

About Safecity

Safecity is a platform that crowdsources personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces. This data which maybe anonymous, gets aggregated as hot spots on a map indicating trends at a local level. The idea is to make this data useful for individuals, local communities and local administration to identify factors that causes behavior that leads to violence and work on strategies for solutions

Abstract

Safecity's campaign in Bandra Plot, in collaboration with Vacha, primarily focused on adolescent girls, as well as boys, of the community giving them the tools and techniques required to bring about social change such as making the community a safer place for girls.



Campaign in Bandra Plot

Bandra Plot, Mumbai

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1. Campaign Description

1.1 Background

Safecity, in collaboration with Vacha, conducted a campaign against sexual violence in public spaces in community of Bandra Plot located in Jogeshwari east, Mumbai. The campaign primarily focused on adolescent girls, as well as boys, of the community giving them tools and techniques required to about social change such as making the community a safer place for girls. During the campaign, the core campaigning team conducted exercises such as mapping of the community, surveys, promoting community engagement, reaching out to stakeholders of the community with the idea of collecting data and, spreading awareness and designing interventions with relation to sexual harassment.

The name Bandra Plot, much like the adjoining community Andheri Plot, gets its name from the area where Muslim families were rehabilitated from post the 1993 communal riots in Mumbai. The members of the community are highly conservative. The community leaders are a group that run the Ajum Ithihad Committee. They gave us a space in a community to work with their girls.

1.2 Existing issues

Just like a lot other areas, sexual harassment is a serious concern in Bandra Plot. Per the information shared by girls who participated in the workshops, some areas were identified as unsafe. Case of exhibitionism along with drug abuse near toilets as well as many other deserted areas are two of the major concerns. Another issue were groups of boys at street corners, dimly lit and deserted areas catcalling, commenting and staring at girls. Boys at school also would catcall and throw stones from building at girls passing by. The girls spoke about 2 cases of rape 2 years ago in a deserted building in the community. The community leaders, being conservative, have a protectionist attitude towards the girls.

1.3 Current Impact

These incidents of sexual violence have had far reaching impact on the girls and women living in the area. It has affected their daily choices and restricted them to lead their lives in a regular way. Here are few examples of the same:

1. Mobility and accessibility

- a. Zero to limited access to public spaces
- b. Strong sense of fear and apprehension among girls and women in accessing public spaces
- c. Fear while accessing public toilet spaces due to safety concerns

2. Physical, emotional and psychological

- a. Society-based pressure and shame inflicted on women who have faced/reported sexual violence
- b. Restricted participation of girls in taking part in awareness campaign like ours due the sensitivity of the issue and protectionist attitude of the elders

3. Sexual harassment is still considered a taboo and as a result it is not discussed freely in families making it difficult to collect reports and document incidents. Girls were aware of sexual harassment but preferred to narrate other people's experiences than their own. Girls also spoke about victim blaming in the community, and lack of support from elders.

2. Campaign Objectives

2.1 Goals

The campaign aimed to reduce and remove sexual violence in public spaces in the community in and around Bandra Plot by involving and educating girls, boys and various other stakeholders in the community. Education was provided broadly in the form of identifying prone areas, spreading awareness by organizing Women's Day to engage with women of the community and conducting surveys. Below are the detailed objectives:

1. Increase awareness on sexual harassment, individual and collective legal rights and laws against sexual harassment
 - a. Encourage people to report sexual harassment in public spaces through training and development
2. Address public harassment in public spaces using data and technology
 - a. Train stakeholders (internal and external) on engaging community members to take ownership of the campaign for systematic and social change
 - b. Address absence/ lack of bystander intervention
3. Increase community participation
 - a. Engage community members in brainstorming sessions
 - b. Improve community members' involvement in devising an effective solution to curb sexual harassment cases

2.2 Target Audience

1. Women, girls and boys from the community
2. Parents
3. Other members of the community

The group that we worked with were adolescent Muslim girls living in the community of Bandra Plot. Almost all the girls came from large conservative families and many of them wore Burkhas and Hijabs.

3. Campaign Methodology and Challenges

3.1 Methodology

The campaign was conducted in multiple phases to ensure accurate diagnostic and develop a comprehensive solution for the above mentioned problems:

1. Diagnostic

- a. Conducting surveys and collecting data in and around Bandra Plot along with an elaborate manual mapping exercise identifying safe and unsafe areas
- b. Identifying types of harassment that happened, which are the most prone areas
- c. Organizing focused group discussions, meetings with parents and the community
- d. Toilet Audit: Preliminary audit of two toilets (Ajim Ithihad Committee and Radhabai Phule Chowk) was conducted and documented with photos and videos. Nearby residents were surveyed to get some insight into the situation near these two toilets.

*Since the toilet near Ajim Ithihad Committee had not been in use for many years, the community members went to a private toilet located around 10 min away. The toilet became desolate, and frequented by drug users.

*The toilet near Radhabai Phule Chowk was functional, however according to the members living nearby, not clean. There was only one bin to dispose of menstruation clothes/pads, and was often filled to the brim. Another toilet complex was being built nearby- but under construction for a very long time. There were many instances of Sexual violence in this toilet complex, in spite of being in the center of many houses.

2. Surveys, data collection, and analyses

- a. Mapping exercise: 13 girls of ages between 13 to 18 were a part of workshop on mapping sexual harassment. Physical maps with roads and unsafe zones were created with reasons why they are unsafe.
- b. Results from Toilet Audit: The team documented two toilets with photos and videos and also surveyed the nearby residents. It was found that the toilet near Ajim Ithihad Committee has not been in use for many years, and the area which is now desolate is frequented by drug users. The toilet near Radhabai Phule Chowk was functional but not clean. There have been incidences of sexual harassment in this toilet despite of it being in use by many houses.

3. Women's Day celebration: We used Women's Day to engage with the women of the community- especially the mothers of the girls we were working with. It was important for the campaign to have strong support systems made up of members of the community. 25 women and girls came together to talk about their aspirations, dreams and hopes for their community and themselves. Games and interactive sessions were organized to make the process more smooth and easier for women to come forward and understand the severity of issue. Film which spoke about the need for members of a community to come together and bring change was screened

4. Right to Pee (RtP) campaign: It is a collective campaign run by several organizations and individuals across Mumbai. There was a lack of clean and safe community based toilets run by the government in the community, and a high incidence of sexual harassment, gangs of men hanging around outside toilets, the issues of broken doors, no locks and no lights, and so on. Since the issue of toilets are deeply connected to the safety of women and girls in the community, we decided to make this the focus of our campaign.

Pictures from the campaign



3.2 Challenges:

- a. Restrictions laid down on girls: The community was very conservative and restrictions were placed on girls which made it difficult to collect surveys on the incidences of sexual harassment in the community
- b. Taboo around discussing about sexual harassment: Families did not allow their girls to participate in the surveys given the topic of discussion
- c. Low to no access to public places: Girls didn't have access to public places very often and hence many incidents went unreported
- d. Talking to women was challenging as many did not have time, even two hours to spare to attend the event

The challenges that we came across during this campaign made us change our approach of addressing the issue of sexual harassment. Firstly, instead of directly discussing sexual harassment we started with another area which was a concern in the community, **incidents of sexual violence and safety around the toilets**. Secondly, by moving the focus from just raising concerns around the incidents of sexual harassment to **increasing girls access to public spaces**.

4. Campaign Outcome and Impact

The campaign was successful in creating awareness among a major section of the community about prevalence of sexual harassment and the factors responsible for them. It received women and girls participation in good numbers for instance, 25 girls and women participated in the event that was organized on Women's Day, girls participating in the mapping exercise among others.

1. Diagnostic: The results that were obtained through the surveys, mapping and unsafe area identification exercises really helped in bringing the community forward and together to address the issue. Quantification of number, type and places where sexual harassment occurred historically gives a pretty good insight into the issue and also helps take the right course of actions for corrective measures
2. Awareness Programs and Focus Group discussion: These were organized in form of Women's day, surveys and mapping exercises and Focus Group discussions on 'safety and sanitation' with the girls from the community and each event witnessed participation in good numbers. These programs made women from the community more forthcoming in talking about sexual harassment
3. Geographical Inspection: Areas in and around the community were marked as unsafe. Following areas were identified:
 - i. Ramgadh Galli
 - ii. Idda Maidan
 - iii. Koliwada Vadi
 - iv. Anwar Bi Chawl
 - v. Ganesh Maidan (St. Mary's)
 - vi. Almost all community toilets
 - vii. Market area, especially fish market

This would help girls/women take more informed decision before they plan to through these places

5. Conclusion

Bandra Plot is located in Jogeshwari East, Mumbai. The members of the community are highly conservative, and are involved in jobs associated with handicrafts and other traditional jobs.

Sexual harassment was a severe concern in the community, not just because of its prevalence, but also because of the conservative nature of the community due to which women and girls were reluctant to share their experiences.

Safecity in collaboration with Vacha, conducted a campaign in the area against sexual harassment that spanned for a couple of months. Workshops, surveys, interactive sessions were organized in the community to identify and quantify the causes of the issue, mark areas which are unsafe and to get people in the community to talk more freely on the topic. The campaign, which combined the issues of ‘Safety and Sanitation’ aimed at making women more aware and forthcoming about the issue and was really successful witnessing participation of women in good numbers across all events. During the campaign, women realized how severe the issue is and the importance of coming forward and being more open to make the change.