

Gender Responsive Urban Public Places in Dhaka City: A Planning Perspective

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Abstract

Women are now getting involved in workforce because of their economic freedom and social progress. They now frequently move outside their home and are exposed to the male dominated urban sphere. Historically, cities are only made for men, just like Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The aim of this study is to find out the gender responsiveness of public places in Dhaka city. To identify the gender responsiveness of urban public places, five major variables were selected namely- design, isolation, lighting, safety, and management. Based on these five variables, this study tried to identify the gender responsiveness of Gulshan and Khilkhet - the two significant representative areas of Dhaka city. In the two study areas, a total of 230 samples were collected by using convenient sampling technique. It was found that planned areas have wide and visible roads, well-lit streets and minimal chances for having entrapment sites, or rather unplanned areas. Moreover, planned areas in many ways facilitate women for their regular movement and help to make cities more responsive and secured. The findings of this study helps understand the importance of gender sensitization and the prospects of urban planning for gender responsiveness as well.

Introduction

The world is now on the boat of urbanization. Majority of the world's population live in cities or urban centers. The global trend towards increasing urbanization promises to continue (UN-Habitat, 2012). Meanwhile, rapid rural-urban migration due to urban centered economic growth along with other factors contributes to rapid urbanization. UN-Habitat (2008) report shows that the negative consequences of urbanization are disproportionately borne by poor working women and men, young and old. Most of the underdeveloped countries are facing the urbanization in a devastating way in respect to urban services because of its huge urban population. Moreover, women are the worst sufferer, when it comes to services like transportation, utilities, security etc.

However, men and women play different roles in society, with their gender differences shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants (Moser, 2012). Women's multiple role and responsibilities in home and workplace lead to more diverse interactions with the city's built ecology. Their journeys are typically more varied and complex than men's (Mahmud, 2016). Women not only perceive and experience cities in a different way than men, but also use public spaces in different ways (UN Women, 2009). Cities generally offer women more work opportunities, easier access to education and healthcare, and chances to socialize outside the home and participate in community or political leadership roles (ActionAid, 2015). More economic opportunities make women more exposed to the outer world. On the contrary, fewer opportunities to

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work outside the home or move about the city contribute to the feminization of urban poverty.

Most of the developing countries around the world exhibit extreme demonstration of gender inequality in planning. Bangladesh is also among them. Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh has grown its population to nearly 12 million over the past years, where 5.2 million are women (Census, 2011). The working footsteps of women are also widened than men because of their variety of works. Their unpaid household works like- domestic works, care works, kitchen market shopping etc. are not considered in the formal statistics. Gender based sensitivity and violence are both a complex socio-political issue in a society (Mahmud, 2016). Women from both rural and urban areas have faced harassment in various ways. Most urban planners and decision makers are men and they often overlook the needs of women/girls. Moreover, there is very little scope for taking opinions from women during planning initiation.

Majority of the gender-based violence in cities are merely opportunistic (Mahmud, 2016). Crime occurrence depends on the condition of the place. Criminals commit crime, where they find opportunity. So along with the social factors, urban structure should be designed in a way that will increase surveillance and thereby reduce the violence and crime. This study focuses on how urban planning can contribute to the gender responsiveness in Dhaka city especially in public places where women are more exposed and meet the challenges on regular basis.

Objectives and Methodology

The aim of this study was to find out the gender responsiveness of public places in Dhaka city. It tried to understand how urban planning can facilitate women in using those urban public places by assessing the public services. Definition of public place is very wide and varied according to their functions. This study only focused on bus/train station, shopping malls, parks/open spaces and roads/footpaths. These four types of public places are selected based on activity pattern of women engaged in work, education or household activities.

The study followed mixed method approach and applied convenient sampling and reconnaissance survey techniques for data collection. A structured questionnaire was developed for data collection. A checklist was also developed for reconnaissance survey. To explore the gender responsiveness of public places in Dhaka city, two areas 'Gulshan' and 'Khilkhet' were selected as the study area. Both areas are in Dhaka North City Corporation, namely ward 19 (Gulshan) and 17 (Khilkhet). Because of their proximity and development pattern, i.e. planned and unplanned areas, clearly depicted the differences among the selected variables. The variables were (i) Design, (ii) Isolation (iii) Lighting (iv) Safety and Security and (v) Maintenance and Management. These variables were adopted from *safety audit* developed by UN Women's Safe City Program, 2010. A total of 230 samples were collected from the study areas, 130 from Khilkhet and 100 from Gulshan. Finally, collected data were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel and exploratory data analysis technique like frequency distribution method, likert scale and categorical scoring for interpretation and analysis.

Major Findings and Results

Design

The design of a city basically carries the impression of the area. Design should focus on the resident's needs, such as easy and comfortable life. A complex area is always hard to find way around in case of any emergency or safety related issues. Moreover, such complexity makes people stressed and so for women are more vulnerable into such situation as the city is not suitable and responsive for them either way. About 95% respondents of Gulshan said it is usually easy to find way around in this area. On the contrary, 65% respondents of Khilkhet said it is hard to find way around in this area. The opposite condition of Khilkhet is because of its unplanned development. Haphazard and discrete access road and land use made the area complex than any other planned areas in Dhaka city.

Another aspect of design consideration is signage and information. Without any direction, signage and information board, it is quite difficult to identify any area. 62% of the respondents from Gulshan said the signage and information system is good. But in Khilkhet again it showed an opposite picture and 77% respondents said there is no signage and information system in Khilkhet.

Public transportation is a major problem for both the study areas. In Gulshan, recent public transport called 'Dhaka Chaka' introduced in 2016. Dhaka Chaka is the only public transport system in this area. But this transportation system is not meeting the demand. Moreover, uniform fair is a big controversial issue for this transport system. Dhaka Chaka banned all other para-transits or partially limited the circulation of rickshaws. Rickshaw is banned on the primary and secondary roads in Gulshan and only permitted in the tertiary roads. Transportation problem is one of the severe problems in Gulshan for non-resident people. On the other hand, it passively encourages people to use pedestrian/footpaths. But in the context of Dhaka city, footpaths are not user friendly especially for women. In Gulshan, some footpaths heights are not suitable for women as well as for aged people and children (Figure 1a). Illegal occupancy and construction materials on footpaths are common picture in Dhaka city, Gulshan is also no exception (Figure 1b). Experts also claimed that there are no minimum facilities on the footways. Pedestrian facilities like bench and sheds are absent without providing such facilities walking is not preferable for both the gender.

Khilkhet is also suffering from transportation problem. No public transport is available here. Existing roads are not suitable for any public transportation system. Rickshaw and easy bikes are the only transportation mode in this area. Moreover, due to some garment factories, heavy vehicles always move in this area that destroys the surface of the road (Figure 1c) and recent water logging made this area more intolerable for women (Figure 1d).

There is no accessibility problem in Gulshan. Almost every portion of this area is accessible for its inhabitants. There is also no accessibility problem in Khilkhet for the movement of people. But all the secondary and tertiary roads are not accessible for emergency vehicles, like ambulance or firefighting vehicles. Some roads are only accessible by rickshaws due to its narrow width.



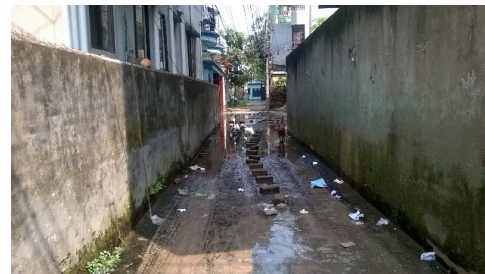
(a) Improper height of footpaths in Gulshan



(b) Construction materials on footpaths in Gulshan



(c) Heavy vehicles destroyed the road surface in Khilkhet.



(d) Water logging becomes obstacles for accessibility in Khilkhet

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 1: Existing condition of the study areas.

The overall design impression of Gulshan exhibits different views of this area. Only 10% people think the design of this area is very good who do not live in this area, and 17% people think the design of Gulshan is poor because of its weak transport system. However, grossly 73% people think the design of Gulshan is good and in-between good and bad. The overall design impression of Khilkhet is mostly negative. Though 27.69% respondents think design impression of this area is neither good nor bad. But majority of the respondents- 35.38% think design impression of this area is poor because of its poor road networks and inadequate transport system. At the same time, 32.31% respondents gave their opinion that the design impression of Khilkhet is very poor

Isolation

Isolation is a common picture in unplanned areas. In this research, isolation indicates those possible sites that are a bit separated from human visibility both during night and day light. Surrounding land use has a great impact on gathering people. Residential areas become quite during night and midday. But mixed land use always offering several people around the area. Though Gulshan was planned solely for residential purpose, but over time, this place has become one of the most exclusive commercial hubs in Dhaka city. Such a change in land use made the area populous, but at same time, inner part of this area yet remains quiet and silent. 70% respondents of Gulshan said surrounding land use encourage people to be there while 30% said it is not true. Some people are always found to be moving within proximity of the avenue roads at different times of the day.

On the other hand, Khilkhet is also not solely residential area. Commercial and industrial activities have been found during observation and field survey. But there are many potential isolated sites exist in Khilkhet, which is threatening for both the gender. About 59.23% respondents gave their opinion that the surrounding land use encourages people to be there.

The internal security of Gulshan is good enough. Police patrol this area at regular interval both day and night time. Most of the avenue roads and internal roads are under surveillance camera provided by the city corporation. However, in Khilkhet, there is no neighborhood watch or community police. Around 65% respondents claimed that there is no neighborhood watch that patrol the area. The police patrol the area at night, but they cannot enter the narrow roads, and at day time, no surveillance is found in observation. Inner areas of Khilkhet that are far away from primary or secondary roads are subject to isolation during midday and night.

A question was asked to the respondents that in case of emergency, 'would someone hear a call for help?' in response to this question, 80% people of Gulshan answered positively that people will come forward to help in an emergency. Interestingly, this ratio decreased in Khilkhet and 60% respondents thought someone would come for help. It was also found that several people were roaming around within these areas all the time. This number increased during evening to until 10 pm.

Lighting

Lighting system is very important element in gender sensitivity issue. Poor lighting system often lead to many unexpected incidents. Women do not feel safe while they pass a dimly lit area or road. There are many roads and areas exist in Dhaka city that are not enough illuminated at night. People are trying to avoid those roads or avoid going out at night. Gender based violence is mostly opportunistic and perpetrator commit crime where they find any scope. In addition, dim lighting system or absent of lighting makes the situation more favorable for the perpetrator. In Gulshan, lighting system is satisfactory though 20% of the respondents said about its inadequacy. About 80% of the respondents from Gulshan said street lights are distributed evenly and working and they are bright enough as most of them are sodium light. Streets and footpaths are also well lit. 75% respondents said the lightings system nor good or bad while 5% said lighting is very poor. Parks and play grounds have also the same condition, but lighting system of shopping center is very well (70% respondent said very well). However, lighting of building entrance is not as good as shopping centers. 43% respondents said neither good nor bad.

The lighting system of Khilkhet is much poorer than Gulshan. Inadequate street lights have made the area obsessed. As an unplanned area, roads and streets are also not planned and there is no provision for street lights. City Corporation provides some street lights on the electric pole which is not adequate as electric poles do not maintain a distance. At the same time, height of the street light post and light watts are not well balanced. Moreover, narrow streets have no lighting system at the same time building entrance also do not have proper lighting. About 26.92% respondents said that the lighting system is very poor and 42.3% respondents said that it is poor. There is no footpath alongside any roads in Khilkhet, and at the same time, there is no parks and

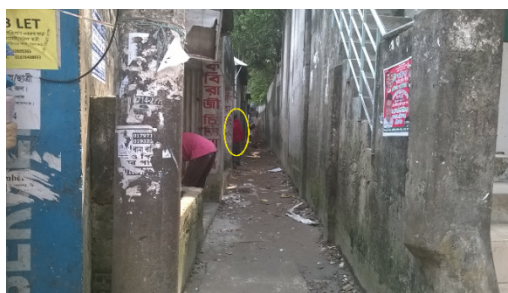
playgrounds either. Only few open spaces remain undeveloped, where children are used to play. Lighting system of shopping complex and markets are also satisfactory in Khilkhet but lighting of building entrance is poor (33.07%).

Safety and Security

Safety is the most important issue in gender responsiveness. Safety issue for women is a global issue. It is not like a phenomenon that only occurred in underdeveloped countries rather developed countries are also facing such problems severely. Safety and security measures should take both from the national and local level authorities. Fear of insecurity and harassment shrinking the working footsteps of women. ActionAid report (2015) said feeling of fear and actual experience are both responsible for limiting footsteps of women.

The safety and security system of Gulshan is very impressive. Recent terrorist attack made the city authority more active on safety issue in this high class residential area containing diplomatic establishments. Gulshan is under several surveillance cameras, maintained by both metropolitan police and private organization. In Gulshan, almost every building has more than two security guards and CCTV for their own security. Another aspect of safety and security is the clear visibility of the roads and the pedestrians. If passerby cannot guess what it is up ahead might be harmful for both the gender. From the field, it was found that 85% respondents said there is no such visibility problem in Gulshan. There are some suspicious places located beside Gulshan Lake. That sidewalk is not well illuminated, and no physical boundary exists. Illegal trespass is possible for that portion. 95% respondents said that there are no entrapment sites in Gulshan.

However, Khilkhet is at risk in regard to safety related issues. Absence of community police and patrol police made this area more vulnerable. In Khilkhet, most of the buildings do not have any security guards. Only few buildings have such facilities. At the same time, because of undeveloped growth, some potential entrapment sites have already been created (Figure 2). Low lighting and poor street lighting system made this area insecure in terms of gender responsiveness. Around 46% respondents said that there are some potential entrapment sites in Khilkhet.



Perpetrator can hide in between two buildings.



Unplanned road network created entrapment site.

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 2: Existing Safety and security condition of Khilkhet

Management and Maintenance

Management and maintenance is also related to gender responsiveness. Well managed and maintained areas always attract people. Uncleaned and discarded areas repel people to be there. Broken roads are inconvenient for walking by both male and female. Women are face this problem more severely. Gulshan is cleaner than Khilkhet, because of its management system. Both the study areas are under DNCC. However, Gulshan always gets some special care, because of its diplomatic zone. Moreover, community involvement in Gulshan is much stronger than Khilkhet. There are 14 enlisted clubs and community welfare associations in Gulshan according to the information received from DNCC. On the contrary, there are no clubs and welfare associations in Khilkhet. In Gulshan, 45% respondents said that the management and maintenance system is good, where 44.62% respondents of Khilkhet said it is poor.

Gender Responsiveness of the Study Areas

From the results of the field survey and reconnaissance survey, following aspects were analyzed based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Those aspects were given weight through a categorical scoring developed for this study. Table 1 shows the average score of each aspect of the analysis as part for identifying the gender responsiveness of Gulshan and Khilkhet area.

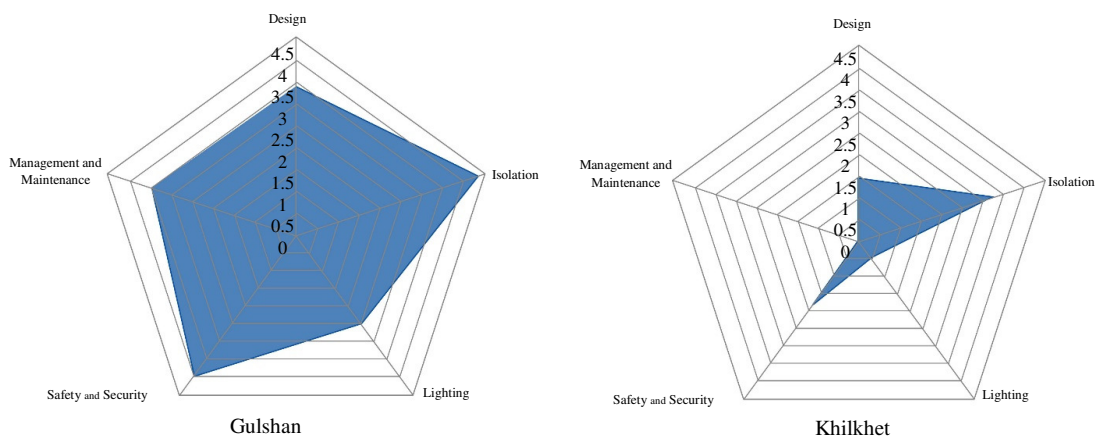
Table 1: Comparative score for gender responsiveness of both the study areas

Criteria	Study Area Score	
	Gulshan	Khilkhet
Design		
Easy to Find Way Around	5	2
Signage and Information	4	2
Does Transit Meet the Needs?	2	2
Accessibility	4	3
Design Impression	2	-2
Av. Total	3.4	1.4
Isolation		
Does the land use encourage people to be there?	4	4
Is the area patrolled by neighborhood watch?	4	2
Would someone call for help?	5	4
Av. Total	4.3	3.3
Lighting		
Is the lighting distributed evenly?	5	1
Are all the lights working?	4	2
Is the lighting adequate?	4	1
Is the lighting bright enough?	5	1

Criteria	Study Area Score	
	Gulshan	Khilkhet
How well does lighting illuminate streets and footpaths?	-1	-3
Lighting of parks and playgrounds	0	-1
Lighting of Building Entrance	1	-1
Lighting of Shopping Centers	3	3
Av. Total	2.6	0.4
Safety and Security		
Can you clearly see what is up ahead?	5	4
Are there small confined areas?	5	3
Is there more than one route?	4	2
Monitoring of the building and area	2	-2
Av. Total	4	1.8
Management and Maintenance		
Does this place seem cared for?	5	2
Management and Maintenance	2	-2
Av. Total	3.5	0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Gender Responsiveness of the Study Areas



Source: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 3: Gender responsiveness of the study areas.

Figure 3 shows the gender responsiveness of the study areas in terms of design, isolation, lighting, safety and security, and management and maintenance, i.e. major aspects of a city structure that has strong relation to gender responsiveness. The figures also clearly show that urban planning can facilitate women in using urban public places. As a

planned area, Gulshan scored well in design, isolation, safety and management but got poor score in lighting. Necessary steps should take to develop the lighting condition of this area. On the other hand, Khilkhet is relatively poor in every aspects of gender responsiveness. Khilkhet's management system is very poor as well as lighting. City Corporation should take strong initiatives and major comprehensive programs to meet the gaps.

It is now clear that urban planning has direct relation to gender sensitivity. Well planned and managed city is preferable for both the sex. Planning can consciously eliminate some aspects, like narrow roads and entrapment sites, which are potential hiding place for suspects. At the same time, urban planning can make the environment healthier and sound for living. Land use planning can encourage people to circulate in a neighborhood that can reduce crime rate and well lighting system can ease women movement at night. It is evident that Gulshan is more gender responsive than Khilkhet, because of its planned development.

Recommendations

This section provides some recommendations as ideas of solving the major problems of the study areas. Such recommendations are not only for the study areas only, but also applicable for other places in Dhaka city. Recommendations are divided into three parts:

- 1) Recommendations for urban design and public services
- 2) Recommendation for institutional framework
- 3) Recommendation for public awareness and participation

Recommendation for Urban Design and Public Services

It is evident that well designed and planned city improve the physical environment that reduces crime. The gender-based violence is generally opportunistic. Unplanned and poorly maintained areas lead to create such opportunities. Women are more vulnerable, where streets are with insufficient light, where few people circulate on empty streets for lack of security. Such conditions encourage perpetrators to commit crime. To eliminate those possibilities of criminal activities, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Sufficient street lights should be provided by the city authority. For installation, standard measures should be followed.
- Lighting should be bright so that a person with normal vision can identify a face from a distance of 10 meters.
- Mandatory lighting provision for building entrances and gates.
- Provision for wide footpaths or sidewalks in primary and secondary roads. Control of vehicles on tertiary roads.
- Pedestrian facilities should be provided on footpaths. Sitting arrangements, water point for safe drinking water, sheds for heavy rain or sunshine, spaces for hawkers etc. should be provided.
- Long straight pedestrian route should be avoided. It often discourages people to

walk on footpaths.

- Surface of footpath should be gender sensitive as well as weather protective, protecting footpaths from getting slippery on rainy days.
- Long high boundary wall should be avoided, especially on the road front. Fence type boundary or design of entrance gate should be visible or can be able to look through the gate.
- Neighborhood watch for empty and deserted areas during day and night.
- Improving the management system of the authority through community participation for cleanliness and security.
- Provision for separate public toilets for women. Constructing toilets is not a challenge, rather, maintaining those is needs enough care. Regular washing and cleanliness is necessary for making public toilets functional.

Recommendation for Institutional Activities

From the literature, it is observed that gender responsiveness is not having that much importance in planning policy and though some guidelines are provided, yet seldom implemented. It is very important to recognize gender responsiveness in both law and planning policy. Without strict laws and provisions, it is not possible to achieve gender responsiveness in the city. To strengthen the policy and legal frameworks, the following suggestions can be useful:

- Mainstreaming the gender issue in city planning and adopting gender sensitive policies, proposals in the land use plan.
- Mainstreaming gender issue in the transport plan and adopting gender sensitive policies, proposals in the transport plan and ensuring participation of women's organization in the plan/ policy preparation for developing a women friendly transport system.
- Comparatively secluded areas, roads and parks should be under surveillance camera. A ward wise control panel will monitor all those public places and inform patrol police unit for any kind of suspicious activity.
- Safety audit program, where all the public places and street lights will be audited once in a month.
- Inclusion of safety audit board in the standing committee of both city corporations. Women councilors should be the chairman of this board. Six women members can be chosen from different NGOs, police department, professionals and community members along with 30 volunteers (5 persons from each group) who will be managed and trained by the city corporation. The safety audit board will audit the gender responsiveness of the ward once in a month. Figure 4 shows the possible organogram of a safety audit board.

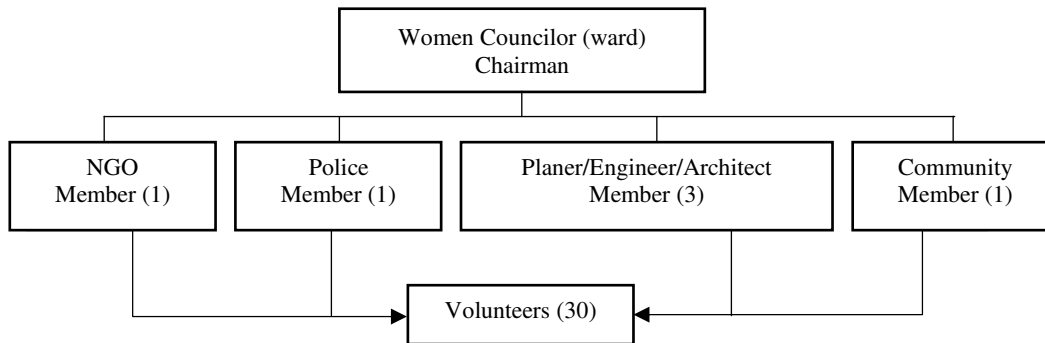


Figure 4: Organogram of Safety Audit Board (Author's Illustration).

- Acknowledging any kind of harassment and sexual assault in public places should be considered as a cognizable offense.
- Police department should introduce special patrol units that will watch the public places.
- Increasing the number of police, especially female police officers and installation of CCTV cameras at key points, such as bus stops and railway station. Visible security system often reduces the rate of crime.
- Introducing gender mainstreaming in policy making and plan preparation.
- Few improvements and affiliation in the project cycle, mainstreaming of gender sensitivity is required in every stage of project cycle starting from project initiation to project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It will ensure gender responsive urban planning and development.
- Safety and security actions from the gender perspective should mention in the guidelines to be executed in the project.
- Project should be evaluated with the gender sensitive indicators to ensure that city is getting its gender responsive form.

Recommendation for Public Awareness and Sensitization

Raising awareness about gender-based violence among the public is one of the most effective ways to make public places safe and secured. Awareness should also be raised among women too as they often try to hide any kind of unexpected incidents only for avoiding additional harassment or thinking about social status. Women should come forward and take initiatives against gender-based violence that will encourage other women to step ahead. To raise awareness among the people, following measures can be taken:

- Many norms and attitude have grown over time about women in our early life. Thinking women weak and inferior is a common phenomenon in our country. Women are also used to think that they are ineligible in this male dominant society. Appropriate education should be provided to reconstruct the belief and change those norms against women. Introducing lessons against sexual harassment and violence for understanding the construction of gender and recognizing patriarchy is very important.

- Women often hide or reluctant to describe their experience because of shame and social stigma. Such things should be eradicated from society by establishing sexual harassment as a serious crime both in public and private places.
- Parents and guardians should also need to be educated about this unfair trade-off between women and crime.
- Safety education and safety campaign and training program should regularly be organized by local authorities and communities.
- Disseminate awareness raising program through media platforms, like the internet, television, radio newspapers and posters.
- Providing women and girls with resources and capacity building training so that they can advocate by their own.
- Establishing advocacy group at community level that can educate community on sexual harassment, violence and abuse and providing legal support.
- Including gender sensitivity lessons in primary education to build a gender-neutral society at a very early age.

Conclusion

Women have been neglected from a very long time in Bangladesh. Discrimination is seen in every aspect of our society and city planning is no exception in this respect. Women are not considered during planning initiation. Excluding women from urban planning made the city more vulnerable to them. It is evident from this study that urban planning can facilitate women in using public places. Well planned and managed city offers women a safe and stress-free life. Dhaka is mostly unplanned, but there are yet a lot of possibilities to make this city more gender responsive if city governments take initiatives strictly and seriously. It is not possible to make Dhaka gender responsive within a day, but there are some scopes that can reduce the gender-based violence and make city safer for women. Proper lighting system and security can easily be achieved by the city authorities. Regular monitoring and safety audit will encourage women and policy makers to rethink about gender responsive issues. Gender mainstreaming in planning process is needed to make city more responsive and including women in every stage of planning process can eventually build this city inclusive and more gender responsive.

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