

WOMEN in Public Spaces

Key Takeaways



CDPR hosted a workshop which explored how public spaces can be designed to be more women-friendly in Pakistan. Participants included government representatives, representatives from non-governmental institutions and academic researchers. A rich conversation ensued wherein a few key recurrent themes emerged. Please note that this is a working draft and we would appreciate feedback and comments on the proposed initiatives. We also request those who are interested in working on the projects listed in the Conclusion section (or similar projects) to contact the CDPR team. We would appreciate receiving materials or references/links to relevant data sources and studies which could be included in the repository listed as item 3 in the Conclusion. Thank you.

Design and planning of public spaces:

An illustrative presentation of Shaheen Complex (a hub of business activity located on Egerton Road in Lahore) exemplifying all design elements which made it uncomfortable for women to exist in the workspace was shared. Highlighted features included a dark and dingy basement parking, poorly lit staircases with numerous blind spots, lack of adequate waiting spaces inside and outside the building, lack of communal spaces for women, a general absence of security cameras, and an inadequate number of elevators in the building. He also highlighted the recent increase in the number of female hostels popping up in Lahore but the security around such hostels is severely lacking.

The general consensus was that women (from all social and religious strata) need to be more involved in the planning and design process. Not only do we need more women in leadership positions but on ground as well (those who use and maintain such spaces on a day-to-day basis). Safe spaces do not need to

be synonymous with segregated spaces; perhaps this is required for the short run but the long term goal should be for men and women to co-exist and share spaces without incidence. The best way to do this is to design spaces with not only women in mind but the differently abled and all those with special needs in mind - this way you're looking not only at the gender issue but the larger human issue.

Normalising female presence in public spaces:

In Pakistan, public spaces are generally considered to be the domain of men, and women are relegated to domestic settings. This is used as a justification for victim blaming when any harm befalls women when they step out in public. But this mindset needs to change, and there is a dire need to normalise the presence of women in public spaces not only as consumers and users of services but also as service providers. This can be done in a number of ways:

1. Education: There is a need to educate the masses regarding rights, responsibilities and social etiquettes of using shared spaces. There is also a need for legislation that is clear, focused and is understood by all (not just the literate). The focus should be on prevention of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in public spaces rather than simply mitigation. Children, from a young age, should be taught about gender equality and inclusion to inculcate acceptance and understanding in them. Electronic media is a powerful tool for raising awareness; cinema, television plays and programs should promote social inclusion of women and condemn violence and injustice against them.

2. Transport and Mobility: Mobility (distance & transport security) constrains educational and employment opportunities

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for women, and also impacts the extent to which they can perform their duties once employed. Safety vs access to quality education often becomes a tradeoff for parents of daughters, which should not be the case. Women are more reliant on public transport than men, and it makes sense that the usage of public transport should be made more accessible and comfortable for them. Drivers, conductors and ticket collectors should be given sensitivity training, and women should be hired for these positions as well. Transport policies need to be developed which holistically take women's transport needs into consideration. One example is of Bangalore where transport staff was trained on sexual harassment, regular campaigns were run to inform women of their rights in public spaces, cameras were installed and helpline numbers advertised, and a committee was set up to work out safety measures. Another example is from England where a comprehensive action plan was devised after consulting various women's groups on five main areas: accessibility, safety & security, affordability, information, and employment. Relevant local authorities should look into setting up provisions for real time updates on transport status and emergency phones/alerts at bus stops. Women on motorbikes is an emerging trend in Pakistan, and this practice should be encouraged and facilitated as this has potential to increase female mobility.

3. Provision of basic infrastructural facilities: There is a distinct lack of basic infrastructural facilities in Pakistan which affects all citizens, but has a significantly higher impact on women. Basic amenities include but are not limited to: street lights, sidewalks, clean and better equipped bus stops, increased security (police attention) at bus stops, security cameras, public toilets, diaper changing stations, benches, and drinking fountains. These measures help safeguard women against sexual harassment and gender-violence, and also make it easier

for them to come out into public spaces by making the process more comfortable.

Laws and policies

First and foremost, there is a need to address definitional and parameter issues, especially a consensus on what constitutes a public space. The Pakistani society is ethnically, generationally, socio-economically diverse and, hence, there is a need for relevant stakeholders to come together and agree on a definition of gender-based violence and harassment. Governments and all political parties need to be more actively involved in this. Once these parameters are defined, additional things to consider are:

1. Implementation and evaluation of existing and new policies: Law enforcement officers should take a strong stance to ensure implementation of policies. Existing laws and policies should be reevaluated and amended as needed. When devising new policies there is a need to ensure there are adequate resources and interest for the initiative so that it can be sustained until the desired outcome is achieved. Female participation is also essential to help combat gender-blind policies devised by men and, therefore, not sensitive to female needs. Furthermore, initiatives should have the potential to be scaled up and their outreach expanded so the focus is not just on big cities but the whole country. It is important to set up systems of accountability, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives (such as safety apps created for women) to be able to assess success and determine what alterations are needed. Once an initiative has been implemented, awareness needs to be raised about it.

2. Training of law enforcement and other relevant parties: Teams of police officers should be created that are more responsive to crimes against women. More female officers should be recruited and be available especially during evening and night

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shifts. Police officers should also be given sensitivity training, especially regarding the handling of complaints of sexual harassment and violence against women.

3. Data Issues: There is a need to collect and assess gender-disaggregated data to inform gender sensitive policies and to evaluate existing policies. Pertinent questions which could help understand behaviors of victims and perpetrators include: What triggers violent behavior? Why do victims not report abuse? Why do bystanders remain bystanders and not be upstanders? How do we change behaviors in society?

Conclusion:

The discussion highlighted several avenues which could be pursued by CDPR and partners that include the Urban Unit, Punjab Safe Cities Authority, Aurat Foundation and Karachi Urban Lab to develop research projects and initiatives that could be funded by IGC or others. Some potential avenues of exploration are listed below:

1. Develop a project to evaluate the recently launched safety app to assess how useful users find the application and how the app can be improved? How can data gathered from the app be used more efficiently to help policy makers make decisions? How can such services be extended to women who do not have smartphones?

2. Conduct women safety audits of (government) buildings in order to be able to bring about relevant changes that increase feelings of safety and wellbeing for women in government buildings and use the findings from these audits to develop planning guidelines for private commercial, office and other public buildings.

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