Women's Safety
-Voices from the Ground

GLIMPSES FROM THE SESSIONS

ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

About AIWC

AIWC is a pioneer national-level women's organization established in 1927, initially for propagating education and literacy among women. We have presence in almost all states within India and a good strength of nearly 100,000 voluntary members.

The primary objective of AIWC is emancipation and holistic empowerment of women. To attain the same, we design different programmes relating to health, education, skill development, legal awareness, environment, and other issues impeding women's empowerment. All our programmes are implemented through our branches and members.

Our primary focus area is not restricted to but includes, health education, environment, climate change, safety of women, legal awareness etc to name a few. The organization also runs shelter homes for girls and women in distress, family counselling centers as well as Day care center for senior citizens.

Details of all the activities are available in our **website www.aiwc.org.in**

Rationale

As a pioneering women's organization, the safety of women has been a primary focus of All India Women's Conference (AIWC).

The alarming rise in crimes against women in India has once again jolted the collective conscience of the citizens.

Despite numerous suggestions for legal reforms and enhanced participation from the police and judiciary, tangible progress remains elusive. Over the years, All India Women's Conference has implemented various programs to address gender-based violence, including self-defense training for girls, awareness campaigns on women's safety, and initiatives such as POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) Training to combat workplace harassment.

While the government and other stakeholders have introduced significant legal measures and safety initiatives, these efforts have failed to stem the tide of increasing crimes against women. On the contrary, the persistent rise in such cases has deepened public anxiety and skepticism. The case of the rape and murder of a young doctor in Kolkata, has triggered the matter in society for the safety issues for women in the country. This calls for exploring alternative strategies to address and combat this pervasive issue, moving beyond conventional methods.

Hence we felt that engaging with youth in colleges and communities may provide fresh perspectives and innovative solutions. Young people frequently navigate public spaces, use public transportation, and are acutely aware of their environment and safety concerns. Moreover, young men and women often have distinct perceptions of safety and may offer valuable insights into potential solutions.

Recognizing this, AIWC initially had an internal meeting of members and officials, deliberated on the issue, and further decided to have an interactive session with youth groups, mothers, teachers, and community leaders. The sessions were held across four key locations in Delhi:

1. Jawaharlal Nehru University (26th September, around 80 participants),
2. Ambedkar University (9th October, around 110 participants),
3. Community level at Majnu Ka Tila (26th November, around 50 participants)
4. Community level at Budh Vihar (18th December, around 70 participants).

This report outlines the findings and recommendations from these interactions and the urgent need for joint efforts to ensure a safer environment for women and girls.

The Existing Situation:

Women's Safety-NCRB Data Highlights (2023)
- India reported over 31,000 cases of rape, with Delhi alone accounting for more than 3,000, the highest among Indian cities. As reported in Indian Express by a supreme court advocate that 90 women a day are raped in India.
- Over 2,500 cases of eve-teasing and sexual harassment were registered in Delhi, reflecting persistent threats in public spaces.
- Delhi recorded over 4,000 incidents of domestic violence, contributing significantly to the national tally of more than 80,000 cases.
- Cases of online harassment and stalking have surged, particularly affecting young women. Delhi reported a sharp rise in such incidents, mirroring a nationwide trend.

Objectives of the Workshop

The main objectives of the interactive workshops were:
- To engage youth in dialogue, helping them identify innovative solutions and preventive measures that can contribute to safer environments for women.
- To identify key safety concerns for today's young girls & women in the universities and communities.
- To ascertain the perspective of youth, parents, and community leaders about safety.
- Possibly design a different and effective strategy to address GBV issues.

Methodology

The workshops were designed as interactive sessions that allowed participants to freely express their concerns, share personal experiences, and brainstorm potential solutions which included:

- Speakers, including professors from academics, community leaders, and AIWC members, who presented data on crime against women and contextualized the discussion within local concerns.
- Facilitators asked open-ended questions to stimulate reflection and dialogue.
  Questions included: "Have you ever experienced or witnessed safety issues? How did you respond? What is your idea of a safe space?"
- Participants were encouraged to share personal experiences, allowing for peer learning and the identification of common safety concerns.
- Participants, especially the youth and community women, were asked to propose solutions to tackle safety issues and prevent violence in public spaces and private domains.

Key Findings

Several critical safety concerns and potential solutions emerged from the interactive sessions:

- A sense of fear and vulnerability among female students even in the academic environment.
- Lack of proactive measures in law enforcement and police handling of sensitive cases.
- Constant staring and stalking make the girls uncomfortable and give them creepy feelings.
- Many girls feel that there are no safe spaces available where they can discuss verbal abuse or catcalling experiences without fear of judgment.
- Lack of support from local law enforcement when women report incidents of harassment.
- Regular verbal harassment and public indecency incidents, particularly by intoxicated individuals.
- The consumption of drugs and alcohol contributes to unsafe conditions for women, especially when they are walking alone in the streets.
- There is a noticeable absence of safety measures such as a "pink booth" (a police kiosk dedicated to women's safety) in the area which remained unfunctional most of the time. Further, fewer or no lights and lack of functional CCTV cameras also create unsafe feelings in several sensitive areas.
- The community also reported lack of cooperation from the local police when women attempt to report incidents of harassment or violence. This further discourages women from seeking help when they face unsafe situations.
- Intimidation by boys also sparks insecurity among girls and needs to be recognized as a matter of concern.
- Collateral damages of safety, prevent many girls from sharing safety concerns with parents and family.
- High rates of eve-teasing, cyber harassment, and societal perception of women's roles.
- The focus was on assertiveness, self-defense techniques, and ways to report incidents effectively.

Outcome

The workshops resulted in a deeper understanding of the challenges young people and women face regarding women's safety.

The primary outcomes were:

- Both women and men felt more confident to contribute and participate in the solutions for safer public and private spaces.
- Many participants, including community volunteers, pledged to take proactive steps such as organizing safety marches and engaging local authorities for better policing.
- The forum provided an opportunity for some girls to share incidents that they couldn't even share with their family and friends.
- Many felt that such interactions were useful and healthy and can be conducted regularly, particularly the girls and women from the communities found the interaction welcoming.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback from the interactive workshops and identified safety gaps, the following recommendations are put forward to improve women's safety in Delhi:

- Establishing self-defense programs and workshops to empower women.
- Boys must be taught about consent and rejection.
- Safe forums should be established where women can share their experiences without fear of judgment.
- More campaigns are needed to raise awareness about how societal attitudes toward women contribute to an unsafe environment. For example, boys should be taught that persistent staring and stalking make women feel uncomfortable.
- Counseling support for survivors of violence are crucial. In cases of rape, mental health support needs to be provided simultaneously with the police and medical assistance. Both survivors and their families must receive counseling to help them cope with trauma.
- Marshall on buses need training to tackle those issues.
- Establish more "Pink Booths" across key urban and suburban areas.
- Train police officers on gender sensitivity and ensure swift action on harassment complaints.
- Install better street lighting in areas identified as high-risk zones.
- Increase the number of functional CCTV cameras and security patrols in vulnerable public spaces, especially at night.
- Integrate gender sensitivity training in school and college curricula, including role-playing exercises.
- Organize community-based programs to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote respect for women.
- Support local NGOs and community leaders in organizing self-defense courses for women and workshops on gender equality.
- Set up more counseling centers for survivors of violence, providing not only legal aid but also mental health support.
- Ensure the availability of a well-publicized emergency helpline and provide training on its use.
- Develop better cooperation between the police and local communities to ensure trust and transparency in reporting crimes.
- Sensitization of parents of young girls to understand their fear of harassment and co-operate.
- Women's safety issue is something that can be addressed effectively more by a collaborated approach than sylo handling by government agencies and other stakeholders.

AIWC intervention post discussion

The members of SWEDWA branch visited the Civil Lines Police Station to file a complaint regarding the situation of the Pink Booth in the Main Market of Majnu Ka Tila. The branch members met with the S.H.O. and informed him about the issues with the Pink Booth, which had been opened but was non-functional and subsequently closed. This dysfunction was causing safety concerns for young girls and women, who were reluctant to leave their homes in the evening. The S.H.O. took immediate action, directing that the Pink Booth be made fully operational. As a result, the Pink Booth is now functioning, with a female constable available. Additionally, the branch members have filed an RTI regarding the status of Pink Booths across Delhi, and the results are awaited.

Conclusion

The workshops were successful in initiating meaningful dialogues about women's safety, emphasizing the importance of youth participation in creating a safer society. It is essential that all stakeholders—government bodies, educational institutions, law enforcement, and the general public—work together to address the multifaceted challenges women face. A collaborative, strategic, and focused approach may have a better result and help create a safer environment for all.

At AIWC, we propose to take positive & proactive steps forward on this issue in the future, conduct regular interactive sessions wherever possible, and endeavour our best to create a safe space for girls and women. We welcome support and collaboration from all interested stakeholders in this regard.