



WOMEN'S SAFETY & THE CITY

A COLLECTION OF SEVEN FEATURE ARTICLES
BY
WOMEN'S FEATURE SERVICE

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The series of seven feature articles have been brought out as part of the UN Women Global Programme on Safe Cities Free of Violence against women and girls being undertaken by Jagori in partnership with Women's Feature Service with support from UN Women's Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives & Sri Lanka. We extend our gratitude to Pamela Philipose & the entire WFS team for their continued support.

Delhi.

January 2014

INDIA

MAPS FOR CHANGE: MAKING DELHI SAFER FOR WOMEN

By Pamela Philipose

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Delhi (Women's Feature Service) – Delhi, which marked its centenary as the capital of India recently, is a city marked by paradoxes. While the per capita incomes here are almost twice that of the national average, half its children live in slums. While it has a history of a settled population that goes back several centuries, it is also the site of high levels of migration. Delhi has seen the emergence of some of India's most powerful women, yet its sex ratio is an abysmal 865 girls per 1000 boys. It is one of the most heavily policed regions, but is also the site of the highest number of rapes in the country.

Delhi's growth in terms of numbers has been dictated by external compulsions. The population flows following partition in 1947, as well as recurrent droughts, occasional disasters and the constant search for better livelihoods, have seen a city that was 0.4 million in 1911 become a megapolis of 16.7 million a century later.

A modern urban existence hinges on the equal participation of women and men. This, in turn, presupposes basic safety, freedom from harassment and the right to free movement for everybody. So how do you secure the public safety of millions of women in an urban sprawl that has 28,508 kilometres of roads and a metro on which over two million ride every day? How do you ensure that women are not assaulted, attacked, sexually harassed in a city with hundreds of markets, parks, schools, colleges?



(Credit: WFS)

Safety is central if women are to step out of the home and achieve their potential but creating that feeling of security in the minds of women, especially those from vulnerable communities living in tough localities, is a huge challenge.

Kalpana Viswanath, advisor to an innovative project that focuses on women's safety in public spaces – Safer Cities Programme, Delhi – believes that the first step towards securing women's lives begins when public safety is not viewed just as a 'women's issue' but the concern of all. "Through this project we want to send out the message that everybody – from street vendors and bus conductors to schoolchildren and the government – needs to be involved in keeping Delhi safe," says Viswanath.

The Safer Cities Programme, Delhi, is being supported by UN Women and anchored by the women's resource centre Jagori, in partnership with the Delhi Government, the Safe Cities Campaign, the International Center for Research on Women and UN Habitat. It reaches out to communities in nine districts of the capital, all with very diverse populations, and forms partnerships with various civil society organisations and activists, as well as with 'Awaaz Uthao', a women's safety intervention of the Delhi government.

"We know that safety is central if women are to step out of the home and achieve their potential. Yet, creating that feeling of security in the minds of women, especially those from vulnerable communities living in tough localities, is a huge challenge," elaborates Anupriya from Jagori, one of the coordinators of this programme.



(Credit: WFS)

Delhi has seen a lot of public action and protest around the issue of women's safety ever since the terrible night of December 16, 2012, when six rapists set upon a 23-year-old student in a Delhi bus and ended up killing her.

Take 35-year-old Sohoni (name changed), a widow who supports her 15-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son by working as a nursing assistant in a private home. Trepidation walks with her every night as she returns home to a small hutment in an unauthorised colony straddling the historic Tughlakabad fort in south Delhi. This return journey is usually after nine at night and the crowds that mill around her neighbourhood during the day have melted away. Says she, her forehead crinkling with anxiety, "I realise anything can happen. Someone could leap out from behind a tree and snatch my purse or, worse, drag me into the bushes. It has happened here to other women."

Sohoni feels particularly vulnerable when she is waiting for a bus at night. "As I sit alone, cars drive up to me and men gesticulate invitingly. How do I convey to these animals that I have as much right to move on the streets without harassment as they have? 'Mein kya karoon, aaj ka mahaul aise hi hain (what can I do, today's situation is like this). Men rub against you in crowded buses, they pass suggestive comments and laugh amongst themselves, they make you feel like dirt," she adds. These are also experiences that Anushka (name changed), who is doing her third year History honours at Delhi University, can corroborate.

The experiences of Sohoni and Anushka are clearly those undergone by a wide section of women in Delhi. According to a 2010 baseline survey initiated by Jagori, public transport, buses and roadsides are reported as spaces where women and girls face high levels of sexual harassment. It also underlined that the most common forms of harassment reported were verbal (passing comments), visual (staring and leering) and physical (touching/groping, leaning over etc).

Farah Naqvi, women's activist and National Advisory Council (NAC) member, believes such behaviour emanates from an instinctive disrespect for women and she attributes it to the strongly patriarchal nature of Delhi's public culture. "In this city that trades in power, almost every human relationship has been commodified. Everything, whether it is a hamburger, a mobile phone or a woman is to be consumed or possessed."

Many believe that they can get away with anything if they have the right connections. "Delhi's VIP culture breeds impunity. Calls to change the law are understandable, but how many times can we change the law? For laws to actually work, we also need a better understanding, among every section of society, of a woman's right to bodily integrity and free movement," observes Madhu Mehra, activist lawyer and executive director, Partners for Law in Development (PLD).

Safety has many dimensions. There is a tendency to perceive women's safety through the prism of middle class experiences, but Delhi's reality is far more complex. "Perhaps the most unsafe category of women in Delhi today is the homeless," states Indu Prakash Singh, Head, Citymakers Programme, Indo-Global Social Service Society, which works among the destitute.

He points out that in the capital there is only one dedicated and permanent shelter for women, which can house about 40 women and a few girls. "In

the NDMC area of Delhi, which comprises 43 square kilometres and where most of the city's ruling elite live, there is not a single permanent facility of this kind. Yet, hundreds of homeless women live here and are forced to seek refuge within the precincts of temples and gurudwaras."

Many of them are young mothers in dire need of medical care. "When a woman delivered a baby on the street in 2010 and the media went to town on it, the courts directed the Delhi government to provide facilities for pregnant women and lactating mothers. Today, although two small facilities have been set up – in Sarai Rohilla and Jehangirpuri – nobody knows about them," reveals Singh.

It is for this reason that the Safer Cities Programme, Delhi, emphasises the need for information sharing and convergence of actors and actions by building broad partnerships on issues of safety and access to support. According to Jagori's Anupriya, while there are many service providers, all supposedly there to make the city safer, when someone is actually under attack, she doesn't know what to do, where to go, how to access the right service. Says she, "Even when a woman seeks help, she is often sent from department to department and ends up feeling, helpless, isolated and fearful. It is this scenario that we are trying to change. The vision is to build 'a city where girls and women from diverse sections of the society are able to move around freely without the fear of harassment and violence at all times.'"

A city that witnessed the terrible night of December 16, 2012, when six rapists set upon a 23-year-old student in a Delhi bus and ended up killing her, must do all it can to hold on to that vision and work towards making it a reality.

INDIA

SECURE PUBLIC SPACES: KERALA'S WOMEN RALLY FOR CHANGE

By Shwetha E. George

Kochi (Women's Feature Service) – The words 'public transport' have taken on a new seriousness, ever since the gang rape of a student on a private bus in Delhi on December 16, 2012. But it is not just Delhi that has witnessed sexual assaults on women in public transport. Take, for instance, Kerala. For decades no woman or girl here has ever considered a trip by bus or train safe. In fact, 'groping' is so commonplace that the stereotype of the 'groper-in-the-bus' is part of the comedian's stock-in-trade in the state.

According to the State Crime Records Bureau, 3,756 molestation cases were registered in 2011. In terms of "eve teasing", there were 573 such incidents that year. Around 98 per cent of women respondents in the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, and 99 per cent in Kozhikode, saw sexual harassment as the main safety issue, according to a recent study conducted by Sakhi Women Resource Centre, a Thiruvananthapuram-based organisation. It also found that 100 per cent women and young girls contacted had experienced sexual harassment, whether in a train or a bus in Kochi.

Reveals Rejitha, a resource person with Sakhi, "While travelling by bus, women report pinching, fingering and fiddling." In private buses, which outnumber public buses in Kochi, the seats in front of the bus are reserved for women.



(Credit: Rejitha\WFS)

A recent study conducted by Sakhi Women Resource Centre, a Thiruvananthapuram-based organisation, revealed that 100 per cent of the women contacted had experienced some form of sexual harassment on public transport.

But as the bus gets crowded men also stand near these spaces. Sexual harassers have a free run in precisely such situations, with some women even reporting blatant assaults like male hands making their way deep inside their garments. There was also a lot of verbal harassment, especially after dark. Men pass lewd comments or take part in conversations conducted in 'obscene coded language', leaving the few women passengers present on the bus feeling extremely humiliated and vulnerable.

Even the crew on the bus cannot be expected to conduct themselves in a decent manner. It is very common to find conductors brushing against women while selling tickets. Female students, especially those who travel at concessional rates, are treated badly. Not only do buses not stop to pick them up, once inside they are subjected to rude comments and are often not allowed to use a seat, or told that they can sit on the lap of a male passenger.

Such treatment is routine, no matter what they wear or how they conduct themselves. Many have been forced to adopt strategies like growing their nails or carrying pins and umbrellas, to stave off assaults. Their best option, of course, is to travel in buses meant only for women, but these are few and far between.

Disturbing testimonies of this kind led Sakhi to focus on improving the helplines instituted by the state in all its 14 districts. Helplines were seen as useful in getting help to the spot. The number 1091, the designated women's helpline run by the Kerala Police, has emerged as a very important resource in many cities.



(Credit: Rejitha\WFS)

Seeing the critical situation of women's safety in Kerala, Sakhi Women Resource Centre conducted a safety audit and study. These students of Marian College were involved in the safety audit at Kumily town in Idukki district.

The problem was that very few women knew about the existence of such a facility. Sakhi, therefore, decided to find out how many cases came to the helpline, the nature of the cases, the response towards them, as well as the follow-up procedures and actions taken. The goal was to arrive at an analysis of the efficacy of this approach, which would in turn help the administration to understand the pros and cons of such an intervention and to address the gaps.

The drive was conducted in Thrissur, where the state's helpline was first introduced in 2005, and, thereafter, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikode and Kasargode.

The primary feedback itself was that the helplines were hardly effective. In Thrissur, the 1091 toll free number works from BSNL mobile phones but it is impossible to connect from other phones. Also, the helpline has no outgoing facility. One jeep allotted to the helpline service is in a very bad state and all the four Kinetic Hondas initially allotted to the helpline service were later taken back by the department. Six women police constables and a male driver work in shifts, from 8 am to 6 pm and 6 pm to 8 am. No extra funds have been allotted for out-of-pocket expense and currently the officers themselves pool in money to meet their out-of-pocket expenses such as buying food or train/bus tickets for poor women who approach the helpline with their cases.

Although the Thrissur helpline gets an average of 30 calls per month - with the maximum number of them taking place after 10 pm - there have hardly been any women callers over the past one year. Most calls came in from other helplines like police patrol vehicles, or the child helpline or police aid posts, especially at bus stands. None of the calls were recorded. The efficacy of the system was thus judged to be nil. The other three cities fared no better.

But since this study was conducted under the aegis of the state Home Department, police personnel at the very high echelons of the force suggested many improvements. For one, they stressed the need to publicise the helpline number a great deal more. Second, they recommended that funds be made available to increase the use of computers and the internet for better communication. They also argued for more staff, with additional women sub-inspectors appointed in all police stations to handle such issues.

There was a need for new, closed vehicles - Sumo or Qualis - that would provide comfort and privacy to the women seeking help, they observed. Another imperative highlighted was the need for intensively training police personnel on handling these calls, a process that would necessarily include sessions on counselling.

Almost everyone consulted agreed that the helpline number should be toll free and have access to connections from all BSNL/VSNL and private land/mobile services, with another connection catering to follow up work. There

was also a strong advocacy for in camera proceedings in courts and fast track courts to deal with these cases.

Sakhi members believe that the Kerala Protection of Privacy and Rights of Women Act 2012 that was recently enacted is a step in the right direction although they know well that laws are inadequate to curtail such incidents. As Rosakutty, Chairperson, Kerala State Women's Commission, observes, "These incidents are born out of a deep-rooted contempt and disrespect for women. No law can change this." Clearly, awareness campaigns and educational programmes have to be part of any intervention that seeks to transform public attitudes and end public apathy. Rosakutty puts it this way, "Society, in general, needs to be more pro-active. We need to bolster the retaliatory spirit in our girls, so that they can defend themselves and their rights." For that, she adds, they need to have a sound knowledge of their legal rights and be ensured of public support wherever they are.

Today, however, that is certainly not the case. Women are forced to bear all the humiliation and attack that come their way without speaking out for fear that assaulters will retaliate even more violently. Similarly, bystanders are mute because they know well that in the current climate of impunity, violence could be directed at them, if they interfere.

It is to end this culture of impunity that the campaign against sexual harassment in public transport is so important. Sakhi is one of the organisations that have taken up the challenge. Through posters, stickers, street theatre and television talk shows, it aims to build the confidence of women subjected to sexual harassment so that they can defend themselves and seek justice, even while effective and timely messages are conveyed to the public on the critical importance of this issue.

INDIA

REDEFINING MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY FOR TEENS

By **Bula Devi**

Delhi (Women's Feature Service) – What is 'mardangi' (masculinity)? Who is a 'respectable' girl? Is a boy 'smart' only if he has a gym-pumped body? ... When it comes to dealing with conventional notions of masculinity or femininity, questions like these baffle the minds of young women and men. Living in a predominantly patriarchal society leaves them little or no room for independent thinking on such subjects.

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Nowhere was this more evident than at a unique workshop, organised by the women's resource centre Jagori, as part of its on-going 'Safer Cities Programme Delhi', which is supported by UN Women. The workshop, conducted in Badarpur – a low-income resettlement colony on the margins of South Delhi – brought together a motley group of youngsters, aged between 14 and 21 years, to discuss "hamara samuday, hamari pehchan" (our identity, our community), what constructs masculinity and femininity and how that affects their community.

For starters, the youngsters were given three cameras and everybody was instructed to take pictures of the participants in their group. Excited at the prospect of being photographed, they happily posed for these shots, some more readily than others. Then as their reactions were sought on the results, interesting observations popped up. "She looks like a 'goondi' (masculine person); she is dressed in



(Credit: Bula Devi\ WFS)

Jyoti Chowdhury, 14, Savita, 19, and Jyoti Chauhan are articulate young women who took part in the discussions on masculinity and femininity. Chowdhury wondered: "why boys whistle or pass lewd comments when an unknown girl rides a scooty or walks alone on the street?".

a ‘bold’ manner,” commented the boys looking at a picture of a girl in jeans and a shirt with a few buttons open. In contrast, compliments poured in for those who wore the traditional salwar kameez: “She looks like a Barbie doll; her beautiful smile has lit up the photograph; her simplicity is the best part of the picture; she looks so innocent and quiet,” commented one young man. Yet another picture – of a sombre-looking girl dressed in jeans and a simple shirt – drew the comment: “She looks good.”

What did the girls have to say? While some reflected on the facial expressions of the boys (“He looks serious” or “Is he sad and depressed?”), others remarked on bodily features (“He should have shown off his muscles” or “He looks like a villain in a South Indian film!”).

The reactions were almost predictable. The image of the girl with the top buttons of her shirt open was widely deemed as “unacceptable”, even though her outfit was not revealing in any way. Male participants opined that while “men can wear anything girls need to be more careful”. For them, respect for a girl emerged from factors like “how politely she speaks” or “how presentable she is”. In their eyes, girls with their hair cut short are immediately typecast as lacking “good character”!

When 14-year-old Anita, heard these observations of the young men, she was amazed by the hypocrisy inherent in them. She remarked, “Why is it that boys whistle or pass lewd comments when an unknown girl rides a scooter or walks alone on the street? They wouldn’t do this if that very girl happened to be the sister of someone known to them. They would then immediately get protective.”

None of the boys had a convincing reply to her question but clearly the general view was that while “good girls” have to be demure, the rules are completely different for boys. Being ‘manly’ entailed the display of physical strength: ‘Mardangi unki taqat mei hoti hai’ (manliness reflects in their strength); ‘mard woh jo kabhi rote nahi hai’ (real men never cry), ‘mard bahut dard sah sakte hai’ (men can endure a lot of pain). Recalled one boy at the workshop, “Earlier when I used to cry sometimes, I used to be ridiculed. ‘Sab bolte the, kya ladkiyon ke jaise ro raha hai’ (Everyone used to say you keep crying like a girl).”

While patriarchy has certain expectations from women, it also makes demands of men. Not one of the male participants had been given the space to reflect on the real notions of strength and pain. No one had ever asked

them to think about whether a man could endure even an iota of the pain a woman bears during child birth, or whether their sisters ever got to eat as much as they did or play as freely or be able to build the physical strength they are so proud of flaunting. The reality is that girls are usually confined within the four walls of their homes and instructed to help out in household chores while boys are allowed the freedom to do what they want.

When the youngsters were asked to share their life ambitions, more underlying biases emerged. At one point many of the girls present expressed an interest in becoming doctors. This left the boys dumbstruck. Said one, "I always thought that girls only wanted to become beauticians or housewives."

What was heartening was that these young girls from Badarpur consistently expressed the desire to take up a profession in order to make themselves "self-reliant" – some wanted to become air hostesses, others, law enforcers; some even wanted to join the police and do something for their country. Anita, for instance, wanted to become a high-ranking police official and Meera, 19, saw herself in combat uniform or heading a management team in a five-star hotel. Anita justified her choice by saying, "Our local police is not able to stop crimes against women so I want to become a high ranking officer to be able to make a difference."

The boys, too, had their preferences. Amitabh 15, for whom masculinity meant "wearing dark glasses and walking with a swagger", wanted a secure government job. The eldest son of a taxi driver, he was keen to pursue his studies and take tuitions on the side to supplement the family income. Mohan, 17, shared his dream of making a film on women, a reflection of his thoughts on the recent spurt of rape cases. "Nobody has time to read books these days. So I want to make a Hindi film on women in an effort to bring change in society," he said.

The idea of the workshop was to make visible general attitudes. Observed Sanjay Muttou, the resource person working on gender issues with Jagori, "Through the dynamics of a workshop like this, one makes boys and girls more sensitive. For instance, while the pain a woman has to bear during child birth may not be a parameter or benchmark of strength for these



(Credit: Bula Devi WFS)

Nishant, 17, wants to make a Hindi film on violence against women.

boys, a sustained, close engagement through such sensitisation efforts helps them explore such notions.”

The close link between stereotyped images of the body and violence becomes apparent in such workshops, just one of the multiple events organised under the ‘Safer Cities Programme, Delhi’, which have given a platform to bring young people from different backgrounds and localities in Delhi together. Youth members from Bardarpur have led public events to fight violence against women and also conducted safety audits in their neighbourhoods. Two youth members are core members of the much talked about Must Bol Campaign, which uses new forms of media to speak out against violence and usher in social change.

According to Muttoo such articulation is the first step to learning. “I find workshops particularly an effective way of communicating the idea of gender equality,” he reiterated. As if to underline his words, one lad spoke up, “We men should certainly change. When I go home I will tell my father that we should all chip in to do the housework and not leave it all to my sisters and mother.”

INDIA

From 'Rape Capital' To 'Safe Capital': Women Rethink Urban Planning

By Amrita Nandy

Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - Not far from the metro station in Delhi's downtown Connaught Place – now officially known as Rajiv Chowk – the incessant hustle bustle of a weekday evening ended for a while. Office goers, tourists, vendors and shoppers stood still, much like the majestic white Edwardian columns near them. They were stopped in their tracks by the sight of a few women who walked in slow motion and asked aloud in chorus: "Can I? Can I walk on the street at 12 midnight? Should I? Should I lie in the park? I should. I can." Highlighting the issue of shrunken spaces and the restricted public life of women, this street performance is one of the diverse efforts underway to re-organise the cultural and physical landscape of Delhi and turn it from 'rape capital' to 'safe capital'.

While institutional reforms and capacity-building through better policing, stronger laws and quick justice are indeed imperative in ensuring women's safety, they are among an array of measures required to address this multi-faceted concern. Changing mindsets and attitudes towards women is certainly the proverbial elephant in the room or, in this case, the street.

Street performance, like the one that happened in Connaught Place, is a creative tool for collective reflection,



In Delhi's downtown Connaught Place – now officially called Rajiv Chowk – the incessant hustle and bustle of a weekday evening paused at the sight of a few women, who asked aloud: 'Can I walk on the street at 12 midnight? Should I lie in the Park? I should. I can.'

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feels Maya Krishna Rao, the brain behind the performance entitled 'Walk'. After it was performed at a number of venues, including festivals and schools, Rao decided to take it to the streets with the members of the Citizens' Collective against Sexual Assault (CCSA), a local group of individuals and organisations that raises awareness about sexual violence against women, girls and the transgenders. "Walk' is meant to help us dig deeper into our beliefs and conscience. Women's desires, needs, fears, vulnerabilities and demands can be put across forcefully to the masses. I think it is such reflection done by men and women that can lead to the assertion of our rights. Art and drama are an effective means to explore such complex themes," she adds. Rao has used 'Walk' to initiate conversations about consent and saying "no" among adolescents and teenagers in Delhi's schools.

A cultural intervention of this kind is one of the ways to transform societal attitudes towards women. The need of the hour is to encourage efforts to create more equal access to public spaces. For instance, a 2010 baseline



(Credit: Maya Krishna Rao)

Voices demanding a rethink in urban planning are growing louder by the day as issues of shrunken spaces and restricted public access for women take centrestage. (Credit: Maya Krishna Rao)

survey conducted by Jagori, in partnership with UN Women and Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Delhi, revealed isolated and/or unlit roads to be significant problem points. What came through clearly was that the fear of crime keeps girls and women from fully living their lives, be it in the arena of education, work or leisure and recreation.

Sunanda, 29, a resident of a gated enclave in South Delhi, shares her hesitation in accessing public spaces. "I feel sad that despite living right next to a lush green park, all I can do is look at it from the verandah but not go into

it and walk on the grass or sit and read a book. It only has men who play cards or drink late into the evening. There are hardly any women who go there, either because of these men or a general feeling of insecurity," says the marketing executive.

Unlike Sunanda, Naseema, 48, a domestic worker, does not bemoan the lack of a recreational park but pleads for streetlights in her locality, a dense slum cluster in West Delhi. She reveals, "In winters, it gets dark early and neither I nor my daughter feel safe coming back home. Men stop their scooters or cars and stare at us, pass lewd remarks on that dark stretch of the road. I even know of women who have been harassed there."

Women's concerns about access to public transport, public toilets, street lights and so on have been chronicled well enough. The Jagori baseline survey highlighted, among other tangible gaps and structural lapses, the need for inclusion of women's safety concerns, including that of the people with disabilities, in Local Area Plans. It also argued for public consultations with women before all urban project proposals are conceptualised.

Says Kalpana Viswanath, Senior Advisor, Jagori, "Street lights and public toilets are features that should definitely encourage women towards public spaces. While main roads and

certain areas of our city are often well lit, what we really need is uniform lighting across all kinds of colonies. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi's (MCD) own survey has revealed a sharp shortage of toilets for women. Of the women's toilets around, only a few are actually usable. So apart from the construction of toilets, their maintenance is equally important."

In a city with only 3,712 toilets for men and 269 for women (as per figures shared by civic agencies in Delhi in May 2013 in response to a PIL filed in the Delhi High Court), disabled women are doubly marginalised. Samarthyam, an organisation that works on barrier-free and accessible transportation and public infrastructure for the disabled, claims that even in colleges and universities, the disabled do not access libraries, laboratories or even toilets for fear of sexual harassment or assault.

In consultation with Jagori, urban planners at Delhi Development Authority's Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure Planning and Engineering Centre (UTTIPEC) created a comprehensive set of guidelines – both short- and long-term – especially geared towards women's safety. The underpinning philosophy of the guidelines is 'public' need and nurturing human contact as against elitist infrastructure (flyovers, malls, showrooms and so on), ghettoised colonies and gated communities.

To cite a few examples, the guidelines entail spaces for hawkers as "eyes on

the street”, the creation of night shelters, re-designing bus stops, making GPS mandatory for autorickshaws and taxis, and so on. Submitted to the Lt. Governor and Chief Secretary, Delhi, the guidelines re-imagine a city where women and other marginalised sections are less isolated.

Retrofitting Delhi with a progressive perspective, one that is also gender and disabled sensitive, should make India’s capital truly vibrant. A city where pavements and streets reflect its multiple diversities and where the underprivileged are not “encroachers” and women are not “careless” if out late at night.

For women, accessing public spaces and living a fuller life should be, literally and metaphorically, a walk in the park.

INDIA

THAT CALL FOR HELP: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE HELPLINES?

By Pamela Philipose

Delhi (Women's Feature Service) – Sonu Das was frantic. She had just stabbed someone. Recalls Suresh Grover, Director, The Monitoring Group (TMG), a leading anti-racist UK-based charity that promotes civil rights and runs a phone-in helpline for those under attack, “For us as a helpline service in the Das case, our emergency service role ended when the police arrived. But in the long term this woman needed support.”

Das had come to the UK as a domestic help and had been treated appallingly. She escaped her employers' home with the help of a cab driver who locked her up, kept her passport and raped her. After three days, she managed to leave the room, got hold of a kitchen knife and stabbed her assailant. She thought she had killed him when she had phoned TMG (he survived). Fortunately, TMG was able to get legal help and she was acquitted of manslaughter charges after six months.

Emphasises Grover, “This case illustrates some key aspects of a professionally run helpline. It has to be visible and its existence widely known. It has to be sensitive to the needs of the caller – it cannot pass value judgments and confidentiality is critical. It has to be credible, and credibility demands sustainability. In our experience, 40 per cent of callers are in urgent need of protection from harm.”

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(Credit: Khadijah Faruqi)

In Delhi, after the December 16, 2012, gang rape of a student, Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit installed a dedicated helpline service – 181– for women facing sexual assaults. Patque que et fenatiam de

Grover's words assume importance given the rising tide of sexual violence in India, which has prompted the setting up of more helpline services. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav set up one in his state late last year. In Delhi, when public anger spilled on to the streets after the December 16, 2012, gang rape of a student, Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit installed a dedicated helpline – 181 – for women facing sexual assault two weeks later. It presently functions from her office.

Making such efforts work, however, is another story. Recalls Khadijah Faruqi, a lawyer and activist, who is a consultant for the 181 service, "What struck me first was the fact that Delhi, despite its high levels of crimes against women, did not have a state-run intervention of this kind that understood women's problems from a woman's perspective."

Faruqi, having worked with the helpline intervention of the women's resource centre, Jagori, then began training the 181 helpline team and establishing a supporting network.

"Experience tells us that a woman under attack often has multiple issues – ranging from access to a hospital to education for a child. This meant that we had to connect with a whole spectrum of service providers – from hospitals to shelter homes. Because we had the backing of the chief minister, the response from these institutions was generally good," says Faruqi. Today, the 181 helpline has a 17-member team, with four floor supervisors who are all graduates and have done case work for a minimum of eight years.



(Credit: Khadijah Faruqi)

The 181 helpline in Delhi has a 17-member team, with four floor supervisors who are all graduates and have done case work for a minimum of eight years.

Apart from 181, and some helplines run by civil society organisations, women facing sexual harassment in Delhi can dial 100

and 1091 – numbers operated by the control room of the Delhi Police. According to T.N. Mohan, Special Commissioner, Operations, Delhi Police, the role of these helplines have been "pivotal". Says Mohan, "We run the country's biggest response service of this kind. Of the hundred incoming lines of 'Dial 100', we have 10 dedicated to crimes against women and two more for stalking. This includes the 'Dial 1091' service. Before the Delhi gang

rape of December, there were only two lines for such crimes. These helplines have gone a long way in shoring confidence in women. For instance, in January we had about 50 calls relating to domestic violence per fortnight, today it is around 1,000 per fortnight."

The Delhi-based Multiple Research Action Group (MARG) undertook a study of the 100 and 1091 helplines in late 2012, covering nine districts of Delhi, to understand better women's experiences of police helplines and how they can be made more effective. The study was part of the Safe City free From Violence against Women and Girls Initiative, supported by UN Women and anchored by Jagori in partnership with UN Habitat and the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Delhi.

One of the major issues that emerged from the study was the need for better understanding. States Anju Talukdar, Executive Director, MARG, "The training we found was largely focused on technical aspects rather than on developing empathetic communication skills. There was also no system of monitoring. For instance, we found many women who were unhappy with the response they received, but there was no way that those who ran it could have learnt of this and corrected procedures. Monitoring and evaluation, even if done randomly, is important." The other aspect that was missing was the laying down of Standard Operating Procedures for all helpline operators.

Talukdar believes that a multiplicity of helplines is not helpful and that it would be far better if there was just one helpline that works and is seen to work. Kalpana Viswanath, Advisor, Jagori, agrees, "In the US, an effective helpline like 911 is a huge asset. Everyone knows it exists, and its very existence provides a sense of security to those who are isolated and vulnerable."

Akshara, an organisation working on gender justice issues in Mumbai, has been assisting the running of the police helpline, 103, for about five years now. Nandita Shah, its co-director, elaborates, "Positioning a helpline is crucial. If we believe that it is fundamentally the state's duty to protect women, then collaborating with the police assumes importance."

While running helplines through centralised call centres may have emerged as the popular model, Shah believes they cannot guarantee the immediacy of response that a police helpline can. "Within a few minutes of a woman calling 103, a police patrol can be expected to arrive at her doorstep. This is an immense source of comfort, whether these women live in high-rises or slums," she explains.

Akshara, therefore, concentrates on strengthening 103, by organising trainings and creating better data systems and directories of supporting agencies in a ward-wise and theme-wise manner. The 103 helpline is now linked to protection officers, medical institutions, rescue homes, and other institutions. Akshara has also developed short films to be shown in movie theatres and about 4,000 Mumbai buses carry its helpline stickers.

It is also, however, true that many women are not comfortable about contacting the police. Shah agrees that this could be a problem and it means that the police will have to work harder at being more gender-friendly. But she also points out instances where women actually wish the police come and talk to abusive families or husbands. "They don't want it to be a police case but welcome the police acting as a source of support. This preventive dimension is useful because it allows abused woman to work things out for themselves," says Shah.

Today, the significance of an effective helpline is widely recognised in India but it is still a work in progress. Several aspects require a resolution. Should there be a multiplicity of helplines or should there be just one? Is it better that the helpline is located within the police system, or outside it? What are the elements that make for effective follow-up action?

More clarity will emerge as the concept of helplines catches on and larger numbers of people are encouraged to use them. But this will only happen if there is trust. Says Grover, "Normally, trust is built through face-to-face contact. Here we have to ensure trust through a telephone conversation that lasts a few minutes. That initial call is very important because it is for the first time that a person under assault has actually summoned the courage to talk. The manner in which it is handled will tell you whether the helpline service is working or not."

INDIA

MIXED CITY SPACES ARE SAFE CITY SPACES

By **Suneeta Dhar**

Delhi (Women's Feature Service) - How do we make our cities safer for everybody, especially women? This is a question that has become insistent and urgent at a time when assaults and attacks on women have increasingly become commonplace. The recent gang rape in Mumbai and the torture and murder of a young Dalit woman in Haryana remind us of the rising tide of violence against women in urban spaces.

Countries the world over have had to grapple with this concern. We have seen grassroots networks like the Huairou Commission and Women In Cities International (working in Latin America, Africa and Canada) that have envisioned their urban spaces as gender inclusive. The safest cities are designed to enable their residents and those that come there to work and study, from different ethnic and class backgrounds, to live and interact together as a community. This teaches respect, tolerance, regard for each other and also ensures the social ownership of the concept of safety.

In India, in contrast, metropolises are getting increasingly segmented. In both Delhi and Mumbai – purportedly world-class cities – the well-off live in privileged pockets and gated communities, while the less-privileged are relegated to under-resourced neighbourhoods, often at the fringes. Ironically, in earlier times, both cities had far more mixed neighbourhoods. Yet, if we are to go by the work that Jagori has done in recent years on making cities more secure for women, it emerges clearly that mixed city spaces make for safer cities.

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Women in public spaces have reported feeling safer when there were “eyes on the road”, when there were people around: vendors, shopkeepers, rickshaw drivers and others who use the streets and make a living on them.

Women in public spaces reported feeling safer when there were “eyes on the road”, when there were people around: vendors, shopkeepers, rickshaw drivers and others who use the streets and make a living on them. Women feel safer when they can freely use local transport and move around without any threat or fear of sexual harassment. The “sanitisation” or “beautification” of cities, where working class communities are re-located to distant sites and street vendors are taken off the roads, actually ends up making them more prone to crime and generates a feeling of insecurity. Mixed communities, mixed neighbourhoods, and mixed land use make for a greater sense of safety.

The women who are potentially the worst affected in unsafe conditions are the very ones who have no voice in deciding the contours of the city or ways to make it safer. One has often wondered why it is so hard to involve communities in planning their own living and working spaces. We know that top-down planning, no matter where it takes place in the world, is never effective. Urban design should better reflect the aspirations, imaginations and requirements of all sections of the population. Where should the public toilet be? Where should the water source be located? Which is the best site for the school?

Jagori has tried to bring in the perceptions of women and the youth into urban plans in various localities in Delhi where it has been working – many

of them resettlement colonies like Bawana, Madanpur Khadar, Molarband, and others. Young people here can then dream of alternatives to make everyday spaces into living habitats in the best sense of the term. In Madanpur Khadar, for instance, the local youth undertook a house-to-house survey as well as conducted safety audits, and highlighted the concerns that emerged through special campaigns, gender sensitisation workshops and street theatre. In this way, they could actually reclaim a park and get its



(Credit: WFS)

Proper street lighting is necessary to ensure a safer environment for women and children after sundown.

surrounding walls painted. For the first time in nine years, girls who had never played collectively in public actually reported that they were cycling and taking part in games in a park that they had helped to create.

Sadly, though, with no sustained follow-up by the local authorities, their efforts were laid waste and the space quickly lapsed back into a garbage dump. Had such a park been developed further, the next generation of kids, inspired by their older counterparts, would have imprinted their right to this public space and ensured greater safety for their young peers.

The collapse of that park only illustrates the huge gap that exists between service providers and the community on how they imagine public spaces. Investments in infrastructure continue in the mainstream of the city benefiting only some sections, even while there is so much to be done to improve the derelict spaces in the neglected neighbourhoods.

In Bawana, young people filed petitions under Right To Information (RTI) Act to track expenditures on public infrastructure in their localities. A gender analysis study of the annual budget for essential services conducted by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), a Delhi based research and advocacy organisation, found huge disparities in investment in such settlements, as compared to the main city. Why is it so hard to get gender-sensitive, low-cost community infrastructure in place for everybody? Toilets, for instance, were not seen as important, although they were crucial to women's safety and well-being. Simple innovations could meet the specific needs of women – pregnant women, women with disabilities, menstruating women – leading to a greater life of dignity.

Changing public attitudes on some of these issues is another huge challenge. As part of the 'Safer Cities Initiative', supported by UN Women and in partnership with the Delhi government's Department of Women and Child Development, Jagori has undertaken trainings for the 'Awaaz Uthao' programme of the Delhi government that seeks to involve the larger community in safety and empowerment issues. Efforts are underway to set up safety guidelines for school-going girls, including good sanitation, lighting, counselling support, and awareness campaigns on the unacceptability of sexual harassment in any form. At a recent meeting of Mission Convergence – a part of this intervention – a young woman from a west Delhi colony shared how young people in her area had, after conducting safety audits, taken up local concerns with the police, resident associations and the public works department.

While these indicate some stirrings, much remains to be done. What happened on December 16, 2012 in that Delhi bus held a mirror to society and forced us to reflect on the deep-seated patriarchal mindset and culture. An international community network, 'Delhi and Beyond' – located across 60 cities of the world – was formed, and women followed up on safety measures in their communities. At the city level, the state government set up an inter-departmental core group that meets regularly on this issue, which is chaired by the Chief Secretary of the state government. A special helpline – 181 – has also been set up in the Chief Minister's office, and has received over 2,00,000 calls related to sexual harassment and stalking, a crime not even recognised earlier.

This takes us to the crux of the issue. We need to be pro-active about putting policies and infrastructure in place to bring about the desired results. A few sensitisation programmes are certainly not enough and the struggle has always been to ensure that such interventions actually permeate a society marked deeply by a culture of impunity and unaccountability.

Ensuring change is not just the responsibility of the state. As a society, we need to deeply reflect on various, inter-connected concerns and work together to make our cities sites of empowerment, not spaces of fear and violence.

(The writer is director of Jagori, the Delhi-based women's resource centre.)

INDIA

SCHOOLS FOR SAFETY: LESSONS ON GENDER EQUALITY

By **Aditi Bishnoi**

Delhi (Women's Feature Service) –

*“Every morning when I go to school, I cross the Lal Market where vendors as well as shoppers often pass lewd comments. I want the school authorities to do something about it.” – Ashima, a Class VII student at a municipal school in Delhi.

*“If my friends absent themselves from the school for some reason, I do not go that day. I never go to school alone.” – Roohi, a Class VI student.

* “When the girls’ morning school shift ends, boys, who are supposed to enter after the girls leave [for the afternoon shift] stand outside the gate and try to touch them or pass comments.” – Ankit, a Class VIII student.

* “In our school there are many secluded spots where we avoid going because there are many ‘bad’ things that go on there.” – Saurabh, who is in Class IX.

The disturbing experiences of these youngsters, unfortunately, mirror those of lakhs of school-goers across the national capital. Once known as ‘the temple of learning’, these days, schools are an ‘arena of fear and violence – be it ‘eve teasing’, bullying, verbal abuse, corporal punishment...’

According to Ishani Sen, an activist with Pravah, an organisation that has been working with the youth for over two decades, “Today, children are at risk, whether in the government school

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(Credit: WFS)

School-going girls are undoubtedly the most at risk from crimes like harassment, leering and inappropriate touching particularly as they travel to school and back. (Credit: Rosipaw on Flickr under CreativeCommons)

system or the public institutions. They are vulnerable while travelling to and from school as well as on its premises. Not only do they face harassment first-hand, they also witness it, which impacts them adversely.”

Girls are the primary targets of violations like teasing, leering and inappropriate touching, although in Sen’s experience younger boys are at risk, too. “While they themselves are bullied by the older boys, they feel helpless even when they see someone else being manhandled. They don’t tell anyone because they know something ‘bad’ could happen to them if word gets out,” she adds.

Clearly, violence has penetrated the schooling system, just as it has become a lived reality for girls and women whether in homes, offices or public spaces. It is with the idea of reaching out to young impressionable minds that Pravah and Jagori, a Delhi-based women’s resource centre, joined hands in July 2012 under the Safe Cities Programme Delhi, which is part of the UN Women Global Programme on Safe Cities Free of Violence against women and girls project. With the support of the state government’s Directorate of Education, a slew of activities have been undertaken across eight government schools in south Delhi to raise awareness on children’s right to a safe learning environment and strike up a dialogue on gender equality.

(Credit: WFS)



(Credit: WFS)

Explains Sen, “The two major factors that influence children’s socialisation process are the home and the school environments. That is why a discourse on gender safety and equity had to be introduced in schools. We chose government institutions as that’s where the majority gains an education. Teachers, who can influence the attitudes of students, are important stakeholders in this conversation. Therefore, we work with teachers and students simultaneously.”

An effective training module has been developed for teachers, which enables them to understand the need to work with children on gender issues, look at

During the workshop, teachers got to interact with gender specialists that enabled them to understand the need to work with children on gender issues and overcome their own gender stereotypes. (Credit: Shreyanjana Bhattacharjee\WFS)

providing a safe learning environment through the gender lens and explore their own stereotypes. Darshana, an art teacher with a Government Girls Senior Secondary School in south Delhi, was among the group of 14 that came together for a two-day workshop organised by Jagori and Pravah earlier this year. Says she, "Violence against girls and women has become a big menace so it is important for us to talk about it. It's critical to create awareness especially among children as it is the only way they can prevent it or defend themselves. I have learnt techniques to engage with children on these subjects."

Adds Dr V.K. Pathak, who teaches Sanskrit and Geography at Government Boys Senior Secondary School in J-Block, Saket, the venue of the workshop, "The interaction with gender specialists has helped me answer many questions that boys have regarding the opposite sex. There is a lot of natural curiosity that needs to be addressed and, as their teacher I know I can help them."

Pathak encourages his students to talk about what they think about women and why they stoop to 'eve teasing' for "fun". "We have done different activities with students to involve them in the gender dialogue. After the verdict of the Delhi gang rape case my class wanted to discuss the juvenile's sentence. Some boys said, 'Sir, he has only benefited from this case – not only is he off the streets, he is getting food and entertainment benefits. Tell us, rape karne ka fayda hua ya nuksaan? After I cleared their misconstrued notions they finally understood that though it may appear that the convict had got a 'good deal' he would have to face the consequences of the crime he has committed."

Darshana, who has had frank conversations with her girls, observes, "Nowadays they are aware of the dangers they are up against. Even those as young as in Class Six have freely spoken about being harassed as they travel to school and back, and how older men try to lure them with sweets."

Plan India, an NGO that works with underprivileged children, has also been holding teacher trainings in schools under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation. Informs Lilly Vishwanathan, Senior Program Manager, "Involving teachers is essential. We talk to them about behavioural management – how to respond to children, keep them busy in class; we take them through the Right to Education Act as well."

Further, to guide and review the existing school curriculum from a gender

perspective - an important step towards ensuring a more inclusive school environment - the state government formed a core committee of specialists on education, communication and gender, post December's rape incident. Rigorous dialogue continued for weeks where experts from various organisations, including Pravah, Jagori and Nirantar, shared their concerns and experiences to enrich the YUVA curriculum. Later, teachers are expected to undergo trainings on the same.

Of course, how can there be attempts at raising awareness on gender issues in schools without the involvement of students? Says Sen, "Of all the activities we have been doing with around 800 school children over the last year, what have proved most effective are the film screenings by the Must Bol campaign, the safety audit walks and the self reflection exercises with Jagori."

She recalls one heated discussion on stalking that followed a film screening: "A few boys initially said that the girls should not go out alone after dark. When probed further they said that boys would 'obviously' tease girls if they knew that they were alone. Then, one boy stood up and asked: 'Shouldn't boys be kept at home after dark so that they don't create a nuisance on the streets?' This changed the course of the discussion. The students realised that it was unfair to restrict the movement of girls just because men were threat to them."

Plan India's 'Chuppi Todo' campaign, which talks about unsafe touch, is another intervention that has proved effective. Elaborates Vishwanathan, "We have developed a short film, scripted and enacted by some girls from Mongolpuri, and it is being shown in schools under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation. After the screenings, children are encouraged to speak about their experiences."

Vishwanathan also emphasises the need to convey concepts like gender equality to children at an early stage, "One needs to get them thinking on these lines while they are still young. What they learn during their adolescent years is likely stay with them throughout their lives."

Ultimately, while learning is indeed a lifelong process, if the foundation provided by the school is sound and strong, it does offer hope for a safer tomorrow.



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