

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES

POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN INDIAN CITIES: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PLANNING

There is a growing recognition that large numbers of women in Indian cities experience violence inside and outside their homes and feel insecure about being in public spaces. Patriarchal norms and sexist attitudes towards women are the main underlying reasons for these experiences. However, outside the home, the nature of urban development and governance, such as housing location and type, provision of adequate infrastructure and services, provision of adequate and safe transport, and responsive policing also play an important role in creating safe and unsafe spaces for women in the city, which in turn expands or constrains their access to resources and opportunities. Gender also intersects with class and other social identities such as caste, ethnicity and religion, to shape women's urban experiences. This study looks at gender insecurity and violence against women in Bombay Hotel, a locality of approximately 25,000 poor and low-income Muslim households which has developed as an informal commercial subdivision on the southern periphery of Ahmedabad (see Box 1).

Women living in Bombay Hotel face various kinds of violence including assaults, rape, sexual harassment and theft. Many of these forms of violence occur within the locality and many women have a pervasive fear of facing such violence while moving about in the locality. Women also do not have access to appropriate and safe buses and do not feel fully safe while using shared auto-rickshaws. This leads women to step back from the public sphere and refrain from inhabiting streets and other open spaces in their locality and using public transport. This situation is compounded by the cultural constraints imposed on women in a large section of the Muslim community. This often makes a woman's life in Bombay Hotel a constant struggle against society, family, poverty and anti-social elements.



AHMEDABAD POLICY BRIEF 9

BOMBAY HOTEL Gender Insecurity and Violence Against Women

"Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Indian Cities: Towards Inclusive Policies and Planning," a three-year research project (2013-16) undertaken by Centre for Urban Equity (CUE), CEPT University in Ahmedabad and Guwahati, and Institute for Human Development in Delhi and Patna, is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada and Department of International Development (DFID), UK, under the global programme Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC). The research analyzes the pathways through which exclusionary urban planning and governance leads to different types of violence on the poor and by the poor in Indian cities.

The CUE research takes an expansive approach to violence, examining structural or indirect violence (material deprivation, inequality, exclusion), direct violence (direct infliction of physical or psychological harm), overt conflict and its links to violence and different types of crime. We note that not all types of violence are considered as crime (for example, violence by the state), and not all types of crime are considered as violence (for example, theft).

In Ahmedabad, the largest city of Gujarat state, the research focuses on two poor localities: Bombay Hotel, an informal commercial subdivision located on the city's southern periphery and inhabited by Muslims, and the public housing sites at Vatwa on the city's south-eastern periphery used for resettling slum dwellers displaced by urban projects.

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BOX 1: INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT OF BOMBAY HOTEL

The socio-spatial divides between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad began to intensify from the mid-1980s, and have consolidated since the post-Godhra riots of 2002. This is due to the housing discrimination against Muslims by the dominant Hindu population and also preferences among Muslims to live in the safety of Muslim enclaves due to fear of communal violence. This has led to their ghettoization in certain pockets of the city, particularly the southern periphery from Juhapura to Ramol. Within this, informally developed localities like Bombay Hotel have become home to poor and low-income Muslims.

In Bombay Hotel, builders acquired agricultural land from farmers through informal transactions, developed the land for residential societies without taking the requisite development permissions, and then sold the constructed tenements or plots in these societies to Muslims. Consequently, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) denied them provision of basic services such as water, sanitation, roads and streetlights, citing the lack of development permissions as well as the lack of sanctioned Town Planning Schemes (TP Schemes) for the locality.* This, in turn, led to the emergence of informal non-state providers in basic services. Many of the builders and service providers are linked to goons. Many of the goons are involved in illicit activities such as operating alcohol and gambling joints and selling drugs. Many of these non-state actors also have links to politicians and the police. This has created local power structures and dynamics that dominate the locality through harassment, threat and coercion. The violence and insecurity faced by women emerge in this context.

*Draft TPS 38/1 and Draft TPS 38/2 were sanctioned for the area in 2006 and 2009, respectively, and implementation of the latter began in 2013.

UNSAFE MOBILITY DUE TO INADEQUATE TRANSPORT

Frequency, connectivity and safety of public transport are essential components for ensuring safe mobility for women. Many bus routes connect Bombay Hotel to various parts of the city, however, the AMTS (Ahmedabad Municipal Transport Service) buses, which are more affordable for residents, are infrequent or irregular or both, while the BRTS (Bus Rapid Transit System) buses which are frequent and regular are not affordable. Women pointed out that in the morning, the buses are overcrowded with men, creating risk of theft and sexual harassment. Two young women explained that they had faced harassment from men on the bus but had refrained from telling their families about it for fear of being restricted from moving about on their own.

Bus drivers or conductors did not pay heed to complaints made by women. Women also complained about having to stand in the bus throughout the journey because of crowding.

Due to the above characteristics of public transport, most women residents of Bombay Hotel rely on shuttle / shared rickshaws, a form of intermediary public transport (IPT). These auto-rickshaws ply along fixed routes with fixed fares (instead of metered fares) and illegally take up to eight passengers (instead of the permissible four passengers), with 4-5 passengers in the back-seat and 3-4 passengers in the front alongside the driver. While the shuttle rickshaws are less expensive than the BRTS and less time-consuming than the AMTS, and one can sit throughout the journey, women explained that they often faced harassment from drivers or co-passengers.

Women explained that drivers harass them by looking at them through the rearview mirror or playing loud music. Often male co-passengers harass them by touching them with their elbows. Women said that they feel safer taking a shuttle rickshaw driven by somebody they are acquainted with because known drivers do not allow drunk or unruly men to board the vehicle. Many women also prefer to wait till they find a shuttle rickshaw with only female passengers in the back-seat. This causes delay, which they also face when the driver waits till his rickshaw is full, making them anxious about getting late for work. In workplaces like garment factories, their wage is cut by half a day's wage if they are late. School-going girls have also faced harassment by shuttle rickshaw drivers. One resident narrated an incident where her niece had to drop out of school because she was harassed by a driver.

"She used to go from here to the main road in a shuttle and then from there to Dani Limda in another shuttle and then walk from there to school. The driver would keep a watch on her and would not take any other passengers when she was in his rickshaw. He would tease her and take her through different routes every day. Out of fear, she stopped going to school."

HOSTILE URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

The environment in the locality's open spaces is hostile due to numerous reasons, and leads to different types of risks, violence and insecurities for women.

Poor Road Conditions

Roads in the locality have been in poor condition since many years. Very few roads have been paved and almost none have been maintained thereafter (recently

paving of some roads has started under the Town Planning or TP Scheme). Lack of adequate drainage creates waterlogging, especially in the monsoons, making road conditions worse. This inconveniences residents and also poses a risk during medical emergencies. The area lacks a hospital and due to the poor roads, ambulances or other vehicles often refuse to enter the locality or are unable to reach the patient's home in time. Pregnant women regularly face this situation and some have even given birth on their way to the hospital because of this.



The only streetlight on this internal road is not functioning

Inadequate Infrastructure and Services

Few of the roads have street-lights and many street-lights are not functional. The internal lanes are almost entirely devoid of street-lights (work on street-lighting picked up over 2014-15 but is still slow). This creates hostile environments and unsafe mobilities for women in the dark. The absence of proper solid waste management leads to garbage piling up in the locality's open spaces, particularly its lakes. This discourages residents from using or passing by these open spaces, leading to these spaces being easily taken over by men for illicit activities like gambling and alcohol sale and consumption. The lack of street-lights near the lakes acts as a propeller for such activities. There are also vacant, partially constructed tenements near one lake, which have been taken over for illicit activities. Women fear that they would be robbed or sexually harassed if they pass by these spaces.

Anti-Social Activities

Gambling and alcohol joints are widespread in the locality. The goons involved in these illicit businesses often have links to builders, politicians and the police. As discussed earlier, the infrastructural conditions have made it conducive for goons to take over spaces such as the lakesides and vacant, partially constructed tenements for running illicit businesses. Groups of men also hang about on the streetsides and gamble. (See Policy Brief 8 for a detailed discussion about such activities). Easy access to alcohol and drugs has led to harassment of women by men hanging about in public spaces in an intoxicated condition.

Women also mentioned that idle young men hang about the streetsides, especially at pan-shops, and verbally and visually harass women. One resident pointed to an incident in which five boys rapes a four-year-old girl who had gone to buy snacks at a shop close to her house. Another resident narrated an incident in which her sister was harassed by young men at a fair that was held in the locality. The girls' brothers who were present confronted the men who later came to their house and threatened them. Despite registering a complaint at the police station twice, no action was taken.

The presence of many liquor dens in Bombay Hotel also contributes to domestic violence against women and children. In one instance, a woman was so scared of her husband's drinking habits that she took her children to the rooftop every night, locked the door and then went to sleep. The economic burdens faced by residents are also worsened when men spend their daily wages on alcohol or at gambling joints instead of contributing to household expenses.

Women's Negotiations of the Unsafe Environment

Many women do not do paid work or do only home-based work not only due to the socio-cultural restrictions imposed by their conservative families but also because moving out of the home in the locality is fraught with the risk of harassment. Many families restrict the movement of the women in their household and require them to be accompanied by a male member or go in a group. But women are not only victims. Many actively negotiate this lack of safe mobility within the locality by being cautious about the routes they take to commute within it. Many travel in groups and take precautions to avoid spaces occupied by groups of notorious men. One NGO has imparted self-defence training for women which has given some of them the confidence to negotiate the situation.

LARGE PRESENCE OF SINGLE MALE MIGRANTS

Many tenements have been converted to garment workshops where the workers are generally single male migrants who work and live there. Women pointed to this as one of the reasons for feeling unsafe in their neighbourhoods and homes. They pointed to cases of young girls being assaulted by migrant workers from northern India. The sense of regional difference and hostility gets aggravated in such situations. Alcohol consumption by the workers adds to women's feeling of insecurity. Some families had complained to the owners who have rented out their tenements to workshops but were instead threatened by goons sent by the owner. Many women hesitate to leave their children alone at home, which impacts their livelihood. Some try to ensure that a neighbour keeps watch over their children or try to take their children with them if they go out.

INTIMIDATION BY INFORMAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

The absence of the welfare state in the provision of basic services to the locality has led to the emergence of informal providers. The dependence of the residents on these providers has tilted the power dynamics in favor of the latter. Women have to engage with these providers on a day-to-day basis, and are often exposed to intimidation by them. This is particularly the case with the bore-well water operators. Some women talked about their behavior as *shabdik atyaachar* (verbal torture). At times, the water operators are under the influence of alcohol or drugs and use abusive language when they come to collect the monthly charges from them. (See Policy Brief 7 for a detailed discussion on conflicts arising out of water provisioning)

WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE POLICE

Women hesitate to approach the police in cases of sexual harassment because their reputation often gets tarnished since society often stigmatizes victims of gender violence. Women also have little confidence in the police which is often unresponsive to complaints brought by them. Some women leaders in the locality have, however, built up relations with the police through their connections to political parties and NGOs, and help other women register police complaints.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing women's safety in the informal commercial subdivisions like Bombay Hotel requires policy responses at two levels, city-level and locality-level.

City-level policies

- Recognition of such settlements by the AMC and preparing participatory local development plans for each of these settlements so as to improve basic infrastructure in such areas and thus reduce the risks of harassment faced by women due to lack of services.
- Proactive provision of basic services in the area would help to break the stranglehold of the service-providing mafias that rule through threats and violence.
- Provision of appropriate, affordable and safe public transport to create safe mobilities for women in the city.
- Develop affordable and regulated systems of Intermediate Public Transport (IPT) so that the last-leg connectivity from the public transport routes can be safely provided.

Locality-level policies

- Better roads and adequate, functioning street-lights.
- Create partnerships between the AMC, police and residents to create well-maintained and safe open spaces in the locality. Participation of women in these processes and partnerships is important.
- A dialogue in the locality is necessary to address the fear and insecurity that comes out of families and single male migrants living in close proximity. Segregation of residential areas and industrial workshops could be one way of addressing this, however, the viability of this is unclear in Bombay Hotel. Therefore, a dialogue with all the relevant groups might help to find the best way of addressing this issue. In this context, policy-makers and planners would also have to be sensitive to the vectors of marginalization faced by single male migrants so that they are not inadvertently demonized and marginalized in the effort to create safe spaces for women.
- Construction of a police *chowky* (outpost) began in mid-2015 in the locality, however, it is also essential that the police is responsive to women's concerns.
- NGOs can play an important role in supporting women to become independent and capable of dealing with violence. There are already some NGOs working in the locality on women's issues (training them in self-defence techniques, encouraging girls' education, etc). This work needs to be expanded to address more women and address issues like low wages, and also requires the state's active support. When women are given an impetus to become economically and socially independent, they would be in a stronger position to address and challenge the violence inflicted on them.

Research Methods

- Locality mapping and community profiling
- Ethnography + ad-hoc conversations
- 16 Focus Group Discussions (men and women)
- 21 individual interviews (local leaders, etc)
- Interviews with political leaders & municipal officials
- Master's thesis: 8 Focus Group Discussions on transport and women's safety

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