

P R E S S R E L E A S E

A third of India's girls expect to be assaulted or stalked when they go out in public: new report

40 per cent believe police would not take them seriously or they could be blamed instead

May 15, New Delhi: A ground-breaking new study reveals the extent of daily harassment feared by girls in India in public spaces, including being subjected to vulgar comments, inappropriate touching and other forms of sexual assault.

Save the Children's new report *WINGS 2018: World of India's Girls - A study on the perception of girls' safety in public spaces*, launched today, finds that one in three adolescent girls in India expect to be inappropriately touched or even stalked when they venture out in public, and more than a quarter feel they are at risk of being physically assaulted, including rape.

Almost half of the girls fear for their safety on public transport, while three in five feel unsafe on the streets and other public spaces when there is inadequate lighting, according to the report, which aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the perception of public safety of girls in India.

Of particular concern, 40 per cent of girls believed if they complained to the local police, they could themselves be blamed or their complaint would not be taken seriously. One in five parents of adolescent girls also believed it was better for their daughters to marry early than risk something happening to them while out in public.

The research included surveys with more than 4,000 adolescent girls and boys in India, as well as 800 parents of adolescent girls, and took place across six states, 30 cities and 84 villages in 12 districts. It is the first study of this size focusing on the issue.

"These findings reveal the danger and fear faced by millions of Indian girls every day when they go outside their homes, and the harmful impact this can have on their self-confidence and ability to move around freely," said Bidisha Pillai, CEO, Save the Children in India. "This harmful phenomenon is also putting girls' futures at risk, encouraging early marriage and making it more difficult to get an education, pursue meaningful employment and engage with the world."

The report also recognizes a number of significant initiatives of the government and civil society to address the issue, including funding for the Nirbhaya Fund, which aims to make public spaces safer for girls and women. But Pillai says far more must be done, pointing out that many incidents of harassment and abuse go unreported every day.

The report also found that:

- More than two-thirds of adolescent girls from urban and rural areas said they would confide in their mothers when they face harassment in a public space
- Nearly half said that if their parents found out about an incident of harassment in a public space, they would, in all likelihood, stop them from going out alone and also restrict their movement outside of home

"All children have a right to feel safe and protected when they are in a public space, and if this right is violated, they should be able to have confidence that law enforcement authorities will take them seriously and properly investigate their claims," she added.

WINGS 2018, which shines a spotlight on the issue while gaining greater understanding of the factors that make girls feel unsafe, makes more than 30 recommendations to improve public safety for girls based on comments they made during the research.

These measures include improved policing, with greater representation of women in the police force, the installation of improved lighting in public spaces, greater development of community support mechanisms like self-help groups, children's groups and mothers' groups, mandatory gender training for all public transport drivers including Uber and Ola, and greater resourcing at a political level for girls' safety.

Pillai emphasized that it's everyone's responsibility to make the country safe for girls. "We need to stand together – policy makers, administrators, law enforcement agencies, civil society and members of the public – not only to provide short-term solutions to address public safety, but simultaneously challenge deeply-embedded gender norms that deny girls of their basic rights."

Save the Children works across 20 states of India, focusing on issues related to education, health, protection of children and humanitarian work – especially for the most deprived and marginalized children.

ENDS

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Notes to editor:

- In the research, the term 'harassment' refers to verbal, physical, visual, sexual and emotional harassment.

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We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.