

A Feminist Inquiry into Urban Planning



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ABSTRACT

learners' republic

A Feminist inquiry into Urban Planning

Mobility
Lack of safe and affordable transport

Public spaces
Unsafe, male-dominated public spaces

Infrastructure
Not aligned with women's needs and wants

Inadequate lighting
Making places unsafe for women

Zoning
Increase in commute time

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A Feminist Inquiry into Urban Planning

Urbanism, when viewed from a gendered lens, reveals that cities are fashioned by patriarchal values which render women unable to influence urban decisions. Societies can majorly be transformed by rethinking physical spaces whereby gender diversity needs to be rampantly taken into account. The incorporation of collective experiences in the dominant discourse is only possible when all the segments of a society are able to foster spaces of exchange and generate community. In shaping cities, gender has continued to remain a neglected area for research, theory, and practice. A multitude of urban theories and practices have been critiqued by feminist scholars and several alternative ways for urban planning have been proposed. Unfortunately, the existing power relationships in most societies have perpetuated inequalities in physical spaces. Consequently, there is a continual economic and social marginalization faced by women.

Gender consideration simultaneously enhances and complicates the scholarship of urban design. From a historical perspective, urban planning and design has stressed upon all those experiences that are associated with users occupying the places in a higher ratio. Consequently, this focus has ignored gender and other identities which led to the neglect of women's needs and their lived experiences in cities and suburbs.

Extensive research on women and their environments, specifically in the urban design has paved the way for necessary construction of gender identities in the city. In spite of significant contributions towards the comprehension of role of gender in urban space, important questions still remain

unanswered. Urban spaces are increasingly divided, restricted, and exclusionary. The gendered dimensions of city spaces cannot be ignored, yet women are not being represented in the creation of demographic cities. This research aims to demonstrate the creation of gendered environments by urban planners that are inclined towards patriarchy. Some arenas of urban planning that continually marginalize women and other minorities have been explored.

INADEQUATE LIGHTNING

In a survey conducted in 2018, Pakistan was identified as the sixth most dangerous country for women (Warraich, 2019). Multi-faceted aspects render women unsafe in a developing country like Pakistan. A woman's anxiety concerning her personal safety is not just confined to the outside world but inside her home as well, which indicates the lack of safety. To be financially independent, a woman works harder than men but still faces discrimination at the workplace. The turmoil does not end here. The moment she leaves her office she doesn't feel associated to the streets she walks on because of the gender biases in the urban designing which doesn't consider her distinct needs. She is stuck in the vicious cycle of leaving home early, traveling long distances, and returning at night to unsafe neighborhoods while facing threats and harassment along the way. The whole day she goes through a constant fear of reaching home before it gets dark, which affects her mental health leaving her with chronic fear and anxiety. This has an economic effect as well because at times she needs to resign from her job to avoid facing sexual harassment on street. This is not the story of one woman but almost all the women in Pakistan.

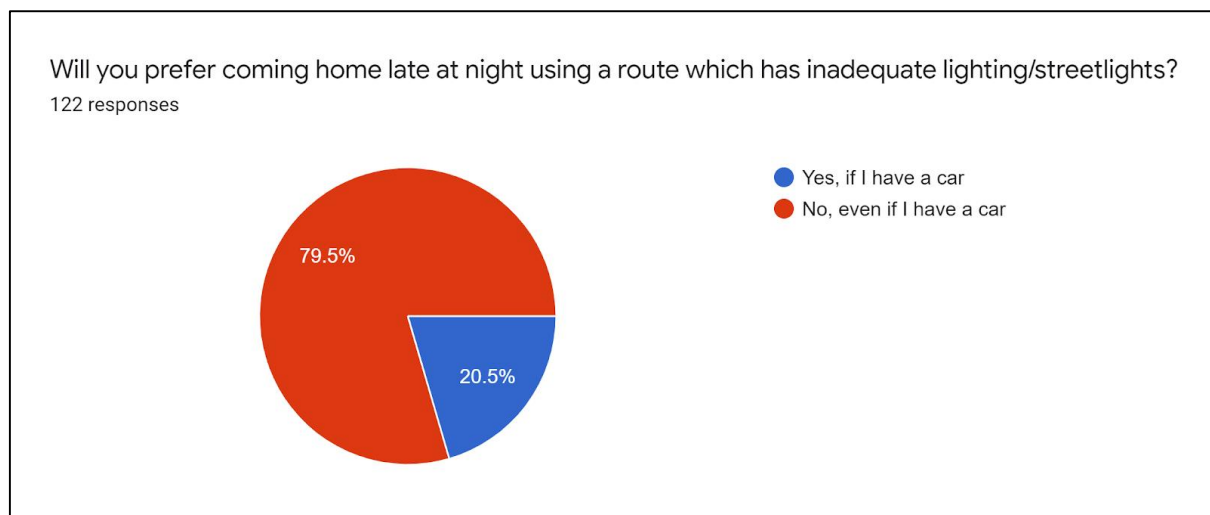
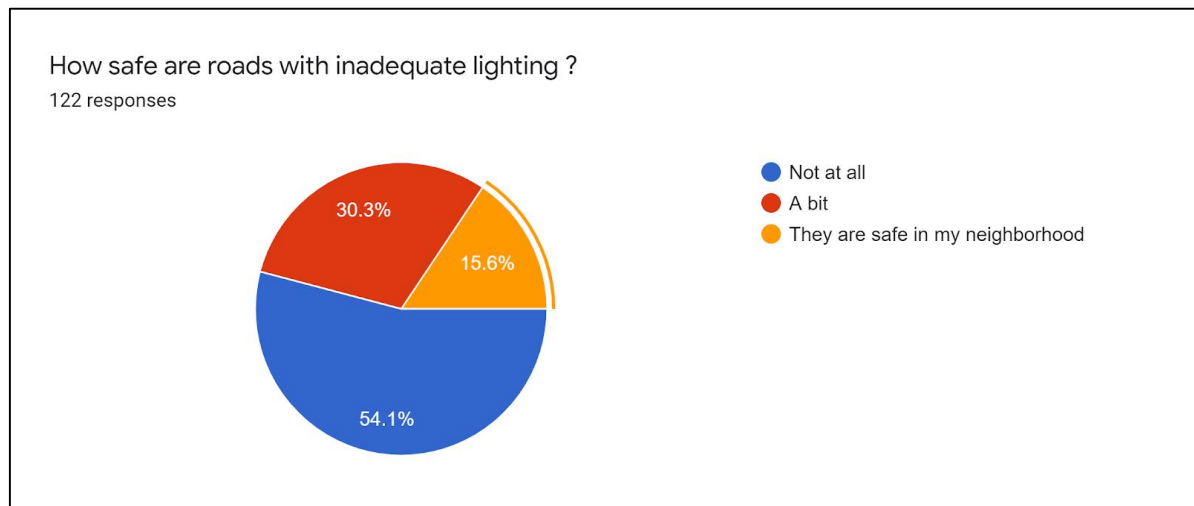
If women decide to walk back home, they encounter dark streets with a high probability of facing street harassment. This limits their mobility in public spaces. In 2017, the Express Tribune reported that “93% of women experienced some form of sexual violence in a public place”, (Home Office, Department of Justice USA, 2020). They cannot stroll at night without a purpose, like in these COVID-19 days the non-essential traveling is not encouraged; you need to have a purpose to go out or else you are locked in your places; this is how a woman felt even in the pre-Covid days. The recent Gallup’s (2017) survey indicated that “every 1 in 4 urban Pakistani women had been stalked by men on their way to home, office, and market”, (Gallup Pakistan, 2017). The story doesn’t end here, the woman is re-victimized for being harassed, by questions like what were you wearing? Are you sure you did not provoke him? Etc. Women feel reluctant to report their harassers and it’s hard to find the harassers who disappear in the dark. Adding to the misery is the absence of Anti-street harassment laws in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2019). In 2019 Women, Peace and Security Index ranked Pakistan 164 out of 167 countries, which is not a number to be proud of (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, 2019). In order to counter the street lightening problem, the government needs to first identify the major dark spots in the country just like the ruling part of Delhi AAP did back in 2016 with the collaboration of an App “Safetipin” and various NGOs (Gupta, 2016). With the safety audit data, the Pakistani government will get a wider picture of the streets which will help in deciding which areas are in dire need of street lights. We are well aware of the circular debt crisis the Pakistani government is going through right now hence using solar panels street

lights will help reduce pressure on electricity companies while making it safe for women to walk (Green Power Pakistan, n.d.).

One way to make women feel safer is having adequate lighting on the street which can help women walk with confidence and have a sense of community. Street lightening is essential for crime prevention, for supporting a nighttime activity and is essential for the freedom to walk at night. “Street lighting is generally seen as the most important physical feature of an environment to affect perceived personal safety”, (Haans, 2012). hence the importance needs to be acknowledged in the Pakistani context where streetlights are either present but not working or not present at all. The policing culture through cameras requires adequate streetlights for its implementation as well hence projects like “Punjab Safe city” won’t be successful in the absence of adequate lighting on the streets. Women feel the most unsafe at night because of the dark. From a survey conducted for different crimes occurring in various cities of Pakistan, women were asked “Whether they felt safe at night walking on roads?”. The results showed that women in Islamabad felt the safest however the women of Karachi felt the least, ironically Karachi is the city of lights (Numbeo, 2021).

We conducted various interviews to have a wide variety of opinions on this topic. Qurat Ul Ain Fatima and Mehreen from the Pakistan Administrative Services were disappointed in the lightning policies of Pakistan and were in the favor of the culture of “eyes on the street” and mixed zoning so that the streets are active all the time, which proved to be safe for women even at night.

Safety of walking at night (%)	City
High (65.32)	Islamabad
Moderate (55.3)	Lahore
Moderate (52.27)	Faisalabad
Low (32.5)	Karachi

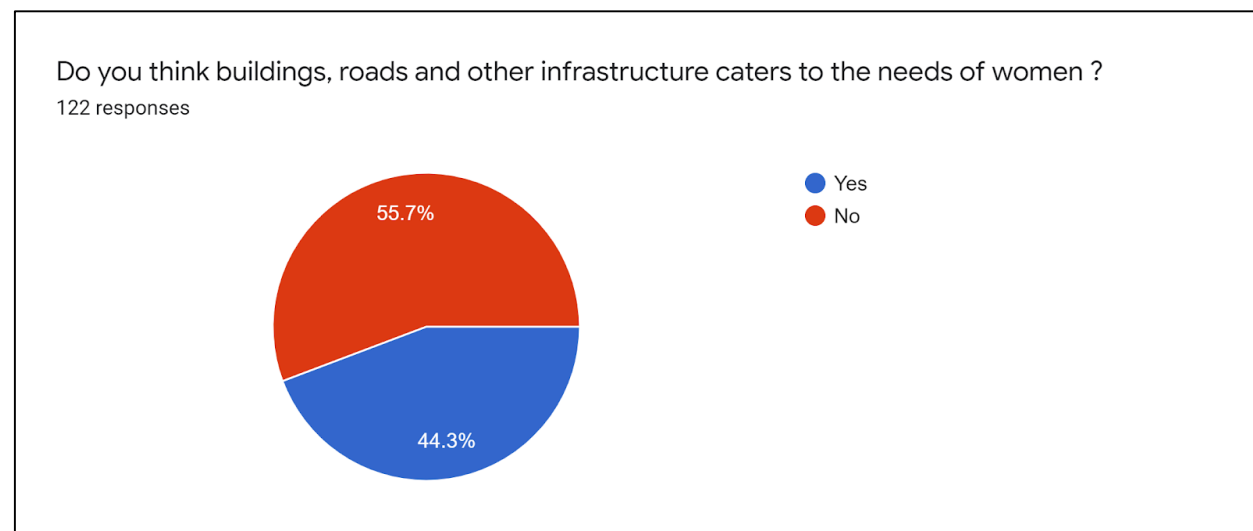


INFRASTRUCTURE

Women access and use the infrastructural elements of a city differently from men. According to our circulated survey, 55.7% of women were in agreement over the fact that the infrastructure of Pakistani cities is not aligned to their diverse needs, wants, or even physical requirements. This significantly impacts safety, movement, and income outcomes for women. Among the most common issues, lack of or broken sidewalks is extremely important according to Mishael, an urban planner, who was interviewed for this study. Sidewalks are often broken and disconnected in places making it difficult for women to navigate prams, strollers, and wheelchairs. The width is not wide enough to ensure comfort and physical distance from other pedestrians. Elevators, as well as nursing areas, are non-existent in the majority of buildings as are suitable public toilets. Women require more spacious toilets due to their sanitary needs, and also because they are accompanied by dependents. However, this has not been given consideration in the design of any Pakistani city. According to the 2009 UN Women's Safe Cities

Campaign, public toilets provide safety (Bloomingrock, 2021). In the Khayelitsha township of Cape Town, doubling the number of public toilets reduced the chances of sexual assault by 30% (Tranovich, 2016). Lack of proper toilet facilities also results in a drop in the number of girls attending school due to the stigma associated with menstruation.

In majority of Pakistani cities, single women are faced with particular difficulties due to the lack of affordable studio apartments. The trend of single family homes requires the expansion of a large amount of household labor, energy, and land. All of the domestic tasks are carried out in the private sphere, with no idea of a shared public component. The single family home absorbs a tremendous amount of labor, and our citizens can barely imagine alternative forms of infrastructural and housing design. There are more housework-efficient design options that can provide adequate but smaller private spaces, as well as larger shared spaces.



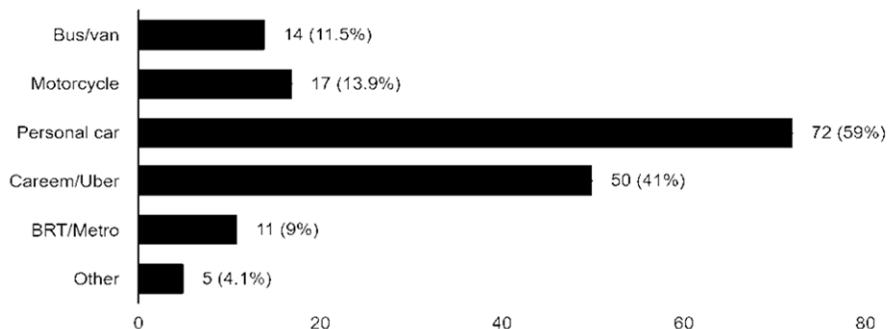
MOBILITY

Mobility in Pakistan finds itself on multiple spectrums: it is gendered, it is social and it is economic. When it comes to transport, while the whole country has found itself suffering from the lack of public transportation, the little that does exist barely suffices for women. Given the social norms that dictate discomfort for a woman to be in close proximity with an unknown man, the current overcrowded public busses do not suffice. The women that do choose to travel in these often find themselves facing harassment in one way or another. The result of all of this is the constrain that exists in women pursuing education, participating in the labor force or doing anything that allows a degree of transportation.

To understand barriers to mobility, a research conducted by Centre of Economic Research Pakistan (CERP) comes in relevant, where across a thousand households in Lahore, 70% of men said that they discouraged from their family partaking in public transportation, and furthermore, the data revealed that with the presence of women only transportation, they would feel comfortable. In the data we collected interviewing women, around 59% of them said they generally travel in a personal car, while only 11.5% said they travelled via buses or vans. With the rise of new modes of transportation such as Careem, Uber and Swvl in Pakistan, 9% said that it was their mode of transportation.

What mode of transportation do you generally use ?

122 responses



PUBLIC SPACES

Pakistan is housing women from all backgrounds, with different economic and social standing. No matter what they are or where they belong to, women, as a whole, are facing an identical crisis. They call Pakistan their “homeland”; however, they do not have an unhampered and unrestrained access to the public spaces in Pakistan. Public spaces

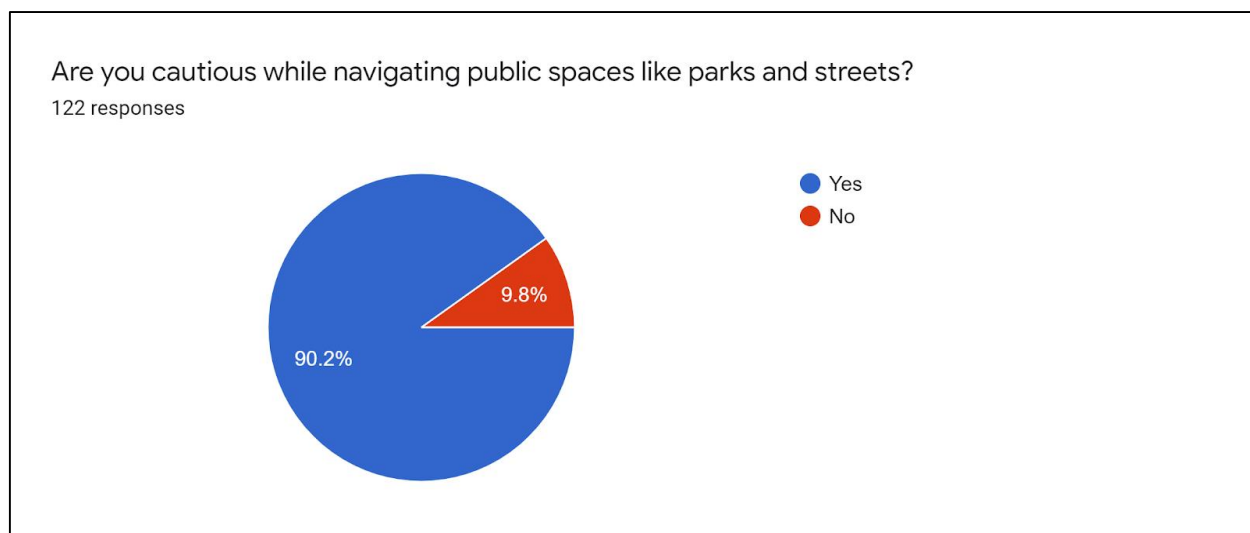
are hostile to even those women who are contributing towards the economy and community. A woman, if she wants to step outside her house, needs to have a purpose to step out. Also, many of the women are usually dependent on a male member to accompany her for moving within the homeland.

Public spaces in Pakistan are often overlooked. Inadequate and poorly designed public spaces are not suitable for the livability of the urban environment, especially for women. Our public spaces are structured in a way that devours inclusivity and generates marginalization (Ahmad, 2020). Women use and perceive public spaces in a different way as compared to the men. In a study conducted on women safety concerns at public spaces in Lahore, it was found that approximately 80 % of women in Lahore feel unsafe in public places, and only 5 % feel safe. Also, 38 % of women have been verbally abused, 45 % have experienced visual abuse, and some have been physically abused (Muhammad Usman Bajwa, 2018).

Women usually face harassment at crowded places, while going to markets, workplaces, using

public transport or walking down the streets or parks. The infrastructure, particularly roads, makes public spaces inaccessible and unsafe. All our large cities including Lahore neither have footpath nor signals, so there is no designated space for anyone to walk. Thus, our public spaces are distinctly gendered and classed. An urban household survey in Pakistan, conducted by the World Bank in 2019, examines sexual harassment posed to adolescent and adult women. According to this survey, every one in three women has faced sexual harassment at public spaces in Peshawar.

We also conducted a survey to find out what women experience, living in male-dominated cities. Out of 122 respondents, 90.2% agreed that they stay cautious while navigating public spaces like parks and streets.



This demonstrates the unsafe nature of our public spaces, and how careful women have to stay while navigating these public spaces. We also interviewed a few prominent professionals from the field of urban planning and administration. Quratulain Fatima from Pakistan Administrative Services is of the

view that planning theory is written by men and executed by men. Policy makers should get feedback from women as well for designing inclusive policies.

ZONING

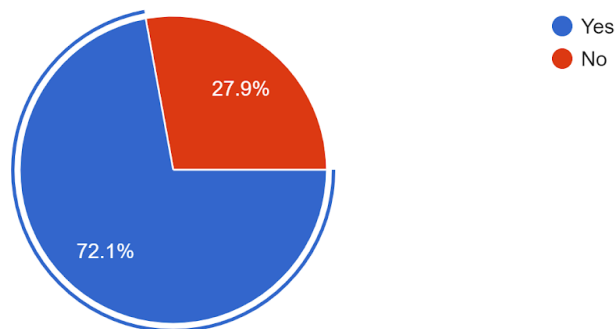
Zoning is one of the essential methods of urban planning, defined as the process of dividing land into specific areas called zones with an objective to avoid the mixing of incompatible land uses and ensure the proper uses of land and to guide and regulate urban development. Through zoning, the urban regulatory bodies like the Capital Development Authority (CDA) divide land into different zones such as residential area, commercial area and industrial area etc. Each zone has its own height, building size, color and shape, urban densities and building location. Countries with efficient and effective zoning make the cities accessible and inclusive for all citizens. However, many cities in the world are not very inclusive and accessible for all genders especially women and other minorities due to historical bias in urban planning and designing. In the wake of Second World War, modern planning was mainly based on the principles of functionalism which led to rigorous zoning. This resulted in a wide segregation of labor, leisure, and residence that further created a lot of barriers in the way of women participation in cities. According to the

World Bank publication for Gender Inclusive Urban Planning and Design, cities do not take into account the needs and lives of women, girls and other minorities.

Similarly, in Pakistan, urban planning and designing is dominated by men that have led to less accessible economic and development opportunities for women and other minorities who face social and economic exclusion, Gender Based violence and lack of representation at different levels. In metropolitan cities like Karachi, zoning is done in ways that completely ignores the element of gender inclusion. Our zoned cities divided housing, working, public spaces etc. into separate locations; for example, our residential, commercial and industrial zones are at large stretches from each other which can create problems for women to travel long distances for duties. So the commuting time between workplace and home is increased in the current scenario and would continue to increase in future.

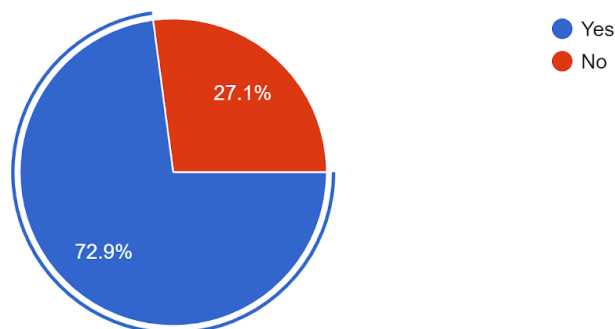
Do you think the distance from your home to your workplace/college/university is large ?

122 responses



If yes , does that make it difficult to carry out errands along the way including getting groceries and picking/dropping children from school ?

107 responses



The increased time adds stress to working women to manage the responsibilities between home and workplace. Likewise, the lack of proper mode of transportation reduces their productivity in workplace and also increases the chances of gender-based violence and sexual harassment in manifolds. They are forced to give up their jobs and education because they need to adjust themselves in urban zones designed by men. Most women in Pakistan feel unsafe in streets, offices and shopping/commercial areas and many other spaces which are far away from their home due to zoning of our cities.

In a focused group discussion with female students at a private hostel in Islamabad, it is concluded that cities are totally designed by men for men where women face myriad issues ranging from lack of accessibility to rampant harassment from streets to offices. When it comes to access and avail economic opportunities, they said that they feel insecure and face sexual harassment while traveling from house to universities or office in public spaces and transport.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Women in cities and urban spaces are greatly affected by the lack of basic services and infrastructure which chiefly hinders their professional and domestic responsibilities. In developing countries, systematic biases have permeated male-dominated roles in the planning and design of cities. Feminist inclusion in

city management can bring an enormous amount of change which in turn will also increase communities' sense of belonging and ownership. Implementation of gender-inclusive urban planning to create congenial and equitable environment for all citizen including women and other genders is necessary.

For each of the afore-mentioned sections, following recommendations can shape research debates and policy interventions:

Inadequate lightning

- The identification of major dark spots in the country can essentially counter the street lightning problem.
- Adequate lighting with a mixed zoning urban design can promote safety and give the women the right to the city which they have been craving for a long time.
- Evocative usage of safety audit data by the government can assist in pinpointing areas that are in dire need of street lights.
- With the presence of streetlights, women will prefer walking instead of using cars which will reduce air pollution to a very large extent as well.
- Policymakers must introduce initiatives that direct masses safer cities and a clean environment.

Infrastructure

- To design more infrastructural suitable cities for women, authorities should use urban datasets that are proportional to the gender balance of the area, to get a better sense of the varying needs of women.
- Women should be empowered to serve as leaders of development agencies, enter public service, and influence policy-making decisions.
- Gender-sensitive urban planning cannot be achieved unless it is part of the dialogue and participates in decision-making capacities to put forward their viewpoints (The World Bank, 2020).

- Local governments and planning departments need to recruit more female urban planners in a way that mirrors the demographics of the area, to design cities suitable for all.
- Female citizens from all strata of society should be part of the consultation process when master plans are designed, which should be inclusive of the infrastructural requirements of women.

Mobility

- Current datasets must be molded into gender-sensitive stakeholder consultations. Traditional data on vehicles, traffic, and volumes of passengers can be meaningfully supported by household surveys.
- The solution devised by policymakers must involve the practicality and social stigma in question.
- The possibility of female only transportation and women restricted physical spaces can be looked into through women-only bus services, women and family-only parks and gathering spaces
- Drivers and conductors should receive training on sexual harassment, and a simple mechanism or channel should exist when aiming to report this harassment.
- Introduce safe and affordable mode of transportation between house and workplace to enhance the economic opportunities for women and their productivity in the workplace.
- Furthermore, a schedule should be made for all transportation needs to maintain a structure of time and easier mobility.

Public spaces

- It is important to understand the contextual and cultural needs of Pakistan while devising policies.
- As Pakistan is agricultural in nature and majority of the population is living in villages, so instead of gendered urban public spaces, focus should be on inclusive public spaces for both urban and rural women.
- In addition to this, policy interventions related to proper lighting at public spaces, availability of separate spaces for females in public places such as parks for women, adequate deployment of security guards, availability of well-built public toilets for females, and inclusive public transport.
- Awareness campaigns for existing measures could contribute towards building inclusive cities.
- Security should be ensured by providing open structures and mix land uses.
- Urban planners and architects should integrate women's needs in public spaces.
- Commercial and industrial areas should be linked with residential hubs for easy access and supply of goods and services.

Zoning

- Female participation must be encouraged while designing the cities and the significance of zoning must be recognized through a gendered lens.

- City planners should reconsider zoning policies and must find incentives for stakeholders and developers to invest in female-centric design.
- Sign posting must be improved in the cities to clearly show activity and non-activity zones
- There must be a provision of well-used and well-lit corridors in every zone

CONCLUSION

Women's usage of urban environments is marked by various constraints, most of which can be traced back to urban design and associated planning. Cities are hugely abandoning their public responsibilities and many structural factors have disadvantaged women at the intersection of economy and society. Regardless of various contributions in pursuit of improving gender equity in urban design, real impacts through fruitful impacts are limited. In the contemporary urban environments, fear exuded by women is associated with a lot of factors, most of which spring up from flawed physical spaces. Women continue to occupy peripheral positions in decision-making, specifically in urban planning which is a call to exercise caution for all segments of a society. There is a dire need to incorporate feminist perspectives that allows women balance their economic prospects along with familiar responsibilities resourcefully.

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Appendix A**Gender and Cities**

We are a group of young women researching on gender and cities, advocating for gender sensitive urban planning approaches. Please help us out by filling the survey below.

1. Do you think public transport in Pakistan's cities is accessible for women? Do you feel comfortable and safe using public transport? * *Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

2. What mode of transportation do you generally use? *

Tick all that apply.

Bus/van

Motorcycle

Personal car

Careem/Uber

BRT/Metro

Other

3. How safe are roads with inadequate lighting? *

Mark only one oval.

Not at all

A bit

They are safe in my neighborhood

4. Will you prefer coming home late at night using a route which has inadequate lighting/streetlights? * *Mark only one oval.*

Yes, if I have a car

No, even if I have a car

5. Are you cautious while navigating public spaces like parks and streets? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

6. Do you think the distance from your home to your workplace/college/university is large? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

7. If yes, does that make it difficult to carry out errands along the way including getting groceries and picking/dropping children from school?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

8. Do you think buildings, roads and other infrastructure caters to the needs of women? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

9. Please elaborate on your previous answer.

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