EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Save the Children®

WINGS 2018
WORLD OF INDIA'S GIRLS

A study on the perception of girls' safety in public spaces

Interaction in public spaces is a crucial component for the development of girls in their early and late adolescence as they prepare for a life of adulthood. The opportunity and ability to interact in public spaces enable them to get their education, exchange ideas and thoughts with their friends and peers, and offer overall development. It is essential for the girls to develop a world view, to pursue a career, or even go out for recreation or run errands. Such exposure is paramount for girls to become self-confident in their interaction with the world outside their homes, and also to become capable to pursue gainful employment and become self-reliant.

But public spaces, while bringing opportunities, are also accompanied with the spectre of fear and abuse. Girls fear and experience various forms of harassment in public spaces – from lewd remarks,

inappropriate touching to physical and sexual assault. These incidents/affronts happen on streets, narrow by-lanes, in the neighbourhood, in and around schools, in public transport, public toilets, in parks, in local markets ,malls and restaurants, among others.

In 2013, the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women (CSW57) identified various forms of sexual violence against women and girls (SVAWG) in public spaces as a distinct area of concern, and called on the governments to prevent it. This requirement also reflects in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that has set "the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres" as one of its specific goals (Target 5.2). The New Urban Agenda of 2016 too commits to promoting a safe, healthy, inclusive, and secure environment in cities and human settlements for all to live, work, and participate in urban life without fear of violence and intimidation. However, safety in rural spaces has not been discussed much even though a larger population resides in rural areas as well as semi-urban peripheries of cities.

Harassment of girls in public spaces is a widespread phenomenon in urban and rural India, jeopardising the protection and care of children. This lack of safety in public spaces not only violates the girls' right to security and mobility, but it also leads to violation of rights provided to children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and United Nations Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women(UNCEDAW) .

In light of these realities Save the Children in India, has conducted a study to capture perception of safety for girls in public spaces.

The core objectives of the study included:

a) Provide an in-depth understanding of the perception of safety of girls in the context of public spaces in both rural and urban areas and identify the factors that make girls feel unsafe across these spaces.

b) Gain insights into the perception of other stakeholders (especially boys) about safety of girls across public spaces.

c) Identify the various response mechanisms adopted by girls when they perceive themselves to be unsafe

d) Understand the implications of girls' perception of lack of safety in public spaces, on their access to various rights (mobility and education)

e) Explore and understand the link between perception of lack of safety of girls at these spaces and early marriage of girls and consequent violation of their rights.

f) Provide an in-depth understanding of government, administrative and civil society interventions, mechanisms, infrastructure and services in place to address the issue of safety of girls and identify some of the good practices.

g) Recommend effective measures for improving the safety in the public spaces identified by girls during the study and also strengthen the provisions under various schemes and policies at national, state and local level.

The present study was conducted in six states of India, namely Assam, Delhi-NCR, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana and West Bengal. The sample was selected using nonprobability sampling technique on the basis of geographical location and required primary stakeholders. Each of the states was selected from the six regions (East, West,

North, South, Central and North-East) using a composite measure comprising child sex ratio; rate of crime against women; women married before the age of 18 years of age; women who experienced spousal violence; and women who worked in the last 12 months and got paid in cash. The state with the highest value in the composite index were selected for the study. It was essential to capture the urban-rural differences and similarities as well. Therefore, sample was drawn from the urban and rural areas of these states. The total urban sample was from 30 cities of varying sizes and the rural sample was from 84 villages in 12 districts. The sample selected thus was not representative of Pan-India picture nor of the selected state, but was aimed to assist in studying in depth the prevailing perceptions on the issue of safety of girls in public spaces, the related dynamics and implications.

Interaction in public spaces is a crucial component for the development of girls in their early and late adolescence as they prepare for a life of adulthood.

The study adopted a mixed method approach involving a structured questionnaire survey covering 5359 respondents across urban and rural segments, consisting of 3128 adolescent girls (aged 11-18 years), 1141 adolescent boys (aged 15-18 years), 248 young, married women (aged 19-22 years) who were made to marry early, and 842 parents of adolescent girls. There were 40 focus group discussions (FGDs) with a similar set of respondents, and series of in-depth interviews with various stakeholders representing duty bearers, civil society organisations and academics. Stakeholder meets were held in three cities, i.e. Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kolkata, for sharing the key findings of the study and getting recommendations for enhancing the safety of the girls in public spaces. The study was undertaken under the guidance of an expert Advisory Committee. All research protocols, data capture instruments and consent forms were thoroughly vetted and cleared by an authorised ethical review board

Key findings of the study:

A. Fear of open spaces and also of crowded spaces: One in three adolescent girls surveyed were scared of traversing the narrow by-lanes of the locality, as well as the road to go to school or the local market. In rural areas one in four adolescent girls felt unsafe when using open

spaces/agricultural fields for open defecation. Nearly three in five girls reported feeling unsafe in situations where the public place was over-crowded.

B. Inadequate lighting: 60 percent of adolescent girls expressed feeling unsafe in streets or other public spaces with inadequate lighting.

C. Apprehension of using public transport: Adolescent girls felt scared in over-crowded buses, trains, metros, local trains etc. as they feared inappropriate touching and groping. 58 per cent of the adolescent boys and 52 percent of the parents of the interviewed girls shared that it was not safe for girls living in their neighbourhood to take a public transport in the evening.

D. Fear of physical and sexual abuse: Over one in every four adolescent girls perceived the threat of being physically assaulted, including getting raped, while venturing into public spaces, while one in three expected to be inappropriately touched or even stalked.

E. Perception of adolescent boys: Nearly half of the boys interviewed were of the opinion that men must have the final word in all decisions. One in three boys held an opinion that slapping a woman to reprimand her should not be interpreted as violence. One in three adolescent boys felt that girls should avoid wearing certain types of clothes while going out in public spaces.

F. Limited family support systems for adolescent girls: Nearly two out of five adolescent girls who did not say that they would confide in their parents, felt that if their parents do come to know about an incident of harassment, they will, in all likelihood restrict their movement outside of home. Over 50 per cent parents agreed that they will probably end up scolding their daughters for letting this happen; and 42 per cent feel that they are likely to regulate their daughters' movement in public spaces if they came to know of any incidence of harassment experienced by their daughters.

G. Gender stereotyping among boys and parents which has implications for safety of girls in public spaces: One in three boys and two out of five parents saw an active role of women in some harassment cases by provoking the offender. As many as half of the boys and as many of parents of adolescent girls were of the opinion that the best way for girls to be safe is that they should avoid certain public spaces or they should simply avoid going out after dark.

H. Implication on child marriage due to lack of safety: One in five parents surveyed believed that it is better to get their daughters married early rather than take the risk of something happening with her on her way to school/work/ any public space. Nearly three in ten girls who were students at the time they got married expressed their feeling of having missed out on completing their education because they got married. Three out of four married girls subject to child marriage had admitted, that they had to forfeit many of their aspirations and dreams.

I. Absence of bystander support: According to the adolescent girls, their support systems outside their homes were also not substantive. Mothers of the adolescent girls shared that they do not expect bystanders to get involved in offering assistance if something were to happen to them on the roads.

J. Inadequate support from the Police: 40 per cent of the adolescent girls believed that the reaction of the local police station (in the event of their going and lodging a complaint) would range from either blaming the complainant or showing acute reluctance in recording the complaint.

K. Lack of awareness of Childline number, and also of Government statutory bodies: A majority of the girls were not aware of government statutory bodies like Child Welfare Committees that can be approached for referral to appropriate authorities for redressal against harassment. In fact, only around 20 per cent (on an aggregate) of the total sample of adolescent girls claimed to have some awareness of such bodies. Awareness among parents was even lower.: only 11 per cent of the total sample of parents had any such information. Awareness of the Childline (helpline for children) number (1098) was also very low.

L. Media reportage: Around 90 per cent of adolescent girls who were exposed to stories on sexual assault on girls and women in the media have started to become more careful about where they go in public spaces.

operated by female staff, should be provided in public spaces, including highways, in cities, towns and rural areas.

- Safe public transport for women be ensured through installing CCTV cameras, GPS and SOS button to alert the police control room and sensitisation of drivers and conductors. Where possible, girls/ women-only transport services should be started by state governments, especially on routes serving educational institutions like schools and colleges.

- A mobile phone based citizen's feedback mechanism that provides an opportunity to citizens to provide feedback to local government institutions about the lack of safety in public space.

Effective policing is essential:

- Police should regularly patrol various parts of the city, especially vulnerable spaces, highways, public parks and educational institutions, offices.

- Representation of women in the police force should be increased to encourage reporting by women and for sensitive investigation.

- Police beat/patrol team should be available through-out the city and towns, with emphasis on ensuring greater presence of women police officers in the team.

- Patrol vans to be equipped with conferencing facility to report the case to magistrate for fast track redressal of reported cases.

- Complaint boxes should be placed in public spaces with a nodal officer responsible to review these complaints and take necessary actions as per established, standard procedures.

- 'By-standers' engagement to be enhanced by making them aware about their rights and providing them protection against perpetrators of crime.

Involvement of traffic police in any incident of harassment to be assured:

- Traffic Police could play significant role as first responders of incidences of harassment on the roads, in public transport, autos, taxis or any other vehicles. It is imperative that they undergo training and sensitisation on appropriate behaviour and protocols of being first responders.

Key Recommendations:

Safe public infrastructure and transport must be ensured:

- CCTVs to be installed across all street/by-lanes and critical locations like markets, cinema halls, malls and important roads and their maintenance ensured. CCTV recordings to be maintained for minimum three months period.

- All public spaces in rural and urban areas should have proper functional lighting.

- Free, safe, hygienic, functional and 24 x 7 accessible public toilets for women, preferably

- A special component needs to be devised in their refresher training courses where they would be trained to proactively listen to complaints and refer to the local police station.

Active community engagement must be encouraged:

- Community Support mechanisms like self-help groups, children's groups and, mothers' groups need to be engaged in creating a strong support system for the adolescent girls.

- Community-based watch guard systems including shopkeepers/traders, residents, RWA, CPC should be set-up and made functional to ensure that they become the "eyes and ears" of the police for the safety of girls in public spaces.

- Resident Welfare Associations and Mohalla Samitis need to be sensitised to ensure that all local vendors (including guards manning the entry/exit gates of societies and public parks) are made aware about the safety of girls.

- Effective child-friendly reporting and redressal systems should be developed at the community level and widely publicised.

Gender sensitisation of service providers :

- All drivers, conductors and helpers of public transport, including those from private cab aggregator services like Uber and Ola, should undergo mandatory induction programme on safety of girls .

- Ensure inclusion of gender sensitisation and girl's safety component in induction and in-service training programmes of local self-governance authorities, Integrated Child Protection Scheme functionaries, Aanganwadi workers, ASHA workers, ANMs, doctors and other health workers.

- Gender sensitisation and safety of girls in public spaces should be part of the curriculum at the B.Ed. and M.Ed., as well as on-the-job training, induction and refresher training programmes of teachers and other in-service personnel

Gender sensitisation of family and community:

- Awareness and gender sensitisation of children (both boys and girls), parents and care givers, grandparents, on gender issues and girls' safety needs to be ensured. Children's participation should be facilitated to mobilise the children, families and communities around the work of girls' safety should be part of school curriculum.

- Parents Teacher Meetings (PTMs) could be used to create awareness on gender sensitisation, and to encourage having open discussions with their children on gender equality, raising their voices against harassment.

- School Management Committees (SMCs) should be sensitised on issues of girls' safety. They should ensure that measures to ensure girls' safety is part of the school development plan and is effectively implemented.

- Large scale sensitisation campaigns by local self-governance institutions and service providers should be launched on safety of girls in public spaces which include information on facilities like Childline.

- Mass awareness building campaigns on girls' safety in public spaces should be run in print and electronic media as well as social media.

Strong civil society action must be mobilized :

- Civil society actors should be actively involved for capacity building and awareness generation of adolescent girls, boys, families, communities on gender

- They should also be involved in sensitisation of relevant state actors on components of safety in public spaces; and undertaking monitoring, research and advocacy with state actors and policy makers to ensure effective design and implementation of initiatives for safe public spaces for girls and women

Media engagement must be strengthened:

- Capacity building programmes need to be organised at district, state and national level for sensitisation of media on safety of girls, sensitive reporting, followup and on the role of bystander involvement in helping a girl in distress.

- Sensitisation efforts should also aim at sustained reportage of incident of harassment against a girl till the judgment is delivered. Wider publicity of convictions is needed.

- Success stories of bystanders playing an important role in helping/mitigating the situation of a girl in distress and steps taken by various stakeholders to improve the situation should be shared regularly with the media.

- Field visits of media persons, round table meets of senior editors and regular press briefings may be undertaken.

Effective utilisation of financial resources is essential:

- Political parties and public representatives should prioritise and advocate for girls' safety and ensure more effective use of public funds controlled by them.

- There is a need to simplify the process of approval of projects for Nirbhaya Fund and develop measures for proper utilisation of funds.

- Concentrated efforts need to be made to mobilise additional resources from corporates, philanthropists and other social development initiatives on girl safety issues.

- Strong mechanisms to be developed to ensure effective utilisation of the earmarked resources to make public spaces safe for girls and women.

Conclusion

Public spaces are perceived to be unsafe by the adolescent girls and also by their families for various reasons, impacting the lives of these girls in various ways. There are several factors that impinge on their right to mobility, education and employment. Therefore, it is strongly advocated that the State, community and family create enabling conditions to ensure the safety of girls in public spaces so that they can live a life of dignity and fulfil their potential.

Several government-sponsored and civil society initiatives that promise to secure the rights of the girls have been undertaken. The allocations made under the Nirbhaya Fund is one such initiative which, if strategically designed and effectively implemented, can contribute to making public spaces safe for adolescent girls and women.. Development of applications for girls for increased vigilance and providing emergency response is another positive step.

Along with the short-term solutions to address safety in public spaces, there is a need to make concerted efforts at family, community and societal levels to challenge and transform deeply embedded stereotypical gender norms to prevent violence against adolescent girls and ensure accomplishments of their rights.