Safe Mobility Impacting Women's Decision To Work

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For the most part of human history – Indian and otherwise – women have largely been quietly separated from accessing public spaces for work, learning, or recreation. Their entry into public spaces has only been recent, some hundred years ago, but since then it has been clouded and hindered by threats to safety, social norms, and familial expectations.

Women were not expected to be actively participating in public spaces due to the social structure which did not want female education and women workforce.

But India after independence has given females all the right to stand equal to men on every ground. Our constitution has given all the rights and freedom to women as to men but in practical experience, females are far behind. The right to freedom of movement, (art 19 (1)(d)) of the Indian Constitution is rhetoric until women can roam around unperturbed giving a feeling of confidence and a sense of expanded possibilities, aspiration and personal growth.

India presents a paradox: on the one hand, women are securing more degrees than men, and on the other, the female labour force participation has been declining and was 18.6% in 2019, the lowest in South Asia. India is witnessing an anomaly where female education is on the rise but employment is declining. India slipped 28 places from 112 in 2006 to 140 in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021.

The decline in economic opportunities for Indian women, which leads to their declining participation in the formal workforce, is a key and persistent feature of the growing gender gap. The female labour force supply is hampered by early marriage and the expectation of prioritising domestic chores and care work. The entrance of women into the labour market is hampered by perceived threats to safety. Chakrabaty et. al (2017) in their research, found that women are less likely to work in areas where the perceived threats of harassment are higher, also they face a trade-off between the opportunity cost of working and the stigma or harassment having to defy social expectations by working outside.

Based on the 2019 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report, the labour force participation rate of women (for 15 years and above) has witnessed a steep decline from 22% in 2017-18 to 23.3% in 2018-19. In terms of the urban and rural divide, the workforce participation rate of urban women is lower than those of their rural counterparts.

One of the profound impacts of COVID-19 has been its disproportionate impact on the employment of women. The pandemic has only exacerbated the situation with widespread unemployment across multiple sectors and sharpened the existing gender divide in the workforce. Data from CMIE's Consumer Pyramids Household Survey December 2020, shows that female labour force participation in urban India plunged to 7.2 % in October and further to 6.9% in November compared to 71% for men. In an attempt to increase women's workforce participation, the Finance Minister in her budget speech announced that women will be allowed to work in night shifts across all sectors, with adequate safety. While this move is looked forward to as it will incentivize and empower more women to join the labour force, there are other factors as well which need to be addressed to ensure women are able to go out to work. Among them, safe mobility is very important.

A slew of proposals to encourage women's economic participation has been concentrated around improving education, workplace conditions, wages, and access to capital and networks. But women's ability to access education, job opportunities and networks is limited by their daily mobility among other factors. Lack of safety in public places and transport on their way to and from home, limit women's economic engagement.

Defining safe mobility

It is the ability for a person to safely and reliably access a destination by navigating an environment considerate of his or her needs and preferences. Safe mobility has a domino effect towards enhancing an inclusive society that leaves no one behind. Without safety, cities are not inclusive and accessible and vice versa. It is important to link accessibility and safety in order to improve mobility for all.

Everyday mobility is fundamental for livelihoods, family life and community life. Mobility influences social justice by enhancing capabilities. Currie and Stanley (2008) argue that public transport, in particular, creates social capital. Harvey (1973), for the first time, pointed out that transport facilities were essential for reaching out to other services, more importantly, the job markets. In the context of Social Justice, Sen (1985) defined for the first time the Capability approach, which then got expanded to include notions of quality of life, opportunities, functioning, alternatives and freedom of individuals.

Defining women's empowerment

It can be defined to promote women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. Keller and Mbwewe (1991) described women empowerment as a " process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right, to make choices of opportunities and to control resources which will assist in eliminating their own subordination.

The core of the meaning of women's empowerment lies in the ability of women to control their own destinies. Almost all the definitions of women empowerment include some reference to an expansion of choice and freedom to make decisions and necessary action to shape her life outcome (Malhotra and Schuler 2005)

Gender and mobility

Lack of safety for women, both perceived and experienced, significantly undermines their right to safe transit for work. While transport opens up these choices, lack of safety reduces these choices even if there is transport availability.

Safe, comfortable, convenient and affordable transport can play an important role in not only helping meet women's practical needs but also in contributing to their strategic empowerment by facilitating access to social and economic opportunities.

Jenifer Mandel's (2004) study of women traders in Benin, provides clear evidence of empowering benefits of mobility. She found a strong relationship between women's physical mobility and livelihood. As Dorsan Marsey (1993) has put it " mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power".

Simply mobility is empowering as women leave the house and enter the public domain. In order to assess equity in mobility we need to know if - and where and when women's lower mobility reflects choice or constraint. When and where it is imposed? Is it self-imposed due to fear or societally imposed due to past dreadful examples and experiences?

Statement of the Problem.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment perpetrated on streets have been variously named as 'street harassment' (Bowman, 1993), 'public harassment' (Gardner, 1995), 'stranger harassment' (Logan, 2015) or girl watching (Quinn, 2002). Women empowerment in India in recent times is confronted with two serious predicaments one being, a rising trend of sexual crimes against women and a steady decline in the workforce participation of women.

There are many policies by the government, employer's concerns and personal safety measures taken, yet a safe environment for women workforce is not present. This is not merely an economical cost to the employee, but a cost that is as wide as the ocean. It is an opportunity cost given up by not only the female but, her family, employer, society and country as a whole. The earnings will, directly and indirectly, benefit all dimensions of human life from health, education for kids, psychological well-being, social recognition etc. the researcher is empirically examining whether violence against women is preventing them from joining the labour market. The study is aiming to gauge that demand for women's safety is not any different in the organised and unorganised sectors. women from both sectors are equally represented to show that Gurugram being a metropolitan city has safety concerns for women when it comes to daily conveyance.

Theoretical framework.

Marginalisation theory completely fits the study as it shows how women are sometimes quietly and sometimes obviously sided by society.

Marginalisation is a process whereby someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance. To be marginalised is to be forced to occupy the sides or fringes and not be in the centre of things such as economic, political, social and market.

The patriarchal model in India which depicts a man as the nucleus and a woman as a peripheral and centripetal entity is marginalising women.

Another theory that the researcher has taken reference from is gender and conflict theory. Conflict theory looks at society as competitive for limited resources. It is identified with Karl Marx.

Feminist theory was developed to fill the void in Marxism and Neo-Marxism which examined class but not gender as a distinct category. They point out male-centric aspects of conflict theory.

According to conflict theory, society is a struggle for dominance among social groups for example women versus men that compete for scarce resources. We can view men as the dominant group and women as subordinate groups. According to conflict theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups, it is difficult for women to rise above men as dominant group members create the rules and definitions for success and opportunity in society.

Review of literature

Turner and Fouracre (1995) - the authors have tried to gauge the contribution of transport to women's interests. The results of their study showed that most planning and development decisions were undertaken by men with little or no regard for women's needs. Establishing that a problem exists (that is poverty of access to job opportunities), it also establishes very clearly the extent to which transport causes or contributes to the problem as opposed to other factors like land use development or social and cultural practices. They have pressed on the need for a greater awareness throughout all aspects of transport - engineering and planning urban and rural - of its development impact on the role of women in society.

Cresswell (2008)- in the book "gendered mobilities ", he has seen that Being socially and geographically mobile is widely regarded as one of the most important aspects of a woman's happiness. Mobility, in addition to health, education, and political participation, is critical for women to achieve goals like freedom and economic empowerment. He has developed a new philosophical foundation for mobility, in which society is framed by the convergences of various mobilities. His research focuses on the intersection of gender, social justice, and mobility.

Phadke & Khan (2011) In the book "Why Loiter", authors have provoked the thought of a women's utopian world. It engages with feminist ideas in the context of 21st-century urban India and challenges the meaning attached to the concepts of risks and safety, modernity and citizenship. The authors desire for gender equity in citizenship and have an agenda of an all-inclusive right of citizens to public spaces.

Uteng (2012) In the study 'Gender and Mobility in Developing World". Being socially and geographically mobile is widely regarded as one of the most important aspects of a woman's happiness. Mobility, in addition to health, education, and political participation, is critical for women to achieve goals like freedom and economic empowerment. Developing a new philosophical foundation for mobility,' in which society is framed by the convergences of various mobilities. His research focuses on the intersection of gender, social justice, and mobility.

Levy (2013) this paper argues that the distributional aspects of transport are cross-cutting, and go beyond the disaggregation of the transport users such as class, gender and age. The research of the author says 'women are the targets of sexual harassment while travelling and practically every woman interviewed had anecdotal evidence of suffering from the same". Public spaces must be understood as a gauge of the regimes of justice distribution.

Shah (2015) according to her study, the different levels of government have started to pick a pace in addressing women's safety in public transport and urban transport but these investments are largely gender blind. The author has mentioned that various department ministries need to work together to make women access and use urban transportation. She has recommended creating a gender advisory committee to mainstream gender in transportation projects, policies and programs, and monitors implementations. She has asked to conduct gender sensitisation training of drivers, conductors and deport managers regularly. Gender audits of public transport authorities can be conducted to understand the extent to which gender equality can be seen in public transport.

Bhattacharya (2016) In the paper "Street Violence against Women in India", she has focused on mapping the prevention strategies of violence against women. It is mentioned that the focus of the various laws and committee reports after the horrific Delhi gang rape and subsequent death of a 23-year-old woman on a moving bus in New Delhi in 2012 served as a wake-up call to the government. Various laws and committees are discussed which were constituted after the tragic event and have provided measures to prevent violence and strategies aimed at escalating the safety of women in public spaces.

Narayan (2020) - according to the author Indian cities experience high rates of rape, molestation and murder on moving public and private transportation. Rape has increased substitutionally, illustrating tensions at the intersection of class, gender and urban spaces. The main gendered policy response that planning authorities in some large cities like Mumbai and Delhi have introduced is to have "ladies only" coaches or seats for women in trains and metros. She has focused on this older response to the more general problem of sexual harassment but doesn't address issues of violent gender crime adequately. She argues that in order to properly respond to current Indian urban gendered realities in transport policies should aim at the elimination of violence in India accompanied by social change.

Swami and Sinha (2021) - in the paper on 'Gender Sensitive Mobility Policies' the researchers mention that participation of women in outdoor and socio-economic activities is limited by various social and cultural factors which include travelling. The interventions in the transport sector are expected to enhance the participation of women by providing safe and affordable access and catalyse the impact on women's empowerment.

Singh (2021) - the author has observed inequities in travel patterns of women and men and has demanded a gender-biased approach to the planning of social and transport infrastructure in Indian cities. The study clearly shows that those with the best and most extensive public transport services have more job opportunities than those living in spaces which are poorly serviced by public transport. She asserts the need to have proper planning

of transport and mobility policies which will guarantee people's equality in accessing goods, services and opportunities.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the incidence of assault on women discourages them to go for work(Gupta, 2013). This finding is also observed in a survey-based study by Sudarshan and Bhattacharya (2009). In a survey of non-working women in Delhi, they find that safety concern is an important factor that stops women from working outside the home, second only to their engagement in domestic work.

The above-mentioned literature has covered aspects like safety and mobility, investment in a transportation facility and making gender-sensitive infrastructure but unsafe conveyance directly impacting women's decision to work outside the house of the unorganised sector has not been covered.

Objective

1) To know if crime in the public sphere has an impact on the daily life of women.

2) To know if unsafe public spaces have an impact on women's decision to work.

3) To know the perception of women regarding road safety

4) To compare problems faced by organised sector female employees and female workers in unorganised sector while commuting to work.

Hypothesis.

H1 - Unsafe conveyance and public spheres deter a woman from going to work.

H0- Unsafe conveyance and the public sphere have no impact on a woman's decision to work.

Research Methodology

Causal-comparative/quasi-experimental research design is attempted to use which will establish cause-effect relationships among the variables. A variable is identified which here is unsafe conveyance to work and its effects on the dependent variable are measured. The dependent variable here is a willingness to go to work.

The study area is selected as Gurgugram. Though the problem of gender-based violence in public spaces is universal, we use Gurugram as a case study for two reasons. One, it is home to 15 lakh people and second Gurugram has women workers both in the formal as well as informal sectors.

The method of selection of the respondent was purposive. A sample size of 97 women was taken where 50 women were from the organised sector working in a university as academic and non-academic staff. And 47 from the unorganised sector, where the majority were maids and daily wage earners living in the area of Chakkarpur and Sikanderpur. The unorganised sector was chosen on the basis of a random sampling of slum dwellers where majorly housemaids and daily wage earners lived.

The source of data is primary which the researcher has taken from working women in both organised and unorganised sectors. The tools of data collection were questionnaires and structured interviews. The

questionnaire was close-ended where a few simple dichotomy questions were asked and the remaining multiple-choice questions. A schedule for the unorganised sector was prepared because most of the respondents either failed to read and write or did not have the time to fill out the question form. This collected primary data was then analysed using quantitative analysis of descriptive and analytical types.

Analysis

Descriptive statistical tools like frequency and percentage are used to analyse the primary data. The first five questions were related to the socio-economic profile of the respondent.

most women were of the age group 25-45. remaining 8% and 22% were of the age below 25 and above 45 respectively. As already mentioned 50 women were from the organised sector and 47 were from unorganised sector. 50 women from organised sector comprised of 35 academic staff of the university and the remaining 15 were the administrative or clerical staff of the university. Women from the unorganised sector majorly belonged to the household maid category with very few as daily labourers.

Table 1

views on women harassment		
	Frequency	Percent
In personal life	18	18.6
Professional Life	17	17.5
Public life	39	40.2
Not seen	18	18.6
Don't know/ Cannot say/ No response	5	5.2
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 1 shows that almost 40 percent of women have witnessed some or the other form of crime against women in the public sphere or roads. The major chunk of crimes, these respondent females have seen were on roads and in the public sphere.

Table 2

Frequency of crime in public area		
	Frequency	Percent
Sometimes	54	55.7
Almost every day	6	6.2
Rarely	30	30.9
don't know	7	7.2
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 2 tells about the frequency of such crimes. 6.2 per cent of the females said they witness such crimes on a daily basis and 55.7 per cent responded saying they witness crimes sometimes.

Table 3

intervention in violence against women in public area		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	20.6
No	57	58.8
Don't Know/ Cannot say/ No response	20	20.6
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 3, followed the previous one if any intervention was made by them to stop the crime. The answers were titled towards no response. Only 20.6 per cent of the females intervened to stop the crime. Whereas almost 59 per cent did not bother to stop the crime happening in front of their own eyes.

Table 4

Hindrance in intervention		
	Frequency	Percent
personal/ intervention would look odd	37	38.1
Too small to intervene	46	47.4
Don't Know/ Cannot say/ No response	14	14.4
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

A contingency question was following the previous question of intervention which asked them about the reason of no response towards the crime that is happening in the public in front of them. Table 4 shows that 38 per cent of the total women answered it as the matter seemed personal and intervention was not required. 47.4 per cent of the females said that the "matter was too small to intervene". This shows how it is in our psyche to be okay with eve-teasing or any such crime. women have become habitual of such events and consider them as facts happening daily or just too small to even bother to stop them. 14.4 per cent refrained from responding to this question.

Table 5

crime in the public sphere impacts women's daily life		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	97	100.0
No	0	0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 5 shows almost every woman felt that crime on road and public sphere impacts their lives in some form or another. Every woman be she from the organised or unorganised sector says that such crimes impact their daily life.

Table 6

crimes on way to work impact women's decision to work		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	81	83.55
No	16	16.49
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

In table 6, it is seen that the majority of women felt that crimes on the road and public sphere impact their decision to work. 83.5 per cent of women feel hesitant to work with such crimes happening around them.

Table 7

Impact on mental Well-being		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	97	100.0
No	0	0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 7 is about a follow-up question that was to enquire about the mental well-being impacted by crime on roads. Every woman felt that their mental peace is disturbed when she comes across crime while conveyance to work.

Table 8

organised sector women face less discomfort while going to work		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	81	83.5
No	4	4.1
Don't Know/ Cannot say/ No response	12	12.4
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

In table 8, women from both categories were asked about the comparative discomfort of the women working in the organised sector. The answer was biased towards working women, 83.5 per cent of the total females felt that it is safe and easier for women in the organised sector to go to work.

Table 9

women in the unorganised sector are safer while going to work		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	12.3
No	76	78.3
Don't Know/ Cannot say/ No response	9	9.2
Total	97	100

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 9 shows the question about the safety of women in the unorganised sector was responded with 76 percent responses as unsafe and merely 12 per cent as safe. 9 per cent of the total respondent had no response when safety was compared between women of both sectors.

Table 10

exact safety issues a woman faces while travelling to work alone		
	Frequency	Percent
No Proper street lights	22	22.7
Less Public transport frequency	10	10.3
Odd timings	15	15.5
Lone female passenger or passerby	8	8.2
Crossing areas like Alcohol, paan shops	42	43.3
Total	97	100.0

source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 10 tells the Multiple responses women gave on the question of exact safety issues faced by women while commuting which had five responses of various degrees. 23 per cent of the women felt lack of well-lit roads and street light is the major reason for unsafe commuting. Nearly 10 per cent of the females blamed less frequency of the buses or other modes of public transport. women either have to wait for a long or have to get inside very crowded buses. 15 per cent of the women felt that odd timings of the work were to be blamed for the unsafe commuting. 8 per cent of them said being alone in public transport or on a road makes them feel unsafe while travelling to work. a very major chunk of women said they feel unsafe while crossing a paan shop or alcohol shop.

Table 11

companies can do more for safety while commuting to work.		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	83	85.6
No	2	2.1
Don't Know/ Cannot say/ No response	12	12.4
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 11 tells the responsibility of the company was questioned in the safety of women while commuting. 86 per cent felt that the company or the place they are working at can make more efforts and be more responsible for their safety while coming and going to work.

Table 12

government can take better measures for safe mobility		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	89	91.8
Don't Know/ Cannot say/ No response	8	8.2
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 12 has responses to the question of government being more responsible for their safety while commuting where almost 92 percent of them felt that government can take better steps in this direction.

Table 13

women hide or understate an unsafe incident due to the fear of family's response on going to work		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	68	70.1
No	29	29.9
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

Table 13 indicates the perception of respondents about women understating or even hiding criminal incidents in fear of family's decision to stop going out to work. 70 per cent of the females think that women hide or understate a crime that happened with them while commuting because of the fear that peers might ask them to stop working. The Family's concern for safety is underscored by their decision to work.

Table 14

maximum help to increase safe mobility of females		
	Frequency	Percent
More Number of police	29	29.9
Company drop off	23	23.7
Proper lights and camera on roads	32	33.0
Bus route and frequency more favourable	13	13.4
Total	97	100.0

Source: Primary data collected in December 2022

In table 14, the suggestions are mentioned about the exact corrective measures women recommend for their safety to work. 30 percent of them felt that if the number of police personnel increases on their way then, it will make them feel safer. 23.7 per cent of the female workers felt that if the employer picks and drops off then commuting will become safer.

33 percent of the respondents felt that proper lights and CCTV cameras make them feel safer on roads and public places. A few of them, 13 per cent to be precisely said favourable bus routes and more frequency can help them commute safely to work.

Conclusion

Transportation is the fulcrum that allows women to participate in the workforce, which can create a societal shift to transform the entire world economy. Women living in 21 century in the national capital region, Gurugram faces issues of safety while travelling to work. this Unsafe environment makes them think twice about working or not. the problem of safe conveyance is seen more in the unorganised sector. Suggestions like CCTV cameras, frequency of public transportation and increasing police personnel are not new. Implementing these suggestions can take a long leap in taking women forward. A tiny step towards their safety can empower them and their families.

Sustainable urban development will remain elusive without integrating women and girls' safety, comfort, convenience and affordability in urban transport. Women may turn down better employment opportunities further away from home in favour of lower-paid local opportunities when the public transport system is unreliable or unaffordable (ADB 2013)

Women are less likely to participate in the workforce when their threat perception is high. As a substantial number of women use public transport to travel to work, insecurity and lack of safety in the mode of travel also curb workforce participation.

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