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Reducing VAWG in Urban Public Space

Tags: Investment, Infrastructure, PPP, Case Study, Evidence

Creating safe and inclusive urban environments is a top priority for UK government, who have signed up to several international commitments in this area, including Sustainable Development Goal 11 to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable', with a target that directly contributes to addressing women and girls' safety in public spaces.

Violence and the threat of violence holds back economic growth in urban areas, limiting women's mobility, access to economic opportunities, and the ability to move into higher paid or more secure jobs. A UN Women scoping report[1] found that over half (55%) of women in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea experienced some form of sexual violence in market spaces in the previous year. These safety concerns meant the local population and tourists were not going to markets. The cost of violence against women ranges from 1.4% to 3.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to recent costing studies within developing country contexts.

> **1 in 3 women experience some form of physical and sexual violence in their lifetime.**
>
> Violence limits the success of urban and infrastructure programs aimed at improving access to resources and services. Safe, inclusive and well-planned public spaces, infrastructure, urban services, and transport can reduce violence and harassment that women and girls face and increase access to economic opportunities.

Reducing violence against women and girls in Urban Public Spaces

What are the risks? Violence and harassment in public spaces reduce women and girls' freedom of movement and their ability to participate in school, work and public life. It also limits their access to essential services, and enjoyment of cultural, recreational and political opportunities, as well as negatively impacting their health and wellbeing. Violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment, in public spaces is increasingly being recognised a human rights violation that reduces the economic and social viability of cities.[2]

> **Where do women feel unsafe in urban areas?**
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> Within urban settlements, there are particular locations where incidents of violence against women and girls are more likely to occur. Although analysis of individual urban areas reveals city-specific hotspots, common trends have been identified. In particular, violence is more likely to happen in public spaces such as public sanitation facilities, schools, water and food distribution sites, open spaces like parks and fields, secluded areas such as narrow lanes, and drinking bars or areas where a lot of drug dealing or consumption takes place.49 Sexual harassment as a form of VAWG is likely to take place on the streets, in public transport and at waiting spaces such as bus stops as evidenced in several studies.50 The use of public space is also intersected by time, and women are more likely to face violence at night in some of these areas, for instance whilst accessing public toilets.51 Further, all public spaces become more hostile for women after dark.

How to build gender-transformative safe spaces programmes?

Various initiatives are being implemented either at a national or international level aimed at improving women and girls' safety and mobility in public spaces, including UN Women's global flagship programme, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (2010-present).52 Evaluations of these safe spaces programmes have highlighted the need to **build in sufficient resources and time to collect data** on women's safety and inclusion, particularly at baseline to inform programme design, but also to raise awareness among the public (see box).

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[1] UN Women (2014)
[2] UN Women (2014); Fulu (2016)

A process evaluation53 of the Gender Inclusive Cities Programme in four cities around the world54, resulted in some interesting learning, such as **programmes were more transformative when women's groups were involved**. For example, in Rosario, Argentina, the process of local women's organisations mobilising around safe spaces led to the development of a *Women's Agenda for the City.*[3] The agenda was presented at different city-wide events and used as an opportunity to have a dialogue with a range of stakeholders, including political candidates for the 2011 municipal election. The evaluation also noted the importance of **reaching out to vulnerable populations**, for example, in Rosario and Delhi, focus group discussions were held with transgendered persons and women street hawkers on safety and inclusion in cities.

Good practice on a transformational approach to VAWG in public spaces

Key recommendations from a recent comprehensive review of 55 evaluated interventions to enhance women and girls' safety and mobility in public spaces in the Asia-Pacific region include:

☐ **Address sexual harassment against women in public spaces as part of the continuum of violence** against women and girls, from private to public and across the life-cycle.

☐ **Use research and develop an evidence base** to inform intervention design and implementation.

☐ **Ensure strong community engagement**, including participatory monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Link community programming to policy-level work.

☐ **Invest time and financial resources in coordination and partnership-building** throughout the life of a programme. Identify community champions in police, local governance agencies and corporations.

☐ **Develop and effectively implement comprehensive laws and policies** to prevent and respond to sexual violence in public spaces.

☐ **Ensure that gender-responsive budgets** are allocated.

☐ **Emphasise the training of service providers** and building their capacities.

☐ **Plan public spaces** for diverse activities and usage.

(Source: Fulu, 2016)

What are the opportunities for creating safe spaces and security for woman and girls?

Safety audits are popular participatory tools that have been used by diverse groups of women and girls to evaluate their city's safety, generate rich local-level data about the relative safety of a place or area at different times in the day and at night, and to leverage women and girls' knowledge to become voices of authority in their communities.[4] Safety audits have been adapted in various settings and programmes. For example, Plan International developed a Girls' Safety Walk tool as part of their 'Because I am a Girl Urban Programme'. Adolescent girls used the tool in a familiar area of their city to help identify factors that make them feel safe and unsafe. In Kampala, 80% of girls reported feeling 'very unsafe' or 'unsafe' in public spaces, particularly when they were moving through the city – when walking and when using passenger taxis and motorcycles (boda-boda).[5] As well as providing data on safe and unsafe areas, the researchers also observed that as girls and boys used the tool, they were increasingly empowered to speak out and raise issues of safety and inclusion in their cities. (See Section 3.2 for more participatory methodologies and Section 3.6 for using new technologies for collecting user-generated data on safety).

Improved reporting and multi-sectoral response systems for survivors, covering safety, shelter, health, justice and other essential services, are an important part of ensuring cities are safe and secure for women and girls. For example, the Seoul Safe City Programme includes a one-stop system through which victims can report crimes and receive protection, including 24/7 hotlines, integrated one stop service centres, and legal and medical advisory groups. The city also put together a Sexual Violence Crisis Intervention Team,

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consisting of police officers, counsellors, medical and legal practitioners, to provide quicker emergency intervention and follow-up care for victims.[6] Seoul has also developed innovative public-private partnerships around safe cities for women (see box).

Women's Safety Patrol Houses, Seoul: Case study of public-private partnership

Over 650 convenience stores have joined the Seoul Safe City Programme as 'Women's Safety Patrol Houses'. These 24-hour shops provide emergency safe havens for women fleeing a violent or threatening situation, and provide assistance in reporting to police. In 2014, 81 women used the facility. In addition, a public-private partnership was formed with a private security company to install additional surveillance cameras, infrared sensors, and window shields for women living in 3,000 low-income households in vulnerable neighbourhoods. A further strategy is the installation and operation of unmanned package delivery lockers in over 100 locations across the city. The lockers aim to prevent sexual violence against women by people impersonating package delivery couriers, and have a 89% satisfaction level (Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2015)

Communications campaigns which combine mass media communication with on-the-ground education and outreach are a popular way of raising awareness, encouraging reporting and facilitating public dialogue around safe space and security. Activities include multi-media campaigns, street plays, art, television and radio shows and celebrity endorsements. More research is needed on the effectiveness of communications campaigns on changing social norms around VAWG as part of urban and infrastructure programming, although there does seem to be some early evidence about improved public awareness and increased dialogue.[7] In New Delhi, India, Jagori had a campaign called "Staring Hurts" which aimed at raising awareness of supposedly less serious forms of sexual harassment such as staring. This included a short film which was shown on mainstream media.

Police training can help develop the knowledge and skills of police in urban areas and transport police to respond in an effective and appropriate way to violence against women. Research shows that harassment and violence, including from partners, often goes unreported, because women do not trust the police, feel that the experience will be humiliating or they will be blamed, that police officials will not do anything, or worse still, that they may be abused or assaulted by police. Perceptions of domestic violence being a 'private family matter' mean that women who report domestic violence to the police are often advised to reconcile their relationship.[8] In Brazil, 84% of women reported having been sexually harassed by the police.[9] Police training can be a useful way of addressing these barriers to reporting.

Engaging men and boys to change social norms on VAWG, including on intimate partner violence, and as allies and active bystanders, can also help create safe and secure spaces. Strategies typically include group education, community outreach and mobilisation. There is an increasing international mandate for working with men and boys, with the second Men Engage Global Symposium[10] producing a shared commitment, known as the *Delhi Declaration and Call to Action*, with a clear set of statements and affirmations that urge the full inclusion of men and boys in the struggle to achieve gender justice. For example, the award-winning Bell Bajao (Ring the Bell) cultural and media campaign in India[11] seeks to reduce domestic violence by encouraging men to take a stand through small acts, such as ringing the doorbell to interrupt domestic violence when they hear it.


[6] Fulu (2016)
[7] Fulu (2016)
[8] Brickell (2014)
[9] ActionAid (2016)
[10] Held in New Delhi, India from November 10-13 2014.
[11] Launched in India in 2008, *Bell Bajao*'s tools and messages have been adapted by individuals and organisations around the world, including Canada, China, Pakistan and Vietnam.

Addressing the links between VAWG and wider urban violence: For instance, research in Brazil has identified strong links between drug trafficking, related violence, a lack of policing and a decrease in women's safety in urban areas.[12] Actors in urban and infrastructure programming in FCAS environments. ICED recognises that VAWG is an important cross-cutting issue to consider across s The most common **drivers of violence in urban humanitarian settings** (see diagram) are at the structural and community levels, including economic strain and **harmful gender norms**, according to a recent systematic review by the International Rescue Committee.[13] ActionAid's safe cities programming sees women and girls as vulnerable to overlapping forms of violence – violence specifically targeting women in a continuum along the private and public sphere, and broader structural violence and insecurities as a result of poor urban planning.[14]

Drivers of Violence in Urban Humanitarian Settings in the Context of the Social Ecological Model (IRC, 2017)
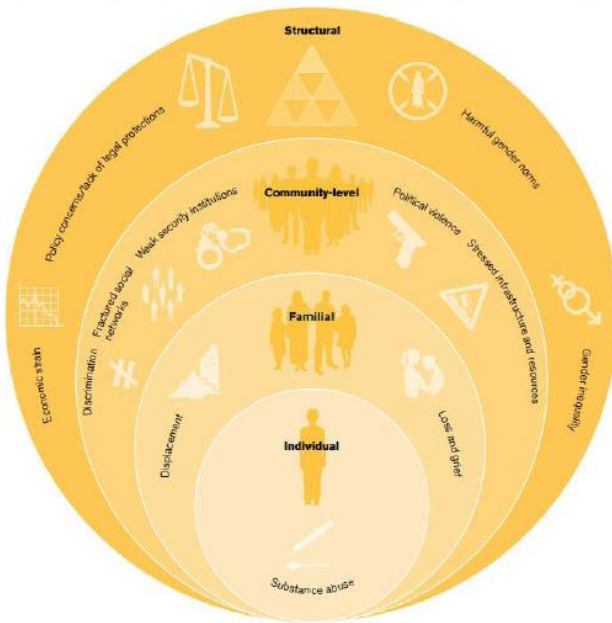
Case study: Safe and Inclusive Cities programme

DFID is working with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on the £4.5 million Safe and Inclusive Cities programme (2012-2017). The programme is supporting 15 different research teams to undertake research in 40 cities across 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. One research team looked at how infrastructure and services affect the manner in which women and men interact with each other, and how this can drive urban violence in working-class neighbourhoods in Karachi and Islamabad, Pakistan. In six of the seven neighbourhoods in Karachi, the team found that 'water mafias' are violently exploiting inadequate public water services and exacerbating the limited supply. Water shortages have led to heightened tensions and an increase in domestic violence, with men feeling humiliated by their inability to live up to their ideal of masculinity and provide for their family, and in turn lashing out at female relative for 'wasteful' practices.

(Source: Mahadevia et al, 2016)

Key reading

Fulu, E (2016) A Regional Study of Interventions to Enhance Women and Girls' Safety and Mobility in Public Spaces, Asia and the Pacific Region

Social Development Direct (2013) Making Cities and Urban Spaces Safer for Women: Safety Audit Participatory Toolkit (Developed on behalf of ActionAid International)

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[12] ActionAid (2013) Women and the City II
[13] International Rescue Committee (2017)
[14] Fulu (2016)