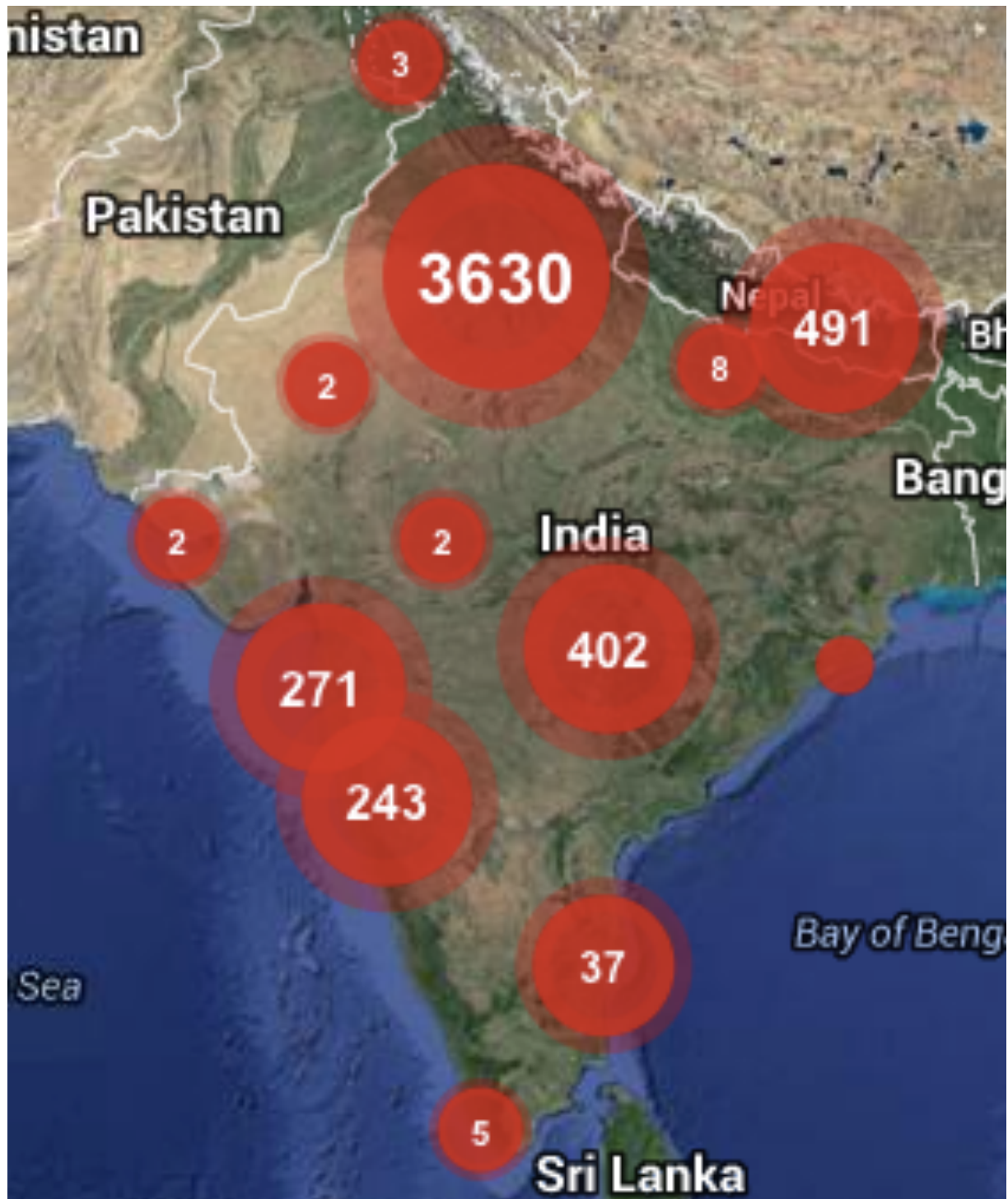# *Using crowdsourced data on sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces to find solutions towards eradicating violence against women and girls in India.*



- **ElsaMarie D'Silva, Rotary Peace Fellow, Class 20**

## Executive Summary

Gender based violence is a global pandemic. UN Women[1] estimates that 1 in 3 women around the world experience some form of sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Yet, 80% of women and girls choose not to talk about it for several reasons, including socio-cultural restrictions, fear of dealing with the police and the lengthy judicial process for justice. In a patriarchal society like India, these statistics are much higher than the global average, thereby affecting the quality of life of women and girls, limiting their choices, restricting their movements and imposing rules and regulations that their male counterparts do not necessarily have to deal with.

In December 2012, a horrific gang rape took place in a bus in Delhi, the capital city of India. This incident was extremely brutal resulting in the death of the young victim. My response was to start, with support from my friends, Safecity, an organisation that enables anonymous reporting of personal experiences of sexual violence in public spaces in India. The aim was to encourage women and girls to break the silence around such crimes, come forward to seek help and bridge the gap between the official statistics and daily reality.

We started Safecity within a few days of the gang rape and it has grown exponentially since then. We did not have the opportunity to do a detailed analysis of the issue or envision our impact when we launched the platform. Therefore, I would like to use this paper to analyse the causes of such violence and assess if crowdsourced data collected on Safecity's reporting platform is indeed a sustainable and effective solution.

I have used the **Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment Tool** as I believe it provides a comprehensive framework to assess the causes and risks. I have restricted the analysis to two neighbourhoods in Delhi as Safecity has the largest data set from that city and majority of our work with partner organisations is carried out there. My analysis has indicated that crowdsourced data can be used to gain insight on trends of sexual violence and can further be used to effectively engage stakeholders to take action. However, it needs to be complemented with further dialogue between various stakeholders and the introduction of a comprehensive sex education class in the school curriculum.

## Background

UN Women states that globally 1 in 3 women face some kind of sexual assault at least once in their lifetime. But in our experience, the statistics in India seem to be extremely high comparatively. Almost 2 out of 3 women reported facing incidents of sexual harassment between 2-5 times in the past year in New Delhi, according to UN Women India's[2] site and 95% of women and girls feel unsafe [3] in public spaces.  The National Crime Bureau statistics[4] indicate that a rape occurs every 20 minutes in India.

A survey carried out by ICRW [5]on behalf of UN Women in 2012, a few months before the Delhi gang rape, found the results to be representative of most men's attitudes and behavioural practices towards women and of what most women experience when they step outside of their homes in Delhi. The survey reached about 2,000 women and 1,000 men, ages 16 to 49, some highlights looked at are:

• Nearly 75 percent of women and girls surveyed said they had faced sexual violence in their own neighbourhoods.

• Nine out of ten reported experiencing sexual aggression or violence – from obscene comments, to being groped, stalked or sexually assaulted – in a public space in their lifetime.

• Six out of ten reported these incidents as occurring in the last six months preceding the survey.

• Nearly 65 percent of the women and girls said they feel fearful or extremely fearful when they go out alone at night.

• Meanwhile, half of the men ICRW surveyed said they had sexually harassed or been violent with a woman in a public setting at least once in their lifetime.

• Male respondents blamed women for being the cause of harassment, with three out of four men agreeing with the statement, "Women provoke men by the way they dress."

• Two out of five men partially or fully agreed that women moving around at night "deserve to be sexually harassed."

Yet, most women and girls do not talk about this abuse for a multitude of reasons - fear of society, cultural norms, victim blaming, fear of police, tedious formal procedures etc. As an aggregated re-

sult of these reasons, women continue to keep silent and hence data relating to such incidents of violence is not captured anywhere; the perpetrator gets bolder over time **and** this kind of violence starts getting accepted as part of one's daily routine. This has led to under communication and under reporting of the issue. If there are poor official statistics, the problem fails to gain visibility and does not serve as a true representation of the actual problem.

Since the Delhi gang rape in December of 2012, there has been a growing momentum to address the issue of violence against women and girls. The conversations in mainstream media and social media have been unrelenting; thus forcing government authorities to act and put in place many different measures: including police sensitisation programmes, increased numbers of women police officers, helplines, one stop crisis centres and budgets for women's safety. Legislation has been strengthened - we have several new laws and acts that were passed in 2013: protecting the rights of children from child sexual abuse, protecting women from sexual harassment at the work place, amendments to the Domestic Violence Act, making it easier for women to seek redressal, and amendments to the Indian Penal code, where the definition of rape has been broadened and verbal and non verbal forms of sexual harassment have been included as crimes.

Whilst the above are all essential for women's safety, it still does not address the ground level need for a change in attitudes and behaviours that contribute to this violence and restricts women from reporting it. Safecity thus allows for anonymous reporting of sexual violence in public spaces: on the nature of the incident, its location, date and time. This is then aggregated as location based trends and visualised on a map as hotspots.

**This crowdsourced data can be used in many ways:**

• To take the focus away from the individual and highlight emergent trends that are occurring, forcing the problem to be looked at through a different lens.

• Individuals reporting will know that they are not alone and will hopefully find solidarity and courage to come forward and break their silence. It also serves to highlight that all types of sexual harassment must be reported and no form of violence is too trivial.

• Communities can use the data to demand better services from institutional service providers like the police, municipal authorities and elected representatives. They can also implement a neighbourhood code of conduct that does not necessarily involve police.

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- NGOs working in communities can design targeted solutions/interventions that are relevant to the neighbourhood in question.

The Safecity platform is a means to bridge the gap - improve reporting and use the crowdsourced data to identify factors that cause the violence and implement strategies to solve it. It further complements the online reporting with on-the-ground action in partnership with NGOs or citizen led community groups.

There are many ways to report sexual violence on Safecity - directly on the website, through a missed call facility, through social media on Facebook and Twitter or through partner organisations who are community based and do individual interviews, surveys or focused group discussions.

This paper will focus on efforts made in two neighbourhoods in Delhi - Sanjay Camp and Dakshinpuri where Safecity partnered with Action India, an NGO that has been working in these communities for over 10 years. The role of Safecity is to build the capacity of Action India to collect data on sexual violence, help them analyse it, build strategies to mobilise and organise the community to participate in designing solutions that are data driven and facilitate meetings with institutional stakeholders like police, municipal authorities, elected representatives, etc.

## Conflict Analysis Tool - PCIA

The conflict tool used to analyse the conflict and intervention is the PCIA - The Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment tool. It is a means of anticipating, monitoring, managing and evaluating the ways in which an intervention may affect, is affecting, or has affected the dynamics of peace or conflict in a region. The tool has been proven to be of utility in different stages of any project cycles such as pre, in and post implementations. This tool helps in identifying, supporting, and most importantly systemising existing peace and conflict sensitive practices that have grown very specific conditions.

This study is specifically aimed at analysing the causes of sexual violence and evaluating the use of crowdsourced data as a sustainable and effective solution. The motive of this analysis is to decrease the violence and increase opportunities for the communities, especially men and boys, to be part of the solution. I have used the data available and the current campaigns of Safecity in the locations of Sanjay Camp and Dakshinpuri in New Delhi to analyse this conflict.

## Contributing factors to the conflict:

- **Religion -** The two major religions in India, Hinduism and Islam, both have a patriarchal outlook and a low status accorded to women - where they have little or no rights thus further creating dependency on the male family head. This is reflected in religious literature as well, for example, **The laws of Manu** [6] which is widely regarded by Hindus as India's earliest legal code says "*In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent.*" Therefore, it is no wonder that women in India are most often treated as "property" and have very little independence or freedom. Furthermore, the Manusmriti says "*It is the nature of women to seduce men in this world; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females.*" thus putting the onus of "proper" or "decent" behaviour on a woman.

- **Patriarchal society - "**Where men are dominant and aggressive whilst women are subservient and docile." Gender stereotypes and roles are extremely pronounced, especially in these low-income communities and any deviance is frowned upon. Ratna Kapur in this **Op-Ed column** [7] in The Hindu says, "*The grooming of young men to have a feeling of entitlement by Indian parents breeds a sense of masculinity and male privilege. Son preference simultaneously erodes the possibility of respect for women, as girls are seen as unwanted or burdensome. Such inequalities produce the very hatred against women in the public arena that we are witnessing throughout the country. When women do not cower or display their vulnerability — thereby inviting the protection of the virile Indian male — what follows is a sense of emasculation and aggrievement on the part of these men.*"

- **Illiteracy and Lack of education -** There are poor literacy rates and the education system does not incorporate gender sensitivity training or awareness of sexual harassment and abuse.

- **Lack of access to finances -** In general, men are the breadwinners and the eldest male member is usually the head of the household, making the most important decisions on behalf of the family. All the other family members bow to his wishes and have very little say regarding their own lives. Women, even though they may have a job, do not have access to their own money. The husband or male family member has control over it.

- **Pop Culture -** Women are portrayed as either goddesses or prostitutes[8]. Very rarely is there a balanced perspective. This is reflected in mainstream Bollywood movies, songs and advertisements.

Mothers and wives are always shown as self sacrificing women and young girls and single women are shown as feisty who need to be "tamed". Often the male hero is shown to be "stalking" and "pursuing" a woman as she does not have a mind of her own and must be pursued till she accepts her fate.

## Mapping Stakeholders:

- **Society:** In general, the society is extremely patriarchal in its attitude and behaviour towards women. These two communities have a mix of Hindu and Muslim populations. It is male dominated and women and girls are expected to conform. It was important to get all residents on board and look at sexual violence as a "society issue" and not a woman's problem.

- **Men and Boys:** who are brought up to be the "protectors" of their sisters, mothers, wives and daughters. They are conditioned from their birth to show "strength", "aggression" and "success". The Indian family[9] has been a long-standing site for reinforcing and perpetuating male privilege and entitlement. Often they do not realise that their behaviour constitutes and contributes towards sexual harassment and abuse.

- **Women and girls:** who face sexual harassment and abuse on a daily basis. As South Asian feminist-activist Kamla Bhasin[10] says, "*a woman is what a man is not…if men are expected to dominate and control, women must be submissive; if men are supposed to order, women have to take orders; if men are allowed to be hot-tempered, women have to be patient; and so on…if men dominate but women refuse to submit, 'peace' and 'harmony' will be disturbed.*" Women are often restricted from receiving an education or pursuing higher education. They are expected to stay at home and manage the household and if they are employed, there are many further restrictions imposed - limited career choices, restricted timings and locations, etc.

- **Police:** who are often seen as perpetrators of violence themselves inhibit the reporting of crimes amongst women. The composition of the police force is also mainly men, interspersed with very few women officers. The police response to violence against women continues to be grossly inadequate and inappropriate. Besides the reasons for the generally poor response to instances of crime such as: increasing workload, lack of resources, pressure of political bosses to maintain low crime figures, malpractices in the organization; there are also certain specific reasons for the lack of appropriate response to offences against women. The cult of masculinity prevalent in the de-

partment makes the police officers hold certain stereotypes about violence against women. The stereotypes lead to certain standard patterns of police response.

- **School authorities:** who do not have sex education or gender sensitivity training as part of the regular school curriculum. Teachers and school management themselves subscribe to the patriarchal culture.
- **Government officials:** at the local level, who have budgets for safety of women and children and can influence change in local infrastructure.
- **NGO partners:** who work in the community on providing various services to women and children.

Both Sanjay Camp[11] and Dakshinpuri are low-income neighbourhoods where traditionally women have a subservient role in the household, they may not be educated and girls generally are not allowed to go to school. Most women would have little financial independence and would have to seek permission for most major decisions in their lives from the male head of the family. Most men and boys do not realise that their behaviour constitutes sexual harassment and abuse and often claim ignorance because women and girls don't talk about it or challenge them. Since it is not reported officially, the police too claim ignorance or deem the crime to be too "trivial". In fact, in many instances rape cases are also not reported, as there is a fear of dealing with the police and of the lengthy process for justice.

Alongwith the NGO Action India, Safecity has been conducting awareness workshops on what constitutes sexual violence and the legislation that is in place for those seeking redressal. Through workshops, focused group discussions and surveys, conversations have been encouraged on the topic of sexual violence in public spaces and people are encouraged to report their personal experiences of such violence either directly on the website, through a missed dial facility or through the NGO, Action India where someone records their statement.

So far the data in these two locations has identified the following kinds of sexual harassment and abuse[12].

**Table 1: Classification of sexual abuse based on crowdsourced data in Sanjay Camp and Dakshinpuri**

| Classification of abuse | Number of Incidents | Percentage of Incidents |
|---|---|---|
| Verbal Abuse | 2432 | 41.09% |
| Non-Verbal Abuse | 1421 | 24.01% |
| Physical Abuse | 1151 | 19.45% |
| Serious Physical Abuse | 45 | 0.76% |
| Other Abuse | 869 | 14.68% |

**Zones that have been identified as hotspots:**

• Public toilet complexes, which do not have adequate security or provisions for safety and comfort or modesty of women. E.g.: broken windows, no windows, no lighting.

• Area outside schools where groups of boys loiter and intimidate young girls.

• The location of a tea stall on a major access road that attracts men who loiter and pass comments.

• Streets with poor or no lighting in the areas of Sanjay Camp and Dakshinpuri.

# Five Areas of Potential Peace and Conflict Impact:

1. **Institutional Capacity to Manage/Resolve conflict and to promote tolerance and build peace.**

    - The crowdsourced data identified location-based trends within the neighbourhoods specified. This helped the community understand the nature of the sexual harassment without giving any room for making personal judgements about the victims - what was she doing at that time of the night, what was she wearing, did she provoke the incident. The large numbers of similar reported incidents in itself highlighted an issue that demanded a solution. Furthermore, the NGO, Action India and Safecity, facilitated brainstorming sessions to help the community - parents, leaders, religious leaders, and teachers from local schools identify possible solutions.

    - It opened up a space for young girls and women to talk about their problems. They found solidarity in listening to others and knowing that they were not alone. They also realised that verbal and non-verbal violence was not trivial and how reporting was essential for finding solutions.

    - It encouraged older people to listen to younger people when they were reporting sexual violence, as often the same was dismissed earlier.

    - It encouraged participation of women and girls in finding solutions for their own safety.

    - It encouraged trust in government processes as the community used the data to demand accountability from institutional service providers. E.g.: better street lighting, clean and safe toilets, increased police patrolling.

    - However it was not easy going into a community and trying to get their attention and engagement. It required building trust, confidence in the process and inclusion so that all voices were heard. Therefore the strategy to use local partner NGOs who have already established trust and confidence in the community helped. The use of data to drive decisions also removed the need to "personalise" the issue and removed "ambiguity".

2. **Human Security**

    - There was a rapport created between community, the NGO and the police as every month the crowdsourced data trend was discussed with the police.

    - Community could demand better accountability from the police and focused spending of financial budgets allocated towards women and children's safety by the elected representatives.

- In these low-income communities, mostly public or community toilets are used, which are usually the hotspots for sexual harassment. Municipal authorities that manage these public spaces were made accountable to ensure a safe and clean environment.
- When women and girls knew that the community was working towards their safety and was aware of the local issues, it gave them greater confidence as well as a sense of emotional and physical security to maintain their daily routine.
- The police were seen in a positive light as they worked with the community on solving local crime issues.
- However, it was not easy to get the buy-in from the police as it meant convincing them to use data that was not official. Initially they resisted and insisted on using official data. But the need to be seen as working pro-actively for women's safety and the genuine need to improve security and safety was a major incentive to use crowdsourced data. The police were aware that they were not going to receive similar data and that they now had access to a new data set; working closely with them helped increase their confidence in the use of crowdsourced data.

### 3. Political processes and legislation

- Knowing that there was legislation on various kinds of sexual violence like commenting, stalking, groping, etc., was a deterrent for men and boys to commit the crime. Whilst for women and girls, it acted as an enabler, helping them stand up for their rights and seek help.
- It would further help to integrate the data collection and data dissemination into existing processes of the government at all levels.
- Over a period of time, this would encourage women and girls to use official channels to make formal complaints, thus building trust in existing systems.
- By closely working with the community, the police sensitivity in dealing with local issues, especially regarding women and girls would improve. This would further encourage building trust in each other and increase reporting of crime.

### 4. Economic Structures and processes

- By making public spaces safer and equally accessible, it would encourage more girls to make attempts to access education and more women to find jobs.
- By having more women take up jobs there would be better financial stability in the home, thus overall improving quality of life.

- By ensuring that girls get an education, their right to hold choices and make decisions is furthered.

5. **Social reconstruction and empowerment**
   - By involving all stakeholders in the process to understand the issues and find solutions, it would build a sense of community and create a sense of teamwork, which would be more sustainable in the future.
   - Involving men and boys in the solution right from an early age, would make them more sensitive to the issues that women face and would result in more active bystander interventions.
   - Greater gender sensitivity and acceptance and in time, it would be a more equal world for a girl.
   - A more harmonious and peaceful environment where women and girls don't always have to worry about being sexual harassment and abuse.
   - Improved status of women and girls in society.

## Conclusions and Recommendations:

Understanding the factors that cause violence is essential when designing solutions to deal with it. The use of crowdsourced data to drive decision-making at the individual, community and institutional level is unique as it allows for targeted solutions that are relevant, participatory and inclusive.

*It can further be complemented with the following:*
- Regular workshops for young boys and girls on sexual harassment and abuse both in educational institutions and in the community.
- Joint programmes with young boys and girls so that interactions between them are regular and not infrequent. This builds a sense of trust, a sense of community, understanding and appreciation that both genders experience life in different ways and have different perspectives.
- Involvement of schools to implement a gender and sex education curriculum.
- Regular community meetings where different groups of people are allowed to voice their perspectives.
- Regular meetings with the police and the community, facilitated by the NGO. This builds trust and confidence in the police.
- Sensitivity training of the police to deal better with crimes against women.
- Transparent showcasing of the crowdsourced data that can be used for decision making.
- Use of sport and art to address sexual violence.

*This picture was taken at an art workshop to address gender based violence. The young 13 year old girl is painting "staring eyes" to address the non verbal harassment of staring at a major access road.*

**Report sexual harassment and abuse:**

*@pinthecreep          #SafecityIndia          [www.safecity.in](http://www.safecity.in)          Facebook-safecity.in*

# References:

*Content note*:
Safecity is the primary project under Red Dot Foundation. It is aimed at using crowdsourced data on incidents of sexual harassment to find solutions towards eradicating violence against women and girls in India.

*Endnotes:*

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