90% of women in Delhi have personally encountered some kind of sexual harassment in public spaces.

Studies by Shah et al. (2017) show even further how fear of crime transcends official crime figures since many incidences of harassment go unreported because of social shame and mistrust of law enforcement. Underreporting of harassment cases distorts crime statistics, hence urban designers and legislators find it challenging to identify high-risk locations and carry out focused actions. In response, community-driven safety audits—like those carried out by SafetiPin—have been quite helpful in mapping dangerous areas and pointing up elements causing women's anxiety (Viswanath & Basu, 2015).

2.4 Policy Interventions and World Best Practices

Delhi has launched several policy projects aimed at women's protection, including CCTV camera installation, female police officer deployment, and women-only transportation choices. Research indicates, meanwhile, that these policies have had limited success because of gaps in enforcement, lack of community involvement, and inadequate infrastructure upgrades (Dhawan & Ali, 2018).

Comparative studies including other world cities show that a multi-layered approach—combining urban design enhancements, tougher law enforcement, and social interventions—yields better outcomes. Women-only buses, more female security presence, and anti-harassment awareness campaigns were among the gender-sensitive transit initiatives the Bogotá, Colombia, government instituted. Likewise, Mexico City's "Viajemos Seguros" (Let's Travel Safe) program unveiled gender-segregated metro carriages (Gupta et al., 2025) and panic buttons in public transit (Gupta et al., 2025).

Another instance where community-based neighborhood watch programs and better-lit pedestrian paths have helped to improve safety impressions is London (Basu et al., 2022). These foreign encounters underline the need of complete strategies combining community involvement with infrastructure and policy-driven solutions.

2.5 Synopsis of Research Vacuum and Literary Notes

According to the examined literature, social and environmental elements together influence women's safety in public places. Common issues across metropolitan contexts are poor illumination, insufficient law enforcement, and high-risk transit locations; socio-cultural standards also limit women's movement. Most current studies, however, have concentrated on certain elements of urban safety—such as crime trends or transportation security—rather than using an integrated framework that takes several contributing elements into account.

Moreover, especially in relation to international best practices, Delhi's safety interventions' efficacy is not well investigated empirically. Few studies examine policy efficacy, public awareness, and long-term infrastructure changes while many stress the issue of harassment and fear of crime. By means of a thorough investigation of women's felt safety in Delhi, combining survey data, crime mapping, and comparative insights, this study seeks to close these gaps by generating actionable recommendations for urban safety enhancement.

3. METHODOLOGY

Combining quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and geographical analysis, this mixed-methods study evaluates women's perceived safety in public areas in Delhi's National Capital Territory (NCT). The study intends to offer a thorough knowledge of the elements influencing women's safety perceptions and find practical policy interventions by including primary data collecting with secondary data analysis.

3.1 Techniques of Data Collecting

The study gathered main information by means of semi-structured interviews with women from various socioeconomic backgrounds in Delhi and systematic questionnaires. To guarantee representation across several demographics—including age, occupation, and geographic location—respondents were chosen using a stratified random sample method. The poll questions concentrated on:

- Views of safety in different public areas (e.g., marketplaces, parks, metro stations, bus stops, and empty roadways).
- Individual encounters with public space harassment or anxiety.
- Preferred safety measures and policy initiatives; factors influencing sensations of safety including lighting, surveillance, and police presence.

To further provide professional insights on present safety policies, implementation difficulties, and opportunities for development, semi-structured interviews were also held with legislators, law enforcement personnel, and urban designers.

3.2 Additional Data Examination

Emphasizing events of sexual harassment, stalking, and gender-based violence in public settings, the study examined crime records from the Delhi Police to augment the main data. Based on reported crime statistics and urban infrastructure evaluations, spatial mapping methods also helped to pinpoint high-risk regions.

The study also included information from SafetiPin, a mobile-based safety audit tool evaluating public areas depending on important safety criteria including lighting, security presence, crowd density, and general accessibility (Viswanath & Basu, 2015). GIS-based mapping methods enabled the visualization of how urban design impacts safety perceptions by pointing out areas needing quick infrastructure enhancements.

3.3 Comparative Case Study Examination

The study contrasted Delhi's policies with effective gender-sensitive urban planning projects from cities like Bogotá, Mexico City, and London to help Delhi's safety measures fit a worldwide context. The comparison study concentrated on:

- Infrastructure enhancements (such as safe transport centers, street illumination).
- Safety projects run by communities;
- public transport security measures including gender-segregated options and emergency response systems.

The study sought to find policy flaws and possible remedies fit for the local situation by measuring Delhi's safety policies against international best standards.

3.4 Methods of Data Analysis

Triangulating the gathered data helped to guarantee quality and dependability.

- Descriptive statistics were used to examine survey responses to spot trends in women's experiences and safety issues.
- Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews revealed reoccurring themes on safety perceptions, policy efficacy, and community involvement.
- High-risk zones were identified using GIS mapping's spatial data, then linked to recorded crime statistics to create vulnerability trends in particular locations.

3.5 Moral Issues

Considering the delicate nature of the subject, ethical precautions were taken to guard respondents. Each response from the voluntary study participants kept private. Participants might share their experiences without worry of consequences by means of anonymously administered questionnaires and interviews. The study followed ethical research principles established by human research ethics committees and institutional review boards (IRBs).

3.6 Research Restraints

Although the study offers insightful analysis, some limits have to be admitted. Recall bias could affect self-reported statistics on harassment and safety issues, so underreporting or overstretching women's experiences depending on personal opinions. Furthermore, the study mostly concentrates on urban public areas in Delhi, hence its conclusions might not be completely applicable in semi-urban or rural environments. Ultimately, even if GIS-based mapping offers insightful analysis, real-time data on changing safety hazards is still lacking since urban infrastructure changes with time and incomplete crime reporting. This multi-method approach lets one evaluate women's safety in public areas of Delhi holistically. The study guarantees a complete knowledge of the difficulties and possible solutions by using survey data, criminal records, spatial analysis, and worldwide comparisons. The approach helps to find policy gaps and priority areas for intervention, therefore guiding the creation of more successful urban safety plans with regard for women.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Examining women's impressions of safety in public areas of Delhi, this part offers the main conclusions

of the research. The results underline important safety issues, elements affecting felt security, and the success of present safety campaigns.

4.1. Perceived Safety Levels in Various Public Areas

Women's sense of safety differs depending on the public area; metro stations (72%) are seen as the safest while empty highways (29%) are the most dangerous. Due to inadequate illumination and lack of police presence, parks (51%) and bus stations (48%) also had worse safety perceptions. These results are compiled in a table 1.

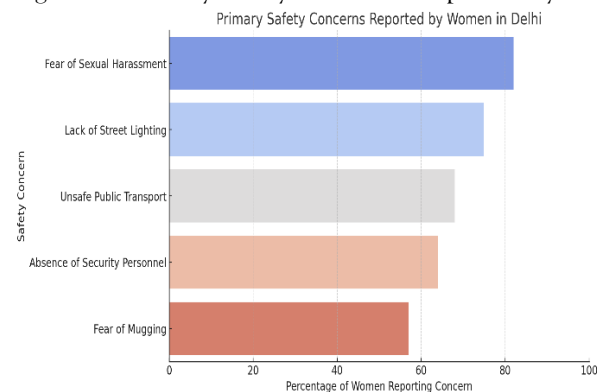
Table 1: Perceived Safety Levels in Different Public Spaces

Public Space	Percentage Feeling Safe (%)
Metro Stations	72
Bus Stops	48
Markets	60
Parks	51
Deserted Roads	29

4.2. Main Issues related to Safety Announced by Women

Women expressed several issues compromising their sense of safety; the most important one is fear of sexual harassment (82%). Lack of street illumination (75%), dangerous public transportation (68%), and lack of security guards (64%), were other main issues. These issues help to explain limited mobility, self-imposed behavior changes, and reliance on safety nets. One can see a bar chart showing these issues.

Figure 1: Primary Safety Concerns Reported by Women in Delhi



4.3. Effect on Safety Perception of Urban Infrastructure

- **Lighting and Visibility:** Mostly at night, inadequate street lighting was found to be the main obstacle to women's mobility. Darkly illuminated bus stop, park, and lonely pedestrian regions heightened harassment concern.
- **Surveillance and Security Presence:** Unless accompanied by obvious police patrols or security personnel, CCTV cameras were found to have a minimal influence on lowering fear. Women said they felt safer in places under active law enforcement than under passive surveillance.
- **Public Transport Safety:** Women's safety issues were especially evident during last-mile connectivity; many of them expressed anxiety when travelling to and from bus stops or metro stations.

4.4. Part played by social and community elements

- **Presence of Other Women:** Women felt safer in packed spaces like shopping centers and markets where other women were present.
- **Neighborhood Trust:** Strong neighborhood networks in high-trust settings helped to explain reduced reported terror levels.
- Many women did not disclose instances of harassment because of mistrust of law enforcement or concern of social consequences.

4.5. Successfulness of Current Safety Policies

Although programs like women-only metro coaches and CCTV installations have somewhat enhanced safety, execution still suffers certain shortcomings. Women said public safety rules have to go beyond

surveillance to include proactive community involvement and infrastructure development.

4.6. Comparison with World Best Standards

Delhi's actions against successful models in Bogotá, Mexico City, and London underline the importance of integrated safety policy. Cities who have embraced multi-layered strategies involving urban design enhancements, community policing, and real-time safety monitoring have shown more success in lowering actual crime rates and anxiety.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that a complex interaction of urban infrastructure, law enforcement presence, public transportation conditions, and social dynamics shapes women's perceived safety in public areas of Delhi. The main deterrents to safe mobility reported by women as being fear of sexual harassment (82%), low street lighting (75%), and insufficient security staff (64%). While bus stops (48%), parks (51%), and desolate roads (29%), public areas including metro stations were seen as rather safer (72%), while inadequate upkeep, lack of surveillance, and limited pedestrian activity at night claimed to be highly dangerous. Women routinely avoided poorly lighted regions, solitary paths, and busy but controlled spaces like public buses, so clearly built environment elements affected safety perceptions. Although CCTV cameras are now widely installed, respondents said that visible law enforcement presence was a more effective deterrent to crime than passive surveillance, in line with past studies showing that simple technological interventions are inadequate unless combined with proactive policing. With many women experiencing concern while heading to and from metro stations, riding auto-rickshaws, or strolling alone at night, public transportation became clear as a major site of insecurity—especially last-mile connectivity. Social and cultural elements also greatly affected mobility patterns; many women self-restrain their movement depending on perceived risk levels, avoiding particular sites, or depending on male escorts for nocturnal travel. Underreporting of harassment instances resulting from social stigma, mistrust of law enforcement, and fear of reprisal aggravates the issue even further and results in many perpetrators not penalized at all. Comparative analysis of world best practices in cities including Bogotá, Mexico City, and London reveals that an integrated safety approach—combining infrastructure improvements, community-led policing, and gender-inclusive urban design—significantly increases women's confidence in navigating public spaces. Although Delhi's present safety policies are improving in several areas (like women-only metro coaches and helpline services), they remain insufficient without accompanying policies emphasizing on prevention rather than reaction. A really safe and inclusive city for women depends on a comprehensive approach combining urban planning, tougher enforcement, social awareness programs, and community participation.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study emphasizes how several elements affect women's felt safety in public areas of Delhi: urban infrastructure, law enforcement efficiency, social standards, and public transportation accessibility. Although programs including women-only metro coaches, CCTV cameras, and emergency helplines have been launched, their efficacy is still restricted because of poor execution, uneven law enforcement, and gender-sensitive urban planning lacking in all around. Fear of harassment, inadequate last-mile connectivity, and the lack of proactive security measures in important public areas including bus stations, parks, and abandoned roads continue to cause women to have mobility restrictions.

The survey finds that the most major obstacles to women's safety are inadequate street lighting, invisible police patrols absent, and dangerous public transportation choices. Social and cultural elements also contribute to limited mobility; many women turn to self-imposed curfews and avoidance strategies to reduce their risk of victimization. Delhi's fear of crime goes beyond mere victimization to include psychological and emotional toll that constant alertness and defensive conduct impose on women's independence and involvement in public life. Comparative analysis including global best practices in Bogotá, Mexico City, and London shows that an integrated approach—combining physical safety measures with community involvement and gender-inclusive urban planning—yields better outcomes in reducing crime and enhancing women's confidence in public spaces.

The results highlight how women's safety is a more general urban development problem than only a law enforcement one. Lack of gender-sensitive city planning has led to poorly built public places unable to meet the safety needs of women, therefore exposing them in underpasses, poorly lighted streets, secluded locations, and transportation hubs. Delhi's public places would continue to alienate and threaten women, hence limiting their economic participation, social freedom, and access to basic services, absent proactive and intersectional policy reforms. To thereby solve these issues and build a safer, more inclusive city for everybody, a thorough, multi-stakeholder strategy is needed.

The following policy suggestions are meant to improve women's safety in public areas of Delhi in order to solve the problems noted in this study:

1. Enhanced Built Environment and Urban Infrastructure
 - Upgrading Public Lighting: Emphasizing last-mile connectivity, smart lighting solutions in high-risk areas including bus stops, metro stations, parks, and pedestrian paths are implemented.
 - Creating public environments sensitive to gender: Women-led urban safety audits will help to redesign public areas with open paths, clear sightlines, and active pedestrian-friendly zones meant to deter crime.
 - Maintaining Public Spaces: Ensuring that parks, underpasses, and transportation hubs are clean, well-maintained, and free from abandoned constructions that support an environment of insecurity.
2. Building Surveillance and Law Enforcement
 - Increasing Police Presence in High-Risk Areas: Especially in early mornings and late evenings, additional female officers should be deployed and regular patrolling in dangerous areas assured.
 - Encouragement of resident and volunteer-led safety patrols in nearby local communities will help to boost social monitoring and intervention capability.
 - Integrating real-time monitoring centers with quick-response teams helps to better utilize CCTV surveillance so that it is not just passive surveillance instrument but also active safety mechanism.
3. Public Transportation and Improvements in Last-Mile Connectivity
 - Safe Public Transport Initiatives: Increasing the number of women conductors and security guards on buses and metro lines and so broad the availability of women-only public transport choices.
 - Establishing well-lit sidewalks, monitored ride-sharing stations, women-friendly auto-rickshaw and taxi services with certified safety measures helps to improve last-mile connectivity.
 - Safe Public Transportation Awareness Campaigns: Running city-wide initiatives to inform passengers about legal safeguards against harassment in public transportation and reporting systems.
4. Programs of Community Involvement and Social Awareness
 - Strengthening digital safety solutions include SafetiPin and Women's Emergency Response Apps, therefore guaranteeing prompt police response on reported safety concerns.
 - Men and women should be taught gender-based violence, legal rights, and bystander intervention strategies to inspire active involvement in crime prevention.
 - Encouraging a Culture of Reporting Crimes: Using anonymous complaint systems, victim-friendly police reporting tools, and fast-track judicial procedures for public space harassment and assault claims.
5. Policy Integration and Urban Planning Sensibly Gender-Based
 - Including women's safety into urban development policies: Requiring gender impact studies for new public infrastructure projects and including women's safety as a mandatory factor in municipal design rules
 - Periodic Women's Safety Audits: Working with local community organizations, law enforcement, and urban designers, periodical safety inspections of public areas
 - Intersectional Policy Approach: Ensuring that policies serve women from many socioeconomic backgrounds, differently-abled women, and underprivileged groups, therefore addressing their safety issues holistically.

A basic right and a cornerstone of sustainable urban development is ensuring women's safety in public areas. The results of this research show that the accessibility, safety, and inclusiveness of public areas strongly relate women's freedom to negotiate the city. Delhi, a fast expanding metropolitan metropolis,

has to change from reactive safety policies to a proactive, multi-stakeholder approach including urban planning, law enforcement, public involvement, and policy innovation. Although some areas—such the launch of women-only metro coaches and more monitoring—have seen improvement, there is still a long way to go toward building a city where women feel really safe and empowered. This calls for reconsidering urban areas from a gender-inclusive standpoint so that, in every phase of urban planning and policy-making, women's mobility and security take front stage. Delhi may lead by example for gender-inclusive urban development by implementing thorough safety plans, enhancing law enforcement responsibility, building infrastructure, and encouraging community involvement. Global best practices in cities that have actively sought to improve women's safety through urban planning, policy implementation, and cultural transformation show how methodically actions could produce safer and more accessible cities for women. A city that is safe for women is safe for everyone—and giving gender-sensitive urban planning a priority helps Delhi to become more fair, vibrant, and inclusive for all of its people.

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