FEAR AS A BARRIER TO OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION: WOMAN NEGOTIATING FEAR OF OUTDOOR-VIOLENCE IN DHAKA CITY

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Abstract: This paper will examine women's negotiation of the many forms of constraints existing within the public spaces of the Dhaka City. The soaring level of outdoor crime reported in this urban city, perceives the public spaces as unsafe for women, while the intimate violence indoors remains mostly unreported. The gendered-approach objectifies women making them vulnerable and fearful of violence. The investigation through surveys and interviews reveals that although women face many kinds of fear in the outdoors, the prime fear that restraints their mobility, expression and outdoor activities is the fear of sexual violence. This fear is prevalent even within those women who may never have experienced such violence directly. The focus of this paper is to identify what negotiated strategies are undertaken by women to tackle their concerns and pursue their outdoor activities. It is found that the level of fear of harm varies across social-class, education and location, hence the approach to avoid risk of harm. The findings portray that not all women's perceptions are the same and that some women defies social stigma in accessing public spaces. This paper then proposes some steps that can be undertaken to lessen fear and allow greater outdoor participation of women.

Keywords: fear, violence, constraints, public spaces, avoidance, risk management, risk taking

Introduction: Women's fear of crime has been an issue of concern in the developed world for policy makers, activists and within academic disciplines such as sociology, criminology and geography since the 1980s. However, this issue in Bangladesh is looked upon on a brief note only recently. My aim in this paper is to examine the strategies taken by women to deal with the fear in the city of Dhaka. With a population of 160 million nationwide, Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh is one of the densely populated cities in the world. In the continual stream of female migration to the city in search of paid-works, a substantial chunk is manifested in Bangladesh's garment export and other service industries. Although the inclusion of the woman workforce increased women's economic independence, the social status of women has not changed. In this deep-rooted patriarchal society, it is deemed that the proper place for women is indoors, while men dominate the outdoors. Such a notion and the increased visibility of large number of women in public spaces led to increased levels of violence against women, in particular sexual violence and harassment, which mean women constantly feel unsafe and anxious for their safety (Actionaid, 2014). As a result, women remain vigilant about their surroundings, avoid unfamiliar places, and are guarded about their bodies to remain safe. By using the strategies to cope with fear women usually distance themselves-in space and time-from potential attackers (Valentine, 1992).

Fear of crime: Anxiety from fear of crime raises concern about understanding relations between public spaces and personal safety (Fanghanel, 2016). Stanko (1996, p 47-48) states that 'fear of crime is taken to represent individuals' diffuse sense of danger about being physically harmed by criminal violence' predominantly, 'outside the home, probably in an urban area, alone and potentially vulnerable to personal harm'. Researchers argue that fear of crime may be better understood as a socio-cultural construct which describes 'malaise, unease or other dissatisfaction of the self with public space as much as anxiety about imminent crime per se' (Lee 2007). While both men and women fear crime, it has been found that women bear greater burden of fear and its effects on their lives (Clemente and Kleiman,1977; Gordon et al., 1980; Markson and Hess, 1980; Lagrange and Ferraro, 1989; Valentine, 1989; 1992; Currie, 1994). The fear to women is not always towards the crime but the possibility of any violence and potential victimisation. This fear is towards a unique and serious category of crime especially attributed to women- sexual violence (Valentine, 1992), that is to say, rape and other crimes of sexual nature or any crime that may heighten their fear of victimisation. Gordon and Riger (1989) named it the classic 'female fear' that women always live under the 'shadow of the threat of sexual abuse' (Mackinnon, 1989 p 340). The sexually violent crimes commonly taking place in Bangladesh are rape, murder if one is resistant to rape, sex trafficking, acid throwing as revenge by rejected suitors and cases of eve teasing. Fear is subjective and public space encounter with men are deemed by women to be 'unpredictable, potentially uncontrollable and hence threatening' (Valentine, 1989, p 174). Any minor forms of sexually intimidating behaviour may gravitate fear of more violent attack in public places reminding women of their vulnerability and possibility of victimisation (Stanko, 1990). Thus, the fear becomes fear of men

who could potentially victimise them, especially male strangers.

Fear draws lines of disadvantage for women in social, political and economic inequality. Indeed, it has been suggested that fear can be largely attributed to lack of integration into the neighbourhoods, lack of social acceptance leading to isolation, less control over resources, marginalisation and sense of powerlessness (Smith, 1989; Van der Wurff and Stringer, 1988). Moreover, sometimes it is the evidence of dirt, disorder and 'incivilities', rather than evidence of crime, selective reporting of the mass media creating awareness of certain issues and places, casting women as victims of violence in vulnerable positions in movies, TV programs, music videos, advertisements, and music lyrics (Stout & McPhail, 1998),words of mouth about victim experiences and its 'ripple effect' by communication with the community that is commonly passed over, and expressed as, fear of crime (Beckett and Herbert, 2008; Biderman et al., 1967; Sampson and Raudenbush,1999; Smith, 1985; Yeoh and Yeow, 1997). Apart from the physical and social environment cues of fear, women may cultivate fear due to their passive and timid personalities (DuBow et al., 1979).

Research Methodology: I interviewed 55 women of age between 16-54 from different parts of Dhaka city about their experiences and apprehension of belonging in and exclusion from public spaces. I tried to interview women from all classes, locations and various employment sectors. Here, I focus on a few of these interviews where women revealed about their fear and strategies to negotiate such fear. The methodology and analytical strategy is partly outlined in this article. I asked participants about their impressions of the public spaces on which they encroach upon in their day-to-day life and which they were familiar with. I then asked them to describe those places they consider unsafe, what their experiences were, and how far rumours or experiences of crime or other anti-social behaviours impacted on their idea about those spaces. When asked about dealing with fear, women participants revealed how they negotiated their way around their vision of fear to stay safe. It was interesting to note that their strategies varied according to their understanding of themselves, the personalities they carry and their social situations.

Findings: Fear of crime was found to have profound effects on mobility, behaviour and lifestyle. In the interviews women explicitly discussed about their insecurities and described how they restricted their use of public spaces. Women adopted strategies to either avoid places perceived as male dominated or undertook risk management strategies to protect themselves from any sorts of sexual attack. According to DuBow et al. (1979), 'avoidance tactics' involve

'actions taken to decrease exposure to crime by removing oneself from or increasing the distance from situations in which risks of criminal behaviour is believed to be high'; and 'risk management tactics' are 'what people do to deal with the perceived risks when they cannot or will not physically avoid them'. Yeoh and Yeow (1997) asserted that such measures do not reduce the crime rate but may reduce one's fear of crime but redirecting crime from one person to another.

Fear of crime in the research was strongly felt after dark. Women related darkness to potential danger which acted as 'virtual curfew' for women (Kinsey, 1984).

Jenny, 21 Student at Dhaka University: '*Students love to hang out in this campus, it is one of its kind. Ofcourse when it's dark, it's better to be careful and not to stray on the streets..you never know who is hiding in the dark.*'

In the interviews women stated that they not only fear physical assault (or rape) often the fear goes beyond the violent act to include the stigma that accompanies the action(Gordon & Riger, 1991); that is, to be labelled as 'unchaste' and/or 'bad' woman inviting such deeds. It is believed that a woman's reputation if tarnished brings dishonour and shame to not the woman alone but the entire family. The narratives of women portray that fear of attack is one of the most influential factors that constraint women's freedom of mobility in the city. To circumvent risks women withdrew from certain areas they construe as dangerous for women. The common places the participants associated with the possibility of attack after dark are desolated roads, short-cuts and back lanes, parks, walkways around lakes, empty housing plots, dead-end streets, vandalised places, dimly lit streets, underpasses, bus stops, train stations and other unfamiliar places. Perception of safety on such places varies widely during daytime. This concept of avoidance was recognised by Koskela (1997, p.118) as that 'women prefer to avoid certain environments rather than take the risk of facing an upsetting or frightening situation'.

Salena, 52 Doctor: '*I go for walks around Dhanmondi lake every morning and it's always filled by joggers..but I cannot imagine going in the evening as it becomes dark and deserted.*'

The narrative further reinforces that women perceive dark and empty areas as more frightening than places where more people are around. They imagine danger lurking in the dark in the form of male stranger(s) waiting to attack which in reality strengthens male dominance over the night city. Some women feared specific spaces that reminded them of a fearful incident. Research shows that sexual harassment 'evokes fear of more severe sexual attack' that creates insecurity and unease to a woman (Pain 1991, p.421).

Saira, 38 Territory Sale Manager: '*It is my job to travel to many places not my choice. When it comes to visiting that area [of incident] on rotation, I go in flashbacks and feel suffocated. I always have to convince my colleagues to go on my behalf...sometimes at the cost of extra expenses.*'

When women were asked who would be the most likely attacker if they were the victim, over two-third of the women suggested 'a stranger', a notion recognized by Dosekun (2007) as 'stranger-danger'. Women narrated to avoid places where young men meet or safeguard themselves from unruly-looking men by avoiding eye-contact, maintaining a rigid posture and walking past them very fast. Just like how women's fear was described to be place-specific, its predominance was during certain times, that is, from sunset to sunrise.

Social class also had some relevance on how women reacted and negotiated their fear. It is argued elsewhere that affluent women may get around the potentially harmful effects of fear on their lifestyle better than the lower classes (Painter, 1992; Valentine, 1989). In my research women in general noted to be accepting jobs which do not require working after dark. Those women, who could afford public transport, confirmed taking the safest form of transport. They avoided certain kinds of transports after dark, such as three-wheelers with closed doors and taxi-cabs. The driver in control of the wheels is always a male and is envisaged to be taking a lone woman elsewhere. Other middle class women preferred taking a *rickshaw* (paddled three-wheeler) which is not enclosed. Women from low income group took buses, which is the cheapest public transport and tried to avoid empty or crowded buses unless having no alternatives by keeping alert throughout the journey in order to avoid intrusive hands on their bodies. Those women, who could not afford everyday public transport, chose work carefully and lived at walking-distance to their work-place and united in a group to walk together, for instance, domestic workers and garments workers. They noted to be taking the route everyday that they were familiar with, believing that there will be less chances of getting lost and falling victim. They even accepted to be visiting relatives who stayed close-by only, as they related unfamiliar territory to be dangerous. Women from high and middle income groups with more means at their disposal to employ coping strategies used private transports or office transportation services or took ride from a known colleague or friend after dark.

Women also narrated about their choice of attire in public places. Although Bangladesh is a Muslim country, *hijab* (head-covering worn by Muslim women) is not the norm. But it is seen from my research that most middle and lower class women were concerned with their attire to wear clothes that covered their bodies and covered their heads after dark and deemed it a proper 'code of conduct' for women. Many reported they were asked by their families to wear *burqa* (enveloping outer garment worn by Muslim women) in public places to avoid prying eyes. They hid themselves behind clothes in a 'ghostly' manner which they reported to repel unknown men and give them a sense of safety.

Nafisa (18, Student): '*I generally wear salwar kameez but when I travel alone to my college I cover my head. I feel safe with this.*'

This finding was different in case of women who could afford private transport. Overall, women attempted to maintain modest appearances so as to deter unwanted attention.

Tanzina, 30, Hotel Receptionist: '*Men always stare at me or make comments in the bus if I wear shirt-pants [office attire]. That's why I always carry my office outfit with me and change after coming to hotel.*'

The narrative demonstrates that women travelling by public transport abstained from wearing western outfits to circumvent risk of sexual harassment. Many operated at subconscious level, depicting behaviour socialised in childhood and adolescence and practiced over years to become 'naturalised' and part of everyday life (Yeoh and Yeow, 1997). One women stated, 'I did not realise until you asked me this question...it's so natural in our society'. Another woman affirmed that the impact on her life is so subtle that she did not realise there could be any difference otherwise. One women working as a school teacher stated that wearing flashy and revealing clothes and too much jewellery were signs of a bad woman with intention to 'provoke' men. Such women are unlikely to even get public sympathy and help if sexually harassed in public places. Women widely accepted that wearing provoking attire would invite trouble and disrespect for them.

Participants narrated that they avoided waiting for family or friends in public. A woman standing alone in a public place is generally assumed to be soliciting. Thus most women either avoided waiting altogether or did not stand alone for long to avoid being termed a 'prostitute'.

Mili, 37, IT Engineer: '*Whenever I wait for my husband to pick me up on the roadside, I either look down or look at the watch too often to signal any men looking at me [the wrong way] that I am waiting for someone I know.*'

It is understood from the reports of women that they feared standing alone or unescorted in public to avoid being perceived as easy and accessible. Such women were identified as waiting to be picked up by

men and her body could be used for the pleasure of men, which a respectable woman is expected not to do.

Constraints on the use of public spaces and activities: The fear of crime largely impacts on the public leisure activities of women. A girl from an early age learns that the outside world is the male domain, while women are expected to remain in private spaces and that it is the male strangers loitering outside that women should protect themselves from. Girls are warned and advised to fear public spaces and restrained from playing outside home, while boys are encouraged to play popular field games like cricket or football. It is the society which decides what woman can do and not. Avoiding certain places and activities and taking precautionary measures are part of socialisation process in Asian families and Bangladesh is no different.

Girls coming from rural areas to city for education accounted to be fearful and constantly alert about what happened around them. They chose their routes carefully and scanned the environment for any encroaching men before going out. Others compromised education and opted for local schools as their parents' feared perceived risk on the way to and back to a reputed school located at a distance.

Rita, 48, Housewife: '*A mother of a young girl has a lot of worries. If anything happens to her, society will blame her. My daughter's safety is more important to me than her education.*'

Shathi, 20, Student: '*After a lot of perseverance my family agreed to send me to Dhaka to study, now by being careless and inviting trouble I do not want my family to call me back to the village.*'

The constraints reinforce notions about women's 'traditional feminity' and sexuality (Dosekun, 2007). Such incidents incur high social and economic costs (eg., getting better employment opportunities in future) for women. Catcalling is one day to day activity often seen as 'men's legitimate pastime' takes anonymity of women's city life away and invades her personal space (Yeoh and Yeow, 1997; Franck and Paxson, 1989). One woman revealed that she moved house from one locality to another which she describes as familiar and 'safe', when some local 'bad boys' made catcalls daily at her teen aged daughter on the streets. Likewise, fear after experiencing violence or harassment entailed some women to become increasingly excluded from public places (Yeoh and Yeow, 1997). A woman working as domestic help revealed to have stopped her school going daughter's education and made her housebound due to such catcalls claiming she feels her daughter 'is safe at home rather than on the streets'.

Women's leisure activities are space and time bound and as discussed earlier, they are expected to refrain from visiting certain kinds of places and retire home before dark.

Tarana, 27, NGO employee: '*No matter how much practice I need for the annual tournament I can only play [lawn tennis in a local club] until sunset.*'

Women avoided activities with too little or too many people especially men, such as walking and jogging in parks during odd hours or swimming and fishing in the lakes; going to overcrowded places like local fairs or rallies. Women restricted themselves to going only to places where 'respectable' women go. Moreover, even when they went they chose daytime or took a family member with them when they planned to stay late or simply avoided altogether. There is no culture of clubs or pubs in Bangladesh for public, so an outing was usually to a restaurant or a family club for affluent members where women noted to go with their family or partners. Young women arranged get-togethers in private places like fast food centres or someone's house. Even going to a movie alone was beyond the scope for some women as they dreaded the risk of a male stranger in the next seat with sexual motives. Woman of middle to high income group were limited to going for multiplexes as opposed to ordinary movie halls where usually vulgar movies are shown and the main audiences are men from low income group. Again, those without private transports limited themselves to activities during the day time. Public outing for the low income group was going to parks on weekends or a relative's house and returned back home before dusk. Lower class women were more exposed to threatening situations because they could only afford to live in areas challenged by high crime rates.

It has already been established by researchers that poor health has an influence on fear levels. Disabled, pregnant and widowed women feel especially vulnerable and are concerned about being 'easy targets' (Pain, 1994). A violent experience often makes them 'double' vulnerable. The participants in my research severely restricted themselves from talking or acting back and largely remained in private places compared to other women.

Phadke (2005) asserts that women's fears reinforced the patriarchal assumption that 'women only need to use the public space in rational, goal-oriented, purposeful ways and not for irrational pleasure seeking'. Processes of self-governance (Foucault, 1979) can be discerned from women's narratives as they engaged in self-regulation and self-policing when negotiating male dominated public space. Thus, it can be deduced from the narratives that the persistent exposure to attacks and the fear of rape, sexual assault, humiliation and harassment infringes women's rights to enjoy public spaces, pursue education, work and recreational opportunities and participate in political and community life.

Reliance on others: Another way of dealing with fear by women was getting a companion. Socialization of all women in our society encourages women to rely on men for protection (Hollander, 2001). Women widely accepted that they felt safe and protected in the presence of a male company. Most married women in a common consensus agreed that they felt the safest when their husbands were with them, while unmarried women were protected by their family members such as father or brother and seldom mother. In majority of the cases, women used another man they knew as protectors from other unknown men they perceive as 'predators' in public places. Women claimed that as a precaution to threat of danger they called up their husbands or other family members to pick them up from work or educational institutions or elsewhere after dark.

Eshita, 38, Bank employee: '*I usually call and wait for my husband to pick me up when its already dark around 8pm.*'

Dora, 25, MBA Student: '*As my classes finish late at 10:00 pm, I ask my father to come to pick me up.*'

Reliance on others they knew was a common strategy used by women which idealises constructions of femininity that centre on vulnerability, delicateness and femininity-in-need-of-protection, particularly in public spaces (see Campbell, 2005; Day et al., 2003; Wilson, 1991).

Carrying alarms or weapons like knives, scissors or pepper sprays were found not to be very common among the participants, as they lacked the confidence to use them on time and feared provoking the offender into committing more violent crimes. Few women noted as saying, technology acted as a saviour to them. They felt safe with a mobile phone in hand as it gave them and any approaching stranger the idea that someone can be informed through speed-dialling about any potential danger. It was also acknowledged that connecting to friends through social networks and updating their locations constantly as well as the availability of various security applications in the smart-phones in a touch gave them a sense of security.

On the other hand, it was also admitted that in times of sudden attack, looking for the right applications or dialling would be a challenge in itself. Women in the low income group did not have the luxury or understanding of such high end technological equipments. And since most of the low paid workers came from rural areas, with few to communicate with in the city, they remained in isolation and in constant fear of risks.

Non-acknowledgement of fear: Lifestyle and age has an impact on the fear factor for women. Women who were housewives and older, ordinarily stayed indoors with occasional outdoor visits (mostly with family) felt least afraid compared to women with greater outdoor commitments. Some participants accepted having no fear as they did not get involved in any risky activities and restricted their lifestyles in a manner that deters potential attack on them. They believed to follow the lifestyle of a respectable woman and exercised caution when outdoors and blamed women who are unprepared for their own victimization. This behaviour of being prepared and acting feminine was recognised by Rader (2008). The women did not deny being vulnerable but acknowledged feeling safe by accepting the situation as it is and by developing behavioural patterns which never put them in situations of insecurity and risks. Overdependence on private transport signifies less contact with public spaces. Accordingly, women who used private transports for movement narrated not to feel any fear. In general, women were found to seldom avoid day-to-day routine activities which they distinguished as necessary and safe, such as girls belonging to high and middle classes going to school, mothers taking children to school, grocery shopping, or going out to eat at restaurants.

Independent women breaking out of fear: From the narratives it was observed that educated women with a minimum of a bachelor's degree emphasised that it is important for women to not allow their fear to hinder their freedom to access public spaces. Women stressed on maintaining a confident posture instead of looking confused or weak, such as keeping head up, shoulders back and firm steps. Women accessed public spaces by suppressing fear and prioritising freedom over fear. Meena, 33, Journalist: '*Risk is always there and it is part of my job. To be honest I am under constant fear at late night reporting duties but I try to concentrate on my work and distract myself from thinking about risks of molestation.*'

Meena talks about resisting and managing her fear, what Koselka (1997) defines as 'reasoning' to keep courage and Hochschild (1983) identifies as acting upon feeling by managing them. Some women expressed anger and rage towards the social system. Most women agreed that it was important for women to control their fear and be brave to obtain life's pleasure and experiences. To let fear engulf opportunities is to let go of their rights and belongings to the nation.

Zoya, 29, Advocate: '*fear means denying constitutional guarantee of equality for women*'.

It was also emphasised that it is important for women to take risks and confront men who invaded their bodily space. This idea was accentuated by some participants saying acting feminine was a 'bad strategy' in dangerous situations.

Nikita, 24, Customer service manager: '*I was looking at clothes at an open market when a pedestrian came and touched me inappropriately. I was fumed with anger and turned around to slap him hard on his face.*'

Fighting back is essentially considered as a masculine activity in Bangladesh and it is noticed that women are breaking fear by using masculine behaviour as a strategy and getting hold of their possessions of both the public and their bodily spaces. It was also noticed that women acted in unity to help other women from falling victim to harassment.

Ranu, 35, Garment Worker: *'When one guy was singing vulgar songs at a girl from the factory and pulled her scarf, a lot of us [women] went there to beat him up. We attracted a big crowd but this is the lesson he needed to learn.'*

Recommendation: It must be accentuated here that the women's fear is a social as well as a personalised construct. Thus the recommendations reflect that the government, society and individuals together have to try to bring about change to ensure safety of women in public spaces.

On a broader sense, government should take initiatives to establish cctv cameras all over the city and inside the public transports like buses and illuminate dark areas. It not only covers crime scenes, it is a proven deterrent to criminal activities. Harassment of women inside crowded buses can be alleviated by increasing the number of buses and introducing other public transport mediums like metro-rails. Police should be more vigilant and monitor city roads and public transports and continue patrolling around the city at night to ensure safety of women.

NGOs and other organisations ought to play a significant role in organising self-defence trainings to suit the woman's' lifestyles, occupations, age groups and gender, and physical and mental capabilities for a nominal fee and make resources available such as pepper sprays for marginalised women.

More awareness programmes are necessary to construct an informed society about the rights of women and the pertinent legal remedies available to them. The Bangladesh legal system, derived from the colonial British Penal Code and the Common Law, are required to be amended to be more victim-sensitive in order to encourage victims to report crimes more and bring the perpetrators under the law.

The root causes of harassment cannot be eliminated without a transformation in social attitudes towards women, especially poor working women. Gender sensitivity training to disseminate information about creating awareness and campaigning against violence is required for all persons in society. In this respect, the mass media arguably has the most important role to play. Only then an environment will be created which is woman-friendly, and less fear-producing.

On a personal level, women should exercise safeguards other than the popular ones with women such as: avoiding overcrowded places where it is possible to be caught, not sharing three-wheeler taxis and cabs with strangers, avoid small talks and chatting with taxi drivers, shop-keepers or other strange men, inform about the cab/taxi number and location to a family member if you must take a one alone, be alert about any potential stalker, avoid taking same route everyday and change routes sometimes, shun walking or waiting alone for long on deserted streets especially at night, having a trusted company, keeping mobile phones handy, avoid using headphones when alone on streets, be extra cautious on festive nights like New year's eve, carrying personal defence and non-lethal weapons such as pepper sprays and undertake self-defence trainings.

Conclusion and discussion: The research shows that the women recognised potential danger signals primarily in the outdoor and developed negotiated strategies to cope with their fear of violence and offset the perceived risks. Social identities and feminity are oriented towards safety as women voluntarily constrain a myriad of choices about work, recreation and transportation. Women feel that they ought to restrict their mobility 'voluntarily', as individuals. This also means that they do not regard their inability to use the outdoors freely as a serious constraint but rather as a normal and accepted condition.

The women in this research, perhaps similarly to women in society at large, uphold images of chivalry, patriarchy, and femininity by fearing men on one hand and using men as a precautionary measure on the other hand, through believing that it is appropriate for women to do so, regardless of how much this restricted their daily activities or forced them to depend on men for protection. The strategies however, did little to reduce the high anxiety levels often experienced by the women. As such, threat of sexual violence reinforces the message which Enjeu and Save summarises as 'the city is for men, the home for women' (1974, p 10).

Moreover, many women looking for a chance to broaden their horizons and open their lives to a myriad of economic, political and social avenues are faced with the persistent threat of sexual violence constricting and controlling their lives. In light of the stereotypical acknowledgment of women as objects of violence, a need exists to understand the influence of such a pervasive attitude on the denotations of outdoor activities as experienced by women and take necessary steps to alleviate the sufferings of women. The recommendations in this article may perhaps be a step forwards towards the much needed change.

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