

Review of: "The Impact of Urban Design in minimizing Women's Fear of Crime"

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This article focuses on crimes against women (CAW) in India in 2021, highlighting how environmental conditions significantly contribute to increased risk for women. The article mentions the findings by India's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and by the BBC, this latter showing that in 2021 crimes against women in India reached their peak with other than 400,000 cases in 6 years from 2016 with an increase of 26.35% over the period (see [Rising crimes against Indian women in five charts - BBC News](#)). The figures from the BBC and the mentioned 2021 NCRB report also include gender-based violence that is not directly motivated by environmental conditions, such as "domestic violence", this latter of which is likely to have a high share in this total. To be precise, this is half of the 2021 total as per the NCRB report (see [Crime against women rose by 15.3% in 2021: NCRB | India News - The Indian Express](#)). According to other Wikipedia sources, "honour killings" and "dowry killings" (see [Violence against women in India - Wikipedia](#)) may also have a significant share in this total, but we are not sure that this type of crimes be included in the reports mentioned by the author.

It must be considered that the problem of CAW is very complicated in India due to the "myriad cultural challenges" that the female population faces and this may also explain why many cases go unreported in India, due to "discriminatory family codes, lack of education and cultural stigma," among others (see Beina Xu, Governance in India: Women's Rights, retrieved on September 2023 from: [Governance in India: Women's Rights | Council on Foreign Relations \(cfr.org\)](#)).

SCP (Situational Crime Prevention) and CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) are further highlighted by the author as the two main methodologies used to investigate urban design principles that can be used to reduce incidence and fear of crime by manipulating the built environment and creating a safer space. Another contribution by the author comes from articles that should be of interest in exploring crime against women in the Indian context (see Table 2.1, literature review comparison table). A report from Delhi state by Rupesh Kumar Gupta (2020) showed that high population density and high mobility areas can be key to "vulnerable places like crowded areas, secluded places, parks, shadows and vacant lots." who are in turn "more prone to crime". It is indeed widely recognized in criminology and urban planning that poorly lit, abandoned, desolate areas, devoid of surveillance, tend to be more vulnerable to several types of crime, including crimes against women. These areas often offer criminals the opportunity to operate with a reduced risk of detection. This is called the "routine activity theory" in criminology, explored by the American sociologist Marcus Felson (1979; 1993) and his school.

Here it is how certain environmental factors such as lighting, surveillance, and the general condition of an area can

contribute to increased crime:

- **Reduced visibility:** Poor lighting reduces visibility, making it easier for potential offenders to approach victims and harm them without being seen. Well-lit areas reduce the risk of crimes going unnoticed.
 - **Criminal Opportunities:** Abandoned and desolate areas can provide hiding places and opportunities for criminals to commit crimes without interruption. Places with higher levels of activity and surveillance tend to deter criminal activity.
 - **Care and maintenance:** Neglected areas with rubbish and ruins can signal a lack of care and supervision by the community, which can attract criminal activity. Well-maintained and clean public spaces can deter potential offenders.
- In the context of crimes against women, these environmental factors are particularly relevant.

According to the author, India can make considerable progress in tackling CAWs and creating safer public spaces for women. Addressing environmental conditions in public spaces is a crucial aspect of any comprehensive strategy to reduce crime, including that of CAWs. It complements efforts to address socio-economic factors and helps create a safer and more inclusive urban environment. The author further describes his survey of 320 women (243 actual respondents) from “varied socio-economic backgrounds living in different cities in India”, and it is conducted with a positivist technique. The women interviewed are between 15 and 55 years old and cover a wide area from Mumbai in the state of Maharashtra towards the south, to Bangalore in the state of Karnataka, Chennai, Coimbatore, Trichy in the state of Tamil Nadu, Kochi, in the state of Kerala, and finally back north to Nagpur still in the state of Maharashtra. These places are mentioned in the articles by Rupesh Kumar Gupta (2020 and 2021) on which the author relies for his own research. The “perspective of women using these locations” was used to explore their perception of risk in public spaces at night and compare certain spatial characteristics such as “pedestrian traffic”. Five female investigators are used to cooperate in this investigation “in a variety of urban points of interest”, such as vegetable markets, public transport stops and recreational areas near lakes. Google forms were used to survey a sort of control group of 35 women. The detailed survey results are graphically represented in Figure 4.1 Types of crimes included and Figure 4.2 Safe spaces according to respondents. Table 4.2 Public spaces at different times of the day indicates the percentage of women’s risk perception through four main questions related to women’s experiences in daily and nighttime public spaces, as well as their crowding/transit with means of transport.

Classic CPTED indices arise from surveys as elements of fear and risk perception such as “low lighting,” “narrow streets,” empty places, and “unmaintained cityscapes.” (see author’s lines on page 6) Figure 4.3 shows the few precautionary measures taken by respondents to avoid risks. Before concluding, the author reports that the answers of the people questioned are all centred on the need to be more concerned with the quality of life and the safety of public spaces. These vivid experiences reinforce society’s sense of disinterest in the actions of perpetrators and the possibility of minimizing risks to women through preventative measures and high-risk scenarios. Focusing on the environmental determinants of crime, the author praises the renovation and maintenance of public spaces, encouraging multidisciplinary research that brings together experts from fields such as criminology, urban planning, sociology, psychology, and environmental sciences, with the aim of providing a holistic understanding. Using geographic information systems (GIS) and crime mapping to analyse the spatial distribution of CAW-related incidents can certainly help identify hotspots and

trends that go beyond population density, including specific environmental risk factors, but this needs to be led in some way by community policing and through initiatives that build trust between women and the male community. It is then a question of participatory urban planning thought by the same women which can lead to more women-friendly environments. In India, women need to be more involved in local communities, as well as in the design and planning of public spaces, as their input can help identify safety issues and design preferences for public spaces. Awareness campaigns are promising instruments to educate the public, especially men, about respect for women's rights and the importance of safe public spaces, beyond changing attitudes and behaviours.

Requested amendments:

- The method of inquiry needs to be rephrased in some way, as it is a bit messy and does not reflect the author's true commitment to his chosen subject.

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