Women's Safety and Security in the City of Mumbai

Booma Halpeth[1] Nitinkumar M. Patil[2]
The S.I.A. College of Higher Education, Dombivli (E)
Email- nitinkumar.patil1970@gmail.com
Corresponding Author- **Booma Halpeth**
DOI-

Abstract

Being financial and economic capital of India, no doubt the city of Mumbai is on the track to fulfilling the basic, economic and infrastructural needs of its residents. However, social growth is something that the city is lacking. Though Mumbai is known as a women's friendly city, there are many inadequacies in the safety and security it provides to women. Considering this fact, based on both primary and secondary data, this theoretical paper is an attempt to understand the safety and security provided to slum dwelling, commuting and working women in the city. The study revealed that slum-dwelling women face stressful conditions due to the absence of toilet facilities, fear of demolition and violence against them. On the other hand, commuting women expect safety and security during their journey to work and also at their place of work. Though the state government and local governing bodies, police forces and individuals have taken steps to overcome the situation, there is a need of strengthening safety and security measures for the well-being of women in the city.

Key Words: Women, Safety, Security, Mumbai, Harassment

Introduction

Cities have been envisioned as spaces of liberation, collaboration and ideas, Meher, S. (2016). Urban thinker, Edward Glaeser states that the city "makes humanity shine most brightly," Edward G. (2011). Unfortunately, this shining view of the city does not apply to all the cities in India and abroad, and not equally. For several women, cities are somewhat spaces of fear, which they access while having to constantly look over their shoulders. This opinion is not just circumstantial. The United Nation's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces program, which started in 2010, recognized that, cities all around the world were becoming unsafe for women, UN, Women (2016). With the ushering in of economic liberalization, Indian cities have witnessed a continual recasting of spaces to keep pace with the burgeoning urbanization. The present scenario is such that while on the one hand, the cities provide ample opportunities for both women and men, on the other the nature of urban development has resulted in the increased exclusion of women, particularly from the marginalized sections; it has reinforced the existing structure of gender-based violence. The emergence and growth of the 'modern city', essentially exclusive in character, has generated new research that draws linkages between urban development, governance and the ever-increasing violence and marginalization. Gender-based violence and safety are now being analysed within a framework that extends beyond the immediate and the most visible forms of violence, taking into its fold issues related to infrastructure, city planning, and governance, Jagori (2010). Women's safety and security in the Indian city of Mumbai have been an intensely debated topic. Mumbai, the city considered to be the most female-friendly in India, the public space is largely male-dominated and not designed for enhancing the access of women to it, Anni-Elina Vänskä (2019). While there are various ways by which women's safety and security can be discussed, the findings presented in this paper are limited to women's safety and security in slum areas, during their journey to work and at their places of work.

Aims and Objectives

The present study aims to understand women's safety and security in Mumbai. This has been achieved with the help of following objectives.

1. To know the status of women's safety and security in slums, public transport and at the places of their work.
2. To investigate the government's policies and programs on women's safety and security.
3. To understand the policing initiatives on women's safety and security
4. To formulate suggestions for mitigating the issue of women's safety and security in the city of Mumbai.

Materials and Methods

The present study is based on the data collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data are obtained through structured questionnaires, personal interviews and empirical evidence. Interviews of police officials and city bus employees were conducted to obtain the information. In all 93 slum-dwelling and 86 commuting women were also interviewed and requested to fill out the questionnaires. The secondary sources of information like newspapers, research articles and publications were referred to in view of getting information on women's safety and security in Mumbai.

The City of Mumbai

Mumbai, with its twenty million people, is a densely populated and largest city in the country. Located on India's west coast, it is the capital city of Maharashtra as well as the commercial and financial center of India. As the city offers a variety of jobs and career opportunities, Mumbai is known as a magnet for migrants. It is the center of Mumbai Metro Politon Region. The city is located on seven islands that are well connected through roads and railways. Mumbai experiences a tropical climate. It varies between the dry period extending from the month of October to May and the wet period from June to September. The cool season from December to February is followed by the hot season from March to May. The period from June to September constitutes the southwest monsoon season while the months of October and November form the post-monsoon season. Flooding is the major problem in the city which occurs during the southwest monsoon season. On an average, the city experiences 27^0C as an annual temperature and 2,213 mm average annual rainfall.

Results

The city of Mumbai is well known for being the most women-friendly city in India. However, the safety and security of women depend on the nature of an area in the city they occupy and the kind of house they live in. It is found that more than 40% population of this city lives in slums where open defecation is one of the common practices. Women in slums, due to the fear of being harassed, try to reduce the number of trips they need to take to the toilet. In all 29% of slum-dwelling women replied that they avoided going to the toilet for defecation and 6% avoided going for urination. In order to reduce the number of trips, women reduced their food and drink intake, which in turn affected their health leading to malnutrition and anemia. Women in slum areas must deal with the ever-present threat of demolition. Thus, they experience psychological fear, stress and shame. In such conditions, they suffer from sexual abuse and molestation. In all 48% of the slum-dwelling women have faced stressful conditions due to the fear of demolition, while 4% of women have been harassed sexually. Though the government has offered legal protection to women, 6% of women faced the problem of domestic violence.

The survey on commuting women showed that in all 23% of women feel safe while traveling through the public transport system. Out of these, the majority of women (94%) feel safe while traveling by local trains instead of taking hired taxis. All the commuting women interviewed were found satisfied with the ladies special train provided by the railway administration. The majority of ladies commuters (73%) are comfortable and feel safe traveling by city bus. More than half (69%) of the ladies commuters feel insecure about traveling alone by hired taxi.

The majority of the women in Mumbai either work in offices, industries or in schools and colleges. Construction sites and markets are the other places where women go for work. Majority of the women (61%) felt that the environment at their workplace is safe for them. However, around 4% of women were found victimized either by sexual harassment, unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors or other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

Women's Safety and security measures implemented in the city

Women's safety and security in slum areas

Several measures have been undertaken for the safety and security of slum-dwelling women in the city. Street lights are intensified especially at the corners of the roads, common toilets are being constructed for women, toll-free helpline numbers are provided to the women by the police force and CCTVs are installed for constant vigilance at prominent places.

Women's safety and security in public transport
Local trains

The Mumbai suburban railways are called the lifelines of the metropolis. The rail network in the city is the busiest commuter train system in the world; with 8 million people using the train to commute daily, overcrowding, here reaches epic proportions. Considering this fact, the railway administration has provided some facilities to women commuters.

Separate compartment for ladies in regular trains:

This has offered some ease, safety, privacy and security to commuting women.

Ladies Special trains:

The ladies special trains are a boon for the commuting women who had previously struggled to board the ladies compartment in the regular trains. The provision of an entire train for working women has made their journey safe and comfortable.

Special security for lady passengers:

In view of ensuring a safe and secure journey for commuting women, the central railway has provided police security.

CCTV in ladies coaches:

Central Railway is planning to install CCTVs in the compartments reserved for ladies by the month of March 2023 to enhance safety and security measures.

Women Empowerment In Modern Age

City Buses:

Some seats are reserved for women in city buses to provide them safety and security.

Women's safety and security at workplaces

Implementation of *Vishakha* guidelines, a set of procedural guidelines for use in cases of sexual harassment, formation of prevention of sexual harassment cell, providing clean washrooms in sufficient numbers, to avail rest room cum changing room, a toll-free helpline number is made available to enhance the safety and security of women at workplace. CCTVs are installed in offices and in common places.

Government's Policies and Programmes

Use of technology to support smart policing and safety management, a safe city project has been sanctioned by the center for Mumbai. A national database on sexual offenders and an investigation tracking system for sexual offenses to monitor and track time-bound investigations in sexual assault cases in accordance with criminal law are implemented. The government of Maharashtra has established the 'Prevention of Atrocities on Women' cell in Mumbai to ensure women's security, women help desks are established for the prevention, detection and investigation of crime against women, Mahila Suraksha Committees are established to provide assistance to the women in crises with the police investigation, in view of prevention of immoral women trafficking, help centers are established at state transport bus stand, a toll-free helpline is made available to the women in distress, special fast track courts are established for the speedy disposal of women related cases, the domestic violence act is passed and brought in force to protect women from the domestic violence.

Policing initiatives

Nirbhaya Squad

Nirbhaya squads, comprised of trained women police officials, are formed to prevent various crimes perpetuated against women's rights from sexual harassment, rape, acid attacks and stalking to eve teasing. Distressed women can contact the squad through the toll-free number provided.

Crime Against Women (CAW) Unit:

Unit I: It handles the cases of Rape, Kidnapping, Molestation and other serious offenses related to women,

Unit II: This unit handles the cases of domestic violence, dowry-related murder, suicide, and other offenses under the Dowry Prohibition Act, Offences under 498 (A) IPC and other Dowry-related offenses.

Counseling cell: The main function is the counseling of women in distress and suffering from domestic violence.

Anti Chain Snatching Squad:

The Mumbai Police has set up a dedicated unit to control chain-snatching incidences in the city. The squad is inducted to keep a regular check on the bike-born chain snatchers. The installation of Close Circuit televisions (CCTVs) at prominent places, armed police forces, and maintaining the information of those arrested for chain snatching help reduce the number of incidences. This squad also recovers stolen property.

Awareness Programmes:

The organization of workshops on women's safety and security in schools and colleges and the conduction of corner meetings in public places help make students and people aware of crime against women. Workshops are helpful for making legal awareness among people.

Prevention of cybercrime against women:

The cybercrime investigation department in Mumbai is the most advanced in the country. As the number of internet and android phone users is high in the city, many incidences of cybercrime against women are reported daily. Thus, cyber police stations are provided with modern software and hardware. Police officials are trained on how to deal with cybercrime against women.

Suggestions

1. Basic amenities like uninterrupted power supply, provision of safe and clean drinking water, clean and sufficient toilets as well as a healthy atmosphere to live in should be provided to the slum-dwelling women.

2. Adequate safety and security measures for women should be implemented in the city, particularly in public places.

3. Collection of crime against women-related data and its analysis should be given priority to provide a better understanding of the nature, magnitude and consequences of violence against women.

4. Organizations and establishments in the city must have a policy against sexual harassment.

5. Every organization in the city must have a prevention of sexual harassment cell and an internal complaints committee (ICC) for women's safety.

6. Zero tolerance approach against sexual harassment of women should be adopted.

7. Employees must be aware of sexual harassment and its various forms.

8. Women employees must be encouraged to express themselves.

9. Entertainment industry should avoid objectification of women.
10. Stringent punishments should be given to the person committing a crime against women.
11. Counseling facilities should be provided to women and girls.
12. A complete women's safety mechanism should be implemented in the city.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the majority (53%) of slum-dwelling women face problems of stress and insecurity while 32% of commuting women have faced at least one type of violence either on the journey to the workplace or at the place of work. Thus, there is a need to emphasize increasing the safety and security of women. This can be achieved in general by the provision of basic amenities like drinking water, toilet facilities, uninterrupted power supply etc. The frequency of local trains and buses should be increased during peak hours and caring work culture should be developed and maintained for women in the workplace of women.

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