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# **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES: LEGAL AND POLICY INTERVENTION**

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## **Abstract**

Public violence against women continues to be a serious worldwide problem that has an impact on women's safety, mobility, and general well-being. The nature of violence against women in public places, its legal and policy frameworks, and workable solutions are all examined in this research paper. The study identifies important interventions and suggests ways to make public spaces safer for women by examining international agreements, national legislation, and best practices.

**Keyword** – public violence, women, mobility, well-being, public places, policy frameworks, interventions, international agreements, national legislation

## **Introduction**

Sexual assault, physical abuse, stalking, and harassment are examples of violence against women in public places. Women's freedom, civic engagement, and access to economic and educational opportunities are all restricted by this kind of violence. Even with advancements in gender equality legislation, many women still feel uneasy and afraid in public places. Effective policy initiatives and a thorough legal framework are needed to address this problem.

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (World Health Organization n.d.)

## Forms of violence against women in public spaces

In every nation in the world, women and girls experience sexual harassment and other types of sexual violence in public places on a daily basis, whether in urban or rural areas.

From unwanted sexual comments and gestures to rape and feticide, women and girls encounter and fear various forms of sexual violence in public settings. Streets, public transportation, schools, workplaces, public restrooms, food and water distribution locations, and parks are all places where it occurs.

The freedom of movement of women and girls is diminished by this reality. It limits their capacity to engage in public life, employment, and education. It has a detrimental effect on their health and well-being and restricts their access to necessary services as well as their ability to engage in cultural and recreational activities.

Despite the fact that workplace and domestic violence are now<sup>2</sup>

- **Sexual Harassment-** Sexual assault, physical abuse, stalking, and harassment are examples of violence against women in public places. Women's freedom, civic engagement, and access to economic and educational opportunities are all restricted by this kind of violence. Even with advancements in gender equality legislation, many women still feel uneasy and afraid in public places. Effective policy initiatives and a thorough legal framework are needed to address this problem.
- **Physical Harassment-** Women's mobility, sense of security, and access to public life are all impacted by the pervasive problem of physical harassment in public places. It encompasses behaviors like pushing, slapping, groping, and other unwelcome physical contact. In crowded places like public transportation, marketplaces, streets, and workplaces, this kind of harassment is common. Because of stigma, fear, or a lack of faith in law enforcement, many incidents remain unreported despite legal advancements.
- **Cyber harassment-** Cyber harassment encompasses non-consensual image sharing, online threats, stalking, and other types of digital abuse directed at people based on their gender. Women are disproportionately impacted, especially public figures, journalists, and activists. Cyber harassment, in contrast to physical harassment, is not limited by

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<sup>2</sup> (UN women n.d.)

geography and frequently follows victims into their personal lives. Anti-cyber harassment laws are still not consistently enforced, despite the increase in incidents.

- **Stalking-** Stalking can happen online, in public places, and at work. It frequently escalates into physical violence or extreme mental anguish. Women and other vulnerable people are disproportionately affected, and stalkers use strategies like following, surveillance, persistent messaging, and threats. Stalking is still underreported despite its growing legal recognition because of social stigma, insufficient legal enforcement, and fear of reprisals.
- **Harassment in public Transport-** Public transportation is a vital service that allows millions of people to move around every day. But safety issues continue to be a major obstacle to equal access, especially for women and underrepresented groups. There are several ways that harassment occurs on public transit, such as groping, catcalling, indecent exposure, and intimidation. Even though such behavior is illegal under law, enforcement is often lax, giving victims few options.

## **Legal Frameworks Addressing Violence Against women in public spaces**

### **1. The convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women-**

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on December 18, 1979. After being ratified by the twentieth nation, it became an international treaty on September 3, 1981. Nearly 100 countries had consented to be bound by the Convention's terms by its tenth anniversary in 1989.

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which was founded in 1946 to monitor women's conditions and advance their rights, spent more than thirty years working toward the Convention. The Commission's efforts have been crucial in highlighting all the ways that women are not treated equally to men. <sup>3</sup>

### **2. The UN sustainable Development Goals –**

Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private settings is the specific goal of Goal 5.2 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This covers sexual exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation.

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<sup>33</sup> (Resolution n.d.)



- Addressing physical, psychological, and sexual violence in homes and relationships is the first step towards ending domestic and intimate partner violence
- . Fighting Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Stopping forced prostitution, human trafficking, and other types of exploitation
- Ensuring Legal Protections and Policies: To shield women and girls from violence, laws and enforcement systems should be strengthened.
- . Encouraging Safe Public Spaces: Cutting down on harassment and violence in public areas, schools, and workplaces.
- Improving Support Services: Giving survivors access to counseling, shelters, and legal assistance.

### **3. The UN safe cities and safe public spaces program-**

In order to prevent and address sexual harassment and other types of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in public settings, UN Women is spearheading the global UN Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Program. In order to create safer urban environments, it collaborates with cities, local governments, civil society, and other stakeholders. It was established in 2010.

#### **Objectives-**

- Stop Sexual Harassment and Violence: Create laws, plans, and projects to stop violence against women in public areas.
- .Enhance Public Spaces: Make sure that infrastructure and urban planning are inclusive and gender-sensitive.
- Strengthen Laws & Policies: Promote and put into effect legislative measures that safeguard women in public areas.
- Involve Communities: Collaborate with neighborhood organizations, particularly women and girls, to pinpoint safety issues and potential fixes.
- . Measure Progress: Evaluate the effects of interventions and inform policy choices with data and research.

### **Laws for protection**

- **Sexual Harassment Laws** - Sexual harassment stories occasionally make the front page of business newspapers, especially when the accused is a well-known CEO. When a well-known CEO of an Indo-US company was recently fired by the board, sexual

harassment made headlines in India. This article discusses the procedures that an Indian business must follow in accordance with the country's sexual harassment legislation, which was approved by the president on April 22, 2013. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill was approved by the Indian Parliament on September 3, 2012, in the Lok Sabha, and on February 26, 2013, in the Rajya Sabha. After being published in the Indian Gazette, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (also known as "The New Law") went into effect on April 23, 2013 went into effect after being published in the Indian Gazette.<sup>4</sup>

- **Anti-Stalking Laws-** According to Section 354D of the Indian Penal Code, stalking is defined as the act of persistently following, contacting, or attempting to contact someone in spite of their obvious lack of interest or through any other form of communication, causing the victim to feel afraid or distressed. In India, stalking is punishable by up to three years in prison and a liable fine for a first conviction, according to Section 354D (2) of the Indian Penal Code. For a second or subsequent conviction, the offender faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a liable fine.
- **Public safety Regulations-** Laws, rules, and regulations pertaining to public safety are intended to protect people's health and safety in public areas, workplaces, transit, and online settings. Governments, law enforcement, corporations, and communities must work together to implement effective public safety measures.

## **Policy Intervention to prevent violence against women in public places**

- **Enhancement to infrastructure and urban planning**
  - **Improved Street Lighting:** Places with adequate lighting are less likely to experience violence.
  - **Surveillance Systems:** Emergency call centers and CCTV cameras can serve as deterrents to criminals. The creation of secure transportation hubs, parks, and public spaces that put women's safety first is known as gender-sensitive urban design.

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<sup>4</sup> (Eshwar n.d.)

- **Initiatives based on community-**

- Bystander Intervention Programs: These teach people how to spot harassment and take appropriate action.
- Women's Safety Apps: These are Smartphone apps that let women report problems and ask for assistance.
- Women-Only Spaces and Safe Zones: Creating specific safe spaces in public areas, such as transit systems.
- **Reforms in the judiciary and law enforcement**
  - Better Law Enforcement Training: Teaching police officers how to handle cases of gender-based violence in a tactful manner
  - Gender-Based Violence Fast-Track Courts: These courts expedite trials for cases involving violence against women.
  - Tough Penalties for Offenders: Raising fines to discourage recurrent infractions.
  - To teach communities about the importance of women's rights are known as public awareness programs.
  - Training in Schools and the Workplace: Including instruction on gender equality in curricula and workplace regulations.
  - Media Responsibility: To counter stereotypes, promote positive representations of women in the media.

### **Recommendation and future directions for public safety Regulation**

A comprehensive strategy that incorporates social, technological, and legal interventions is needed to ensure public safety, especially in light of violence against women in public areas. The following suggestions highlight important areas for future development, with a focus on public involvement, cross-sector cooperation, improved reporting, legislative reform, and technological innovation

#### **1. More robust integration of laws and policies-**

- A cohesive and efficient legal framework for public safety depends on local laws being in line with international human rights standards. There are gaps in protection and enforcement because many nations still lack comprehensive laws that address cyber violence, stalking, and public harassment.

## 2. Improved Reporting Systems-

- Underreporting is one of the main obstacles to addressing violence against women in public places. Low reporting and prosecution rates result from victims' fear of reprisals, social stigma, or inaction on the part of authorities. To ensure justice and increase accountability, reporting procedures must be improved.
- Important steps include: **Digital and Anonymous Reporting Platforms:** Governments and non-governmental organizations should create safe online portals and mobile applications that enable victims to anonymously report incidents.
- **24/7 Help lines and Crisis Centers:** Setting up widely advertised, 24-hour help lines can give victims prompt assistance and direction.
- **Integration with Law Enforcement:** For quicker response times and data-driven policymaking, digital reports ought to be directly connected to law enforcement and legal authorities.
- **Promoting Bystander Reporting:** Public awareness initiatives ought to enable bystanders to come forward with reports of harassment and take action.

## 3. Collaboration across Sectors

Governments are not the only entities responsible for maintaining public safety. More efficient and long-lasting safety solutions can result from a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, law enforcement, civil society organizations, the commercial sector, and educational institutions.

Important steps include:

- **Public-Private Partnerships for Safety Infrastructure:** Companies, especially those involved in urban planning and public transportation, should work with government agencies to enhance lighting, security personnel deployment, and surveillance.
- **NGO and Community-Led Initiatives:** Activists at the grassroots level are essential in promoting legislative changes, aiding victims, and increasing public awareness.
- **Corporate Responsibility Programs:** Businesses ought to put workplace safety regulations into place and train staff members on how to avoid harassment.

- Educational Institutions as Safety Advocates: Schools and colleges should create support networks for students who are being harassed and include safety education in their curricula.

#### **4. Safety Solutions Based on Technology**

One of the best strategies to improve public safety is to use technology. Mobile apps, AI, and GPS tracking can all help stop harassment in public areas and offer real-time security solutions.

Important steps include:

- AI-Powered Surveillance Systems: AI-enabled smart security cameras are able to identify questionable activity and notify authorities before situations get out of hand.
- GPS-Enabled Emergency Alerts: When a user feels unsafe, they can use mobile applications to send their location to law enforcement and emergency contacts.
- Public Places and Transportation: Placing panic buttons in taxis, buses, and trains can help victims get help right away.
- Wearable Safety Devices: Personal security can be improved by smart watches and wearable alarms that notify emergency personnel of distress.

### **Conclusion**

A multifaceted strategy combining legislative actions, policy interventions, and social change is necessary to address the serious human rights issue of violence against women in public places. Even though there has been progress, more work is required to establish safer spaces where women can move around freely without worrying about violence. To guarantee women's right to safety in public areas and to put sustainable solutions into practice, governments, communities, and individuals must collaborate.