

A Study of Women's Everyday Negotiation of Jaipur's Public Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the interrelation between emerging urban infrastructure and women's safety concerns in the city of Jaipur. It attempts at addressing questions of access, freedom, inclusivity and safety in public spaces. It argues that the safety discourse has narrowed the demand for spatial equality by focusing on surveillance and safety infrastructure more than inherently planning for them. Through a survey of 170 women in the age groups 18-50+, this study gathers perspectives of women as they navigate the city for different reasons and how they encounter issues of safety, their views on access and scope of participation in public life within the existing structure. This paper argues that urban planning and infrastructure remain elusive to addressing the needs of making cities not only women-friendly, but truly a space that they can inhabit at par with men. The findings suggest various concerns that women have which reflect the nature of urban infrastructure and development flaws that relegate women to a secondary role in the social-political-economic and cultural life of the city. The notion of safety discourse in creating women friendly cities will be critically examined and analysed in relation to infrastructure and urban planning.

1. Introduction

After a woman finishes a long day, she gets on a bus and discovers that the seats reserved for women are taken by men who refuse to move. The driver does not intervene, leaving her to stand while feeling uncomfortable from the stares around her. Earlier at the bus stop, an intoxicated man was lying across the bench, creating a sense of unease and making her question if it was safe to wait there. Many urban women face similar situations daily when navigating public spaces (Raju & Paul, 2018). Public transportation is meant to connect people to education, employment, and opportunities, serving as a leveling force. However, for women in urban areas of India, it often comes with added stress. Ladies-only coaches in metro systems offer some relief but also reinforce the idea that women need separate spaces to travel freely (Phadke, 2013). Some women even go as far as purchasing smart cards not for convenience but to avoid queues

filled with men. These small adjustments highlight a larger issue: women do not see cities as welcoming and accessible, leading them to constantly adjust their behavior based on safety concerns.

Public spaces for women are a category that has been created within the larger meaning of public spaces, which is guided by concerns of safety, appropriate behavior, and women's position as vulnerable. The focus of safety discourse has largely meant 'women's safety' (Stanko, 1997). Safety discourse thereby constructs women's relative positionalities (Walsh, 2015). It relies on the notion of public space as gendered, through which it achieves categorisation of safe places meant exclusively for women. Historically, public spaces were never neutral. In India, women's participation in community spaces was only imagined through festivals and markets. Over time, with industrialization and colonial urban planning, the idea of respecting femininity and influenced by Victorian morality, women were confined to private and domestic spaces while men claimed the outdoors as sites of work and leisure. This segregation of spaces reinforces gender roles. The evolution from traditional markets to modern, dominated public spheres reflects how architecture and social structures shaped visibility and exclusion. This issue is not only a problem in India. In the 1980s, women's groups in Toronto called for a place at the decision-making table. By conducting safety audits, they highlighted how simple changes like improved lighting, clear pathways, and visible transit stops could enhance women's sense of security (METRAC, 1988). Their efforts demonstrated that safety is not just about decreasing crime; it's also about creating cities where women feel safe and included.

Urbanisation, while often celebrated for economic growth and connectivity, has also caused new challenges for safety. Rapid expansion of cities has also led to overcrowded transport systems, inadequate street lighting, and growing socio-spatial divides. These changes affect women, yet gendered experiences of urbanization remain one of the least discussed aspects of city planning. The conversation around development tends to prioritize infrastructure, mobility, and efficiency over ignoring who these spaces are truly designed for. Hence, gender inclusivity becomes an afterthought rather than a foundation of urban growth.

This study explores the intersection of urban planning and women's safety, specifically examining how everyday architectural choices - such as public transportation and recreational areas - influence women's freedom of movement. It contends that while temporary measures like segregation or increased surveillance may alleviate fears momentarily, they do not address the fundamental issue: cities are predominantly designed without inclusive spaces and spaces that are equalising for women. The main concern of this paper will be to understand how urban planning can transition from merely protecting women to empowering them to freely access public spaces.

2. Literature Review

This paper focuses on understanding women's safety concerns in relation to urban public infrastructure and how they interact, navigate and negotiate with public spaces. It is imperative to look at the concepts of safety, access and safe spaces that are framed for this conversation. As mentioned, the term 'safety' has assumed an inherent meaning which is 'women's safety'. Women's rights and movements for equality are served through this discourse leading to a gendered understanding of public spaces and what safety means (Walsh, 2015). The creation of safety discourse also hinges on the normalisation of everyday masculinist practices, men claiming and designing this normal (Martin, 2003). Women are therefore seen as objects of concern within this broader masculine space and their safety requires creation of boundaries (Sack, 1986). This boundary is created on gendered lines and women outside of this, out in the open are susceptible to crime and violence. It is evident how gender differences are reflected and reinforced through spatial divisions (Rose, 1990).

The relationship between urban planning and women's safety is deeply shaped by how public transport and city spaces are designed and experienced. In Delhi, studies reveal how women's mobility is both enabled and constrained by infrastructure (Khosla, 2018). The introduction of a women-only coach in the metro created a space where young women felt less conscious and freer in their dress, marking a shift in how public space could be claimed (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Yet, this intervention also reinforced the idea that safety lies in segregation rather than systemic reform. On buses, women frequently encounter harassment, and even reserved seats are often ignored by men without consequences (Ranade, 2007). Such experiences highlight how the everyday functioning of buses and metros produces insecurity, making women anxious about travel, especially at night (Phadke, 2013).

Comparative perspectives underscore that safety can also be imagined differently. In Toronto, grassroots organizations such as METRAC developed Safety Audit Kits and engaged women directly in assessing parks, transit, and dark spaces (METRAC, 1988). These participatory approaches design solutions, such as lighting, visibility, and openness, while reframing safety as empowerment rather than restriction (Women Plan Toronto, 1982). The contrast with Delhi reveals how policy and planning often overlook women's lived experiences, leaving them to individually negotiate safety through avoidance, altered routes, or group travel.

Broader feminist scholarship situates these realities within the gendered coding of cities as male spaces. Women's presence in public is often legitimized only when tied to "respectable" purposes such as education or work, whereas men enjoy the privilege of loitering without scrutiny (Phadke, 2013; Ranade, 2007). Families reinforce these boundaries by imposing curfews and accountability, while societal discourse frequently blames women's clothing or behavior for

violence. This framework of respectability limits women's leisure and their right to risk, producing a constant negotiation between visibility and safety (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007).

Across these contexts, two themes emerge. First, current approaches often equate safety with surveillance, segregation, and behavioral regulation. Second, women's safety must instead be reimagined as freedom of access: the right to move, linger, and enjoy the city on equal terms with men. Whether through participatory planning in Toronto or feminist claims to loiter in Indian cities, the literature makes clear that inclusive urban design must shift from protection to empowerment, recognizing women not as vulnerable outsiders but as full citizens of the city.

This research paper specifically examines Jaipur, a city with a unique blend of historical urban planning and rapid modernisation. Founded in 1727, Jaipur was designed with a strict grid layout and distinct neighborhoods, combining aesthetic appeal with functional civic spaces. Over time, the city has undergone considerable urbanisation, fueled by population growth, tourism, and economic development. The Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) Master Plan 2025 reflects this trajectory, outlining initiatives for housing, commercial hubs, and transport expansion. However, these transformations have raised questions about inclusivity, particularly regarding women's safety and mobility in public spaces.

Women's experiences in Jaipur reveal both progress and persistent challenges. Media reports (Bhandari, L., 2022) indicate that harassment in public spaces, including buses and markets, remains prevalent, and many women feel unsafe traveling alone, especially at night. Initiatives such as women-only metro coaches have provided temporary relief, but these measures also highlight the structural limitations of segregated solutions. According to a 2025 survey, about 8% of women in Jaipur reported harassment in public spaces, slightly above the national average, while only 28% formally reported incidents. These numbers indicate not just the prevalence of harassment, but also systemic barriers to reporting and accountability (Times of India, 2025).

The city's urban infrastructure significantly shapes women's access and participation. Public transport, pedestrian pathways, and recreational spaces often lack sufficient lighting, security measures, and open sightlines, making them inaccessible to women during non-peak hours. Parks, markets, and public squares are designed without adequate consideration of safety and usability, limiting women's opportunities to engage in civic life and leisure. This physical environment, coupled with social norms, constrains freedom of movement and participation in public activities.

Jaipur's economic growth and role as a tourism hub further influence women's experiences. The expansion of hotels, marketplaces, and cultural sites has opened opportunities for women in the labor force, particularly in tourism, hospitality, and retail sectors. Yet, unsafe or poorly

connected transport networks restrict access to these opportunities, reinforcing gendered inequalities in economic participation. Labour force participation among women in Jaipur remains below national averages, reflecting structural barriers linked to safety, mobility, and social expectations.

A historical lens also reveals that Jaipur has traditionally been framed as a male-dominated city space, where women's presence was limited to educational or domestic activities. Contemporary urbanisation challenges these boundaries but often fails to address structural inequalities. Participatory approaches, inspired by global examples like Toronto's METRAC Safety Audit, suggest that active involvement of women in urban planning from traffic management to park design can transform both infrastructure and social norms, creating spaces that enable freedom, agency, and equal participation.

In conclusion, Jaipur exemplifies a city at the intersection of heritage, rapid urbanisation, and social transformation. Women's safety and mobility remain critical indicators of inclusivity, while access to public spaces and civic participation reflect broader patterns of empowerment. This literature review highlights the need for transformative urban infrastructure that goes beyond protection and segregation, embedding gender-responsive planning at the core of Jaipur's development. By integrating historical context, infrastructural design, social norms, and economic participation, this paper frames women not as vulnerable outsiders but as active citizens, shaping the city they inhabit. The findings reinforce the importance of designing urban spaces that facilitate access, freedom, and participation, aligning Jaipur's growth with principles of equity and empowerment.

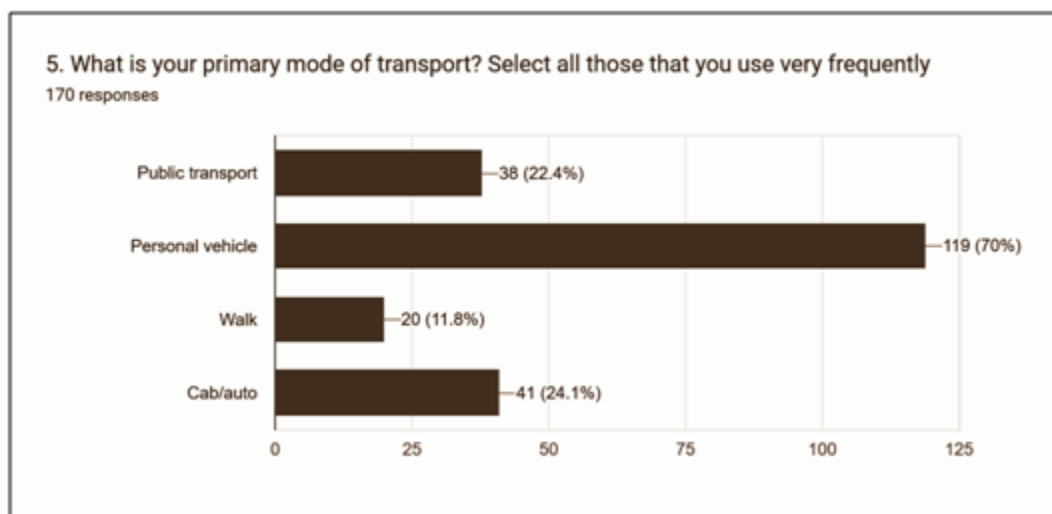
3. Data Analysis

This survey regarding women's safety and public infrastructure has 170 respondents and looks at women's experiences in public spaces and their perspectives on safety, access, and mobility. The participants are in the age group of 18-50 years, and a few are under 18 and over 50 years too. There is a strong presence of homemakers, students and working professionals. They come from urban and semi-urban neighbourhoods, with a small part of them from rural neighbourhoods too. Educational backgrounds vary from high school to PhDs, and professions range from teachers, healthcare workers, shop owners, business owners, and social workers.

Safety emerged as the most important concern. While many women rate their overall safety as moderate, the frequency of feeling unsafe is higher, showing that the fear is more than the actual incidents. Harassment- verbal, staring, stalking, and touching is common. Many women avoid reporting authorities about this, due to the fear of family pressure, or distrust in authorities. Unsafe streets, neighbourhoods, empty areas at night make women change their routes to avoid.

The women aged 18-25 years faced the highest exposure to harassment, mostly in public transport and market areas. They rated night-time and transport safety the lowest, averaging around 2.5 on a 5 point scale. Most of them avoid specific routes or travel with company after 7pm. In contrast, women aged 26-35 years showed slightly higher confidence in their safety, particularly those who used personal vehicles. The older age groups reported fewer harassment but continued to express the caution and dependance of the company after 7pm.

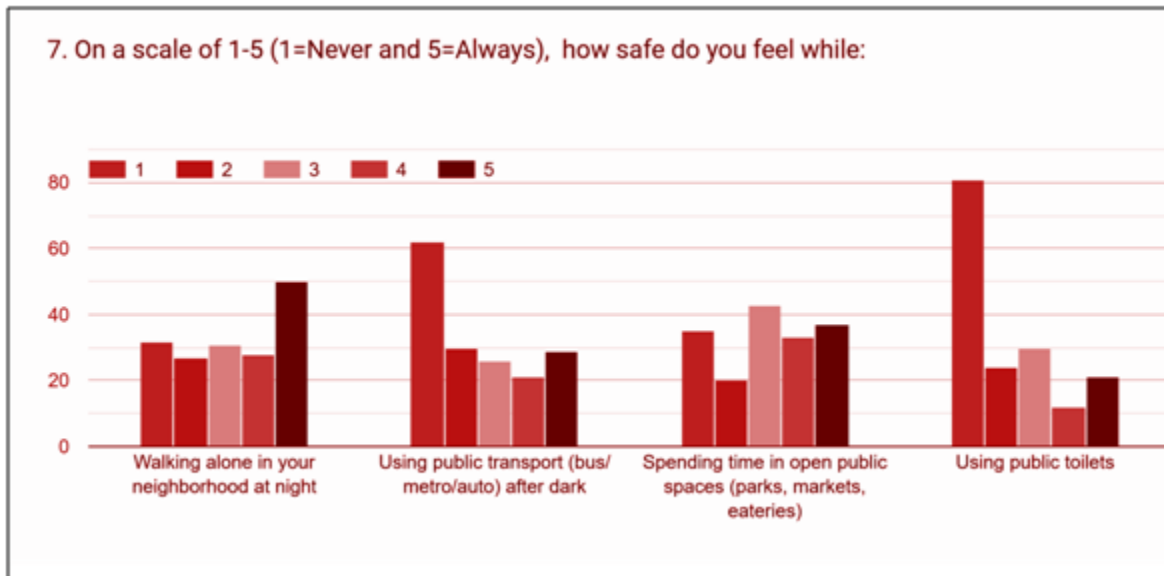
Figure 1: Modes of transport used



Undergraduate and postgraduate respondents (over 75%) mostly worked in corporate, service and education sectors. Professionals, and private sector employees reported longer commutes and greater exposure to public spaces, linking safety concerns with less street lighting, and limitation of surveillance. Students were the most vocal about restrictions on mobility and freedom to participate in leisure activities, showing high sensitivity to street-level safety and infrastructure. Self-employed women, expressed apprehension in local markets and parks, even though they travelled less frequently after 7pm.

Residence patterns also showed significant differences. Urban women comprising nearly three-fourth of the total showed mixed response. While many rated their neighbourhoods relatively safe (average- 4.2/5), public transport and isolated areas scored poorly. Semi-urban and rural respondents, though fewer, reported higher perceived safety within familiar locations but stronger fears about travelling beyond them. Jaipur’s public transport, including buses and metro stations, received consistently low safety scores across all regions, highlighting limited trust in these environments at night.

Figure 2: Safety perceptions while using public spaces



When it came to reporting, the gap between experience and response was significant. Around 80% of respondents had faced some sort of public harassment, yet only about 15% reported these incidents. Staring (70%), verbal comments (45%), and stalking (35%) were the most cited issues. Across all age groups, young adults, and women were more likely to share their experiences or change their behaviour, whereas older respondents likely remained silent or dismissed these incidents as minor. A majority mentioned adopting self-protective strategies, changing routes, avoiding specific areas, or ensuring male accompaniment.

Figure 3: Types of harassment faced

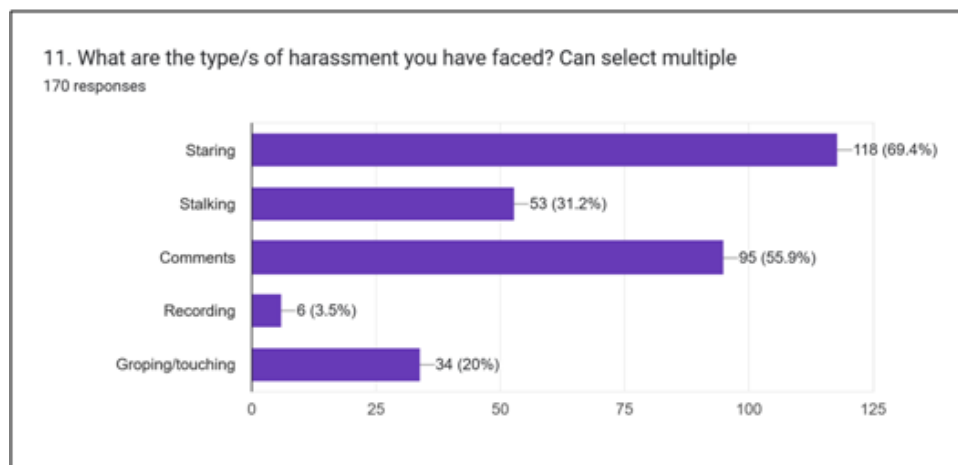
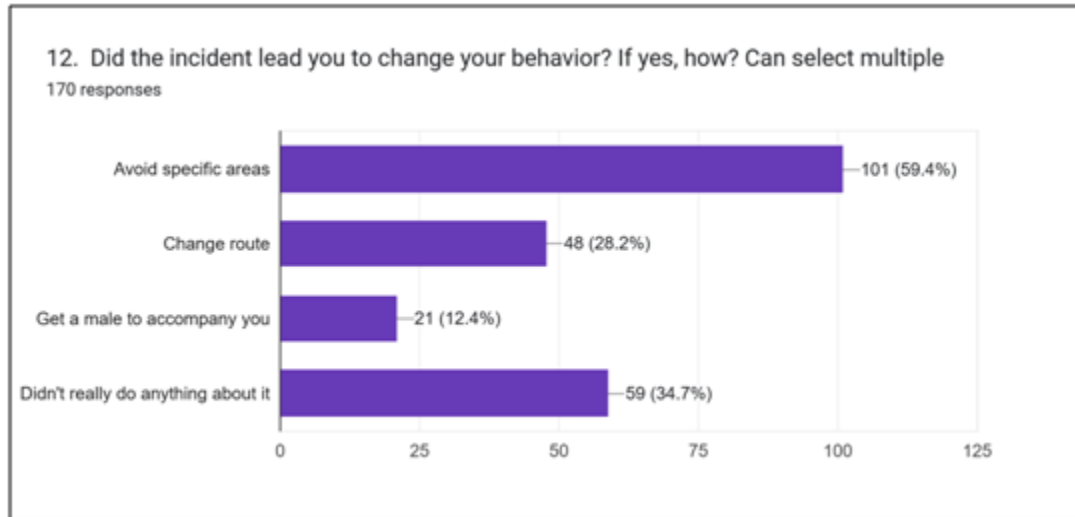
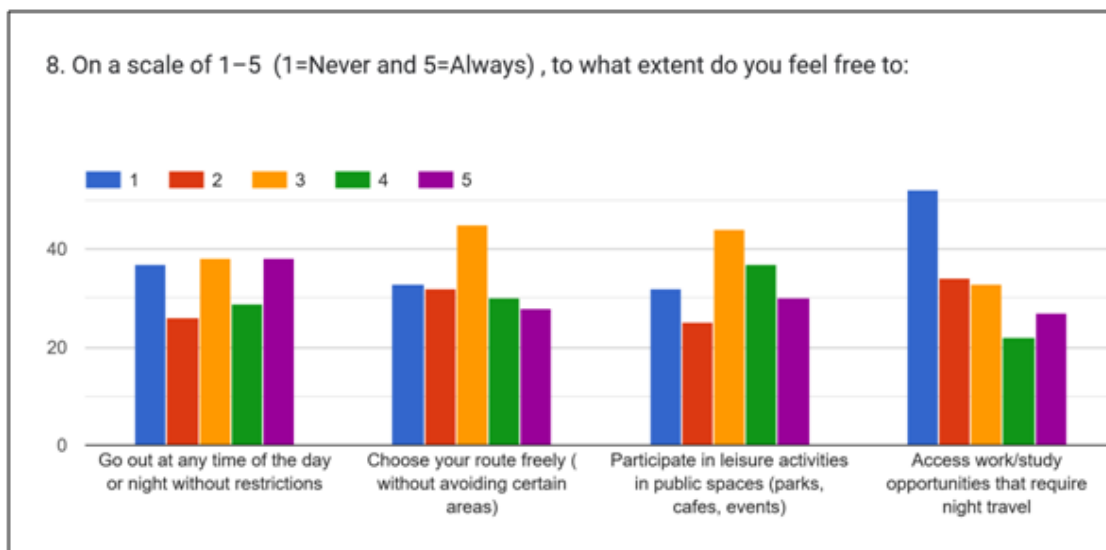


Figure 4: Changes in behaviour upon facing harassment



The survey's patterns suggest that public safety perceptions are directly proportional to the accessibility and participation. Average scores for freedom to go out anytime (2.8), work or study travel at night (2.6), and public toilet safety (2.0) show restricted access even in otherwise familiar areas. However, women-only spaces and CCTV presence received higher comfort ratings (around 4.3), reflecting the reliance on controlled or monitored environments. Yet, only 20% expressed willingness to go out alone after 7 PM, with over 70% saying they would do so only if accompanied.

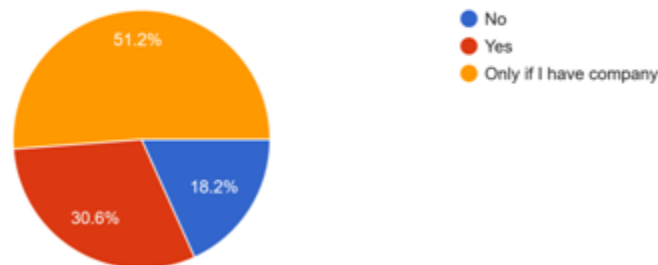
Figure 5: Perceptions of freedom



Moreover, the presence of CCTV cameras was a recurring factor, while 57% of the urban respondents said surveillance increased their confidence in moving through commercial areas, rural participants viewed this presence as largely absent or ineffective, revealing a geographic divide in infrastructural safety. In addition, women only spaces such as compartments in metros were cited as zones of relative comfort with 71% of the women associating them with safety though some criticized these areas as gender segregation rather than empowerment. Public toilets, despite being an essential amenity, have been identified as concerns particularly in semi-urban areas. Leisure participation also reflected layered restrictions as younger women in Jaipur selectively go to cafes, malls, and parks but hesitated to engage in outdoor recreation after dusk, due to the fear of harassment or lack of adequate lighting. In rural regions, leisure was more tied to familial or community contexts, with less women feeling safe to occupy public spaces.

Figure 6: Willingness to participate in public spaces defined by time

15. Will you be willing to participate in public activities/ cultural events in your city after 7pm?
170 responses



4. Discussion

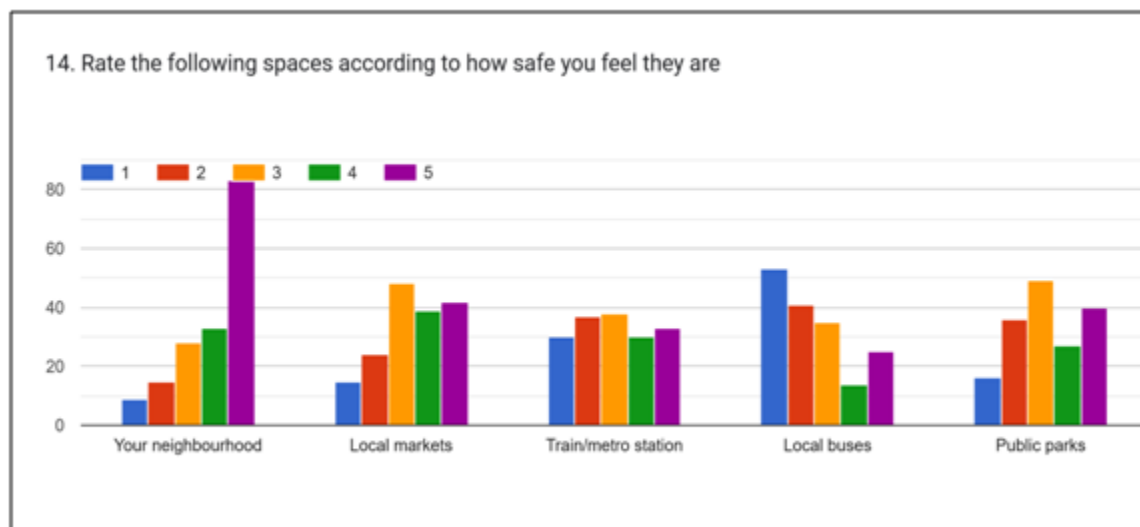
The result of this study shows how women’s sense of safety in Jaipur is shaped by their experiences and also the feat of what could happen. Even though many respondents described Jaipur as “safe”, the feat and the caution that women have to carry everyday says otherwise. The city’s infrastructure lacks surveillance in some areas, and the social normalization of harassment all lead to a place where women have to remain alert, even in familiar spaces.

One of the most striking findings is how the fear outweighs the actual number of incidents. Many women stated that they have not faced any direct attack, but the news that they heard, made them vigilant, and cautious. One woman wrote “I have generally felt safe in Jaipur, but reading about incidents in the news and hearing experiences from others has made me more cautious, especially at night.” Another woman described that when she was 19, “I was chased by two boys. One of them asked me the time even though he had a watch on. I understood his intentions were not good.. I slapped him and they ran away. She added that after the adrenaline wore off,

fear took over, the fear of what could have happened. This story captures how women in Jaipur live with a constant need to be alert and strong, while still carrying the fear of vulnerability.

Market, bus stops, train stations, and empty streets at night came up repeatedly as unsafe spaces. Many women shared that staring, comments, and unwanted physical contact were so common that women had become “normal.” One woman mentioned that in a nearby market, “while walking, two men on a motorcycle approached and slapped me from the behind before speeding away”, and one said “I faced the comment of an older man, maybe 60 years old, that day I realised not only young boys, but even old men do such things.” These behaviours show how safety concerns quietly shape women’s everyday choices- where they go, what they wear, how late they stay out. Public washrooms were also a huge concern, as they mentioned there was dim lighting, lack of attendants, and fear of being followed or watched. For something as basic as going to the washroom, women still feel vulnerable.

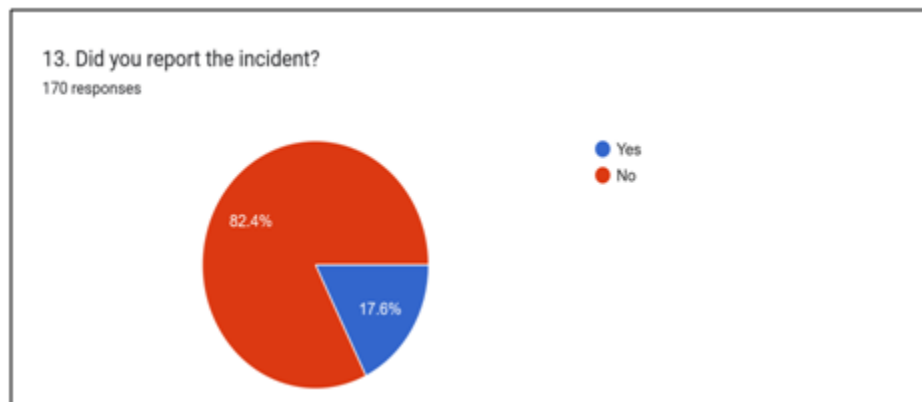
Figure 7: Perception of safety of urban infrastructure



Even though nearly 80% of the women faced some sort of harassment, only 15% reported it. The reasons for not reporting were: fear of not being taken seriously, shame, or family pressure. Many said they rather not go to the police, and handle it by themselves. As one woman stated “I had to change my route for years to avoid these people near my house, yet still they didn’t report it. Incidents go unrecorded, so they seem less frequent than they really are. Women share locations, avoid empty areas, and carry pepper sprays or pretend to be on phone calls. The city’s infrastructure doesn’t always support them either, as poor lighting, lack of CCTV, and broken footpaths add to the fear. Several women also said that the late- night presence of police gave them a sense of security. “There is good police presence at night which makes me feel safer to

move around”, others however pointed out that the road rage, reckless driving, and harassment near highways still make Jaipur unsafe. “The late nights of young kids, boozing, fast driving—that's why Jaipur is not safe anymore, reflecting upon the broader social anxieties around changing city culture.

Figure 8: Reporting of incidences of harassment



Despite the fear, many women emphasized how much they love their city and don't want to live in constant fear. One woman mentioned that “Jaipur has been pretty safe compared to places I've been for work. These reflections show a mix of pride and frustration; women know the city isn't the worst, but they still don't feel entirely free. In the end, safety isn't just about the absence of violence; it's about being able to move freely, use public spaces without fear, and trust that the systems will protect you if something goes wrong. For Jaipur's women, true safety not only comes from collective awareness and authorities that listen, but also from better infrastructure.

5. Methodology

This paper sets out to examine the interrelation between women's safety concerns and urban public infrastructure in the city of Jaipur. Women's safety has been of prime concern to policy makers since the very beginning. It takes a sharper turn when women are increasingly occupying public spaces and participating in public life. The concerns have broadened to include the narrative of safety in relation to urban infrastructure. Spatial justice theories and urban governance converge on this issue of equal right to the city. Due to historical exclusions, women have remained outside on the margins of the city's public life. Modern-day infrastructure too seems plagued with the idea of the non-existent woman and remains a male dominated zone. Today, the question of safety is not foregrounded only in terms of safety from sexual assault, harassment, theft etc. It is moving towards the idea of complete access and full participation, which hinge on the questions of access and mobility, which are still curtailed. This paper tries to

analyse and understand these emergent concerns and through women’s perspectives, highlight the gaps and lacuna that exist in the ‘safety’ discourse.

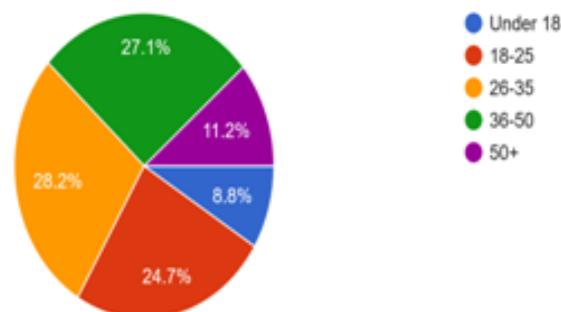
Jaipur has been chosen as the site of study. It has been observed that mega cities such as Delhi and Mumbai form the analytical basis of such studies. It was felt imperative that new emergent cities should also become a part of the larger literature on this theme. Jaipur serves to be one such city which has seen a rise in urbanisation and infrastructural development. The past two-three decades have seen rapid urbanisation in Jaipur making it a suitable candidate to understand the transitioning nature of a city. This rapid nature of urbanisation usually outpaces planning for safety and inclusive spaces. This development has led to the development of new residential and commerce zones, its strategic location and cultural heritage has attracted diverse industries. It has also become a prominent education hub leading to emergence of an ecosystem of newer infrastructure to meet the demands of these different populations. These dynamics allow for the examination of the intersections of urban infrastructure and women’s safety.

5.1. Sampling

This is a qualitative study that relies on narratives to build an understanding of the key concepts used to frame this study. A survey questionnaire was developed for the purpose of receiving responses on various aspects and parameters of safety, mobility and access. The sample size was 170 women between the age groups 18-50+ years. This survey was sent out to an initial small group of respondents who fit the criteria- urban women. Thereafter, the survey was snowballed to reach a larger respondent pool and a total of 170 responses were received. These were women across the city- rural, urban and semi-urban areas with different job profiles. Sampling was conducted keeping in mind the need for a broad based perspective of women and their experiences to add depth to this study.

1. Select the age group you belong to

170 responses



5.2. Analysis

The survey responses have been compiled and analysed using Microsoft Excel to identify patterns and relationships between women's perceptions, experiences and impact of urban infrastructure on their daily lives. With the help of descriptive analysis, response trends were identified and variations across groups were compared. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to interpret how infrastructural features relate to women's reported sense of safety, mobility and access. Graphical representations, including bar and pie charts, were used to illustrate key findings and highlight contrasts in perception and experience. In addition, open-ended responses were thematically reviewed to capture the qualitative depth of women's experiences and interpretations of urban safety and freedom. Recurring patterns around issues such as surveillance, restriction, infrastructural inadequacy, and negotiation of public presence were identified and interpreted alongside quantitative findings.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that women's safety in Jaipur is shaped as much by the city's design as by its social attitudes. Jaipur is often seen as a city of beauty and progress, but for many women, daily life here still involves small acts of caution, checking the time before stepping out, choosing well-lit routes, or avoiding crowded buses. These are not just habits; they are responses to a city that often forgets to plan with women in mind.

Even though Jaipur has developed rapidly, much of its public infrastructure still feels gendered. Poor lighting, unreliable public transport, and the lack of public toilets or safe waiting areas remind women that the city was not built for them. Measures like women-only coaches or reserved spaces may offer a sense of relief, but they also reinforce the idea that women need protection rather than equal access. Safety, in this sense, becomes about restriction instead of freedom.

What emerged strongly through this research is how women's access to and participation in urban life are fundamentally shaped by how safety is built or neglected within city design. The way women carry fear is often larger than the actual risk they face. It's a kind of quiet fear, built through years of warnings, experiences, and stories shared between women. Even if nothing happens, the awareness of what could happen shapes how they move, where they go, and how long they stay. This constant calculation shows how deeply gendered our cities still are.

Yet, women are not passive in this story. The women in Jaipur find ways to make the city work for them by sharing rides, using tracking apps, or simply claiming space in small, everyday ways. Their actions show strength and adaptability, but they also reveal how much effort women must put in just to feel safe. That effort should not be theirs alone. The responsibility lies with

city planners, policymakers, and communities to build spaces that do not make women choose between safety and freedom.

Safety in Jaipur, and in cities everywhere, cannot just mean more cameras, police presence, or separate compartments. It has to mean being able to move freely, without fear or judgment. It has to come from thoughtful design- better lighting, public benches, accessible transport, and from social change that treats women's presence in public as normal, not exceptional. Jaipur, with its mix of heritage and modernity, has the potential to become a model for more inclusive urban spaces. But for that to happen, safety needs to be reimagined not as protection, but as belonging. When women can occupy public spaces without hesitation, when they can travel without worry, and when the city feels like it was built for them too, that is when Jaipur will truly be a safe city.

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