

## LEISURE EXPERIENCES IN SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT: GENDER AND SPATIAL EQUITY

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**Abstract:** Plethora of research has established that access to and utilization of outdoor leisure is highly inequitable from gender point of view. With the changing concepts of leisure time and spaces, it has been found that shopping malls though not truly 'public' have 'public' character that satisfies the need of leisure while providing for sense of security.

The aim of this paper is to measure the accessibility and utilization of such spaces in the urban setup by both the genders. This empirical study incorporates physical assessment of three shopping malls in Mumbai through questionnaire survey. The conclusions derived support the hypothesis that shopping malls provide an environment with opportunities for women's leisure and put forward the disparities in access to such spaces by various income groups.

The study concludes that women's leisure participation may be augmented with a particular controlled setup with good security measures. The study may help identify an environment whereby issue of gender inequality in outdoor leisure can be met with provision of private and secured atmosphere and certain spatial attributes can be followed in public leisure spaces too to improve participation by both the genders.

**Keywords:** Access to Leisure, Gender, Geography of Fear, Shopping Mall, Spatial Equity

**Introduction:** Women shoulder most of the responsibility of house chores and other family related work thereby facing scarcity of time for their own leisure. The access to leisure has been largely inequitable with respect to factors such as gender and income. With due considerations to the physical, cognitive and psychological benefits of access to outdoor leisure spaces, it becomes vital for every individual to have access to leisure with respect to time and spatial aspects of it to improve quality of life and contribute to healthy society. A 2013 survey by Pew Research in America emphasizes the gender leisure gap whereby men enjoy leisure time five hours more than women per week [1]. In India, cultural and social gender role construction makes concept of leisure for women's own sake quite unacceptable by the society as well as women themselves resulting into different patterns of leisure for men and women [2]. Women prefer to spend their leisure time at home or in group activities in enclosed spaces rather than visiting outdoors resulting into outdoor leisure spaces more dominated or controlled by men. The access to leisure has been largely inequitable with respect to factors such as gender and income. The study of Outdoor leisure spaces in Mumbai demonstrates this phenomenon quite evidently that women visit outdoor leisure spaces less frequently than men [3], the reasons being socially constructed gender roles, division of public and domestic labor and spaces with respect to gender, ethic of care as well as geography of fear.

Our previous study conducted in an urban context of Mumbai concludes that women's participation in outdoor leisure with respect to outdoor green spaces is considerably low as compared to men as well as

women's usage and movement patterns are controlled in many ways [3]. It led this study to make further inquiries into whether contemporary leisure spaces satisfy the leisure needs of all individuals irrespective of gender and income. With the changing concepts of leisure time and spaces, it has been found that shopping malls though not truly 'public' have 'public' character in them that satisfies the need of leisure while providing for sense of security that lacks in public spaces.

This empirical study incorporates physical assessment of three shopping malls in different geographical locations of Mumbai through questionnaire survey and observations on working days. The sample of 113 was composed of men and women respondents of different age and income groups. The users from five different locations within a mall were selected for the survey. The quantitative data was coded and analyzed with statistical methods to reach the conclusions that partially support the hypothesis that participation of women in contemporary leisure spaces is considerably more though not equal as compared to other public outdoor leisure spaces. The geography of fear was found to be playing a significant role in areas such as parking, basement and also movie theatres within malls where proportion of women was noticeably less. Simultaneously it also puts forward the differences or disparities in access to such spaces by various income groups whereby a statement can be made that equality achieved by one parameter has created a disparity by another.

In the recent years different new typologies of leisure spaces have evolved and shopping malls are one of them. Shopping malls prove to be carrying virtues of

public spaces such as encouraging social interaction providing access to all and secured environment yet such spaces are designed from consumerism point of view and indirectly only those are welcome that are able to and willing to spend [4] thereby further discriminating income groups that may prove vital/detrimental particularly for women from low income group. The research on shopping malls worldwide addresses the income, race and ethnicity discrimination effectively yet it has been less explored whether such spaces provide comfortable environment to women encouraging access to their own leisure.

It led this study to make further inquiries into -

1. Whether shopping malls as contemporary leisure spaces satisfy the leisure needs of all individuals irrespective of gender.
2. Whether access to such spaces is largely guided by income or spending capacity of the visitor.
3. Whether women from lower income group are the group experiencing limited access to such spaces.

The study concludes that women's leisure participation may be augmented with a particular controlled setup with good security measures. The study may help identify an environment whereby issue of gender inequality in outdoor leisure can be met with provision of private and secured atmosphere and certain spatial attributes can be followed in public leisure spaces too to improve participation by both the genders.

**Theoretical Framework:** Historically the spaces are divided into two worlds – 'public' that is men's arena and the 'domestic' that is women's [5]. According to a Greek legend, as stated by Thompson (1994), 'Hermean' is a masculine world that is visible and 'Hestian' is the invisible feminine world where in concrete 'Hermean' world, men think, practice politics whereas in 'Hestian' space women perform domestic chores [6]. It led to unequal division of labor and spaces for men and women leading to social construction of gender roles.

'Public' spaces were to great extent non-permeable spaces for women that consequently denied access to knowledge, power, authority, and politics for women. Such inequitable spatial division was challenged by feminists recently. After 1990s, many issues were addressed in women's geography of which one was unequal access to places depending on gender [7]. Due to unequal labor division and the concept of ethic of care women tend to run out of time with the increased perception of time paucity [1] that inflicts more stressful conditions for women as compared to men which is significantly higher in Indian Women [8]. Previous research in this arena suggests that access to leisure helps reduce stress levels [9] simultaneously stating the fact that unequal labor, ethic of care and socially constructed gender role

jeopardize leisure of women. Gender gap in terms of leisure states that women find less time for their own leisure [10]. A study conducted in an urban context of Mumbai concludes that women's participation in outdoor leisure with respect to outdoor leisure spaces is considerably low as compared to men as well as women's usage and movement patterns are controlled in many ways [3]. The factors that affect access of women to outdoor leisure were identified as gender roles and ethic of care contributing to lack of time and energy in women as well as geography of fear dealing with perception of safety and security by women. Public leisure spaces have limited security measures particularly in India and hence are less likely used by women for their own leisure. They visit such spaces mostly with the children as a care giver and prefer spaces where children's play areas are or spaces that are open and visually permeable. The changing concepts of leisure and leisure spaces during last two decades include a particular typology that of shopping malls. These spaces have limited entry points as a part of design for 'consumption and movement' [11] that are guarded and have comparatively dependable security provisions such as security guards in uniform patrolling the malls, security cameras, signages at various locations dictating appropriate behavior, etc. [12]. Simultaneously it also suggests that those who have spending capacity are welcome in this environment though shopping is not a mandatory activity [4]. It may be stated with the above literature that shopping malls as a typology of leisure space may provide a secured environment for women addressing the geography of fear and encourage them to access such spaces for their own leisure. Shopping malls provide leisure in terms of shopping, a modern concept of leisure apart from sitting, chatting, watching nature and people and so on also encouraging social interaction that makes them quasi-public spaces [13]. Simultaneously it also may be stated that access to such leisure spaces though is not discriminated by gender but is by income or spending capacity of an individual [14] which suggests that women from lower income group have dual restrictions while accessing them further increasing the gender and leisure gap with another discrimination factor added as income group thereby jeopardizing spatial equity and social justice. The surveys conducted in malls in America suggest that the discrimination in terms of age, race and ethnicity also takes place in such controlled access secured environments of shopping malls [4] while promoting themselves as 'family friendly places'.

This study attempts to examine this phenomenon with respect to two factors – gender and income groups in an Indian urban context of Mumbai.

**Research Methods:** The study attempts to make inquiries into the research questions posed in the introduction by two different methods – observations and interviews of the users of the shopping malls. Sample selection process addresses selection of shopping malls in the city of Mumbai as well as selection of the respondents or interviewees. For both, a stratified sampling method was used by selecting three shopping malls at three different geographical locations / zones in Mumbai – one each from Central, Western and South Mumbai. Viviana Mall at Thane from Central zone, Infinity Mall at Andheri from Western zone and High Street Phoenix Mall at Lower Parel from South Mumbai zone were selected for survey.

As the study deals with the leisure a survey of respondents by the way of questionnaire was conducted at five different places within a mall – Entrance to the mall, seating in corridors or other places, cafeteria, parking and entrances to movie theatres. The questionnaire was composed of objective questions that can be answered on the likert scale of five for the purpose of incorporating ease of answering in less time. The sample of 113 is composed of equal male and female respondents from different age groups.

**Composition of Sample:** The general composition of sample is balanced with respect to gender (54% male and 46% female) whereas for each mall, the efforts had been taken to maintain the balance between number of male and female respondents. (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2)

### Sample Composition -

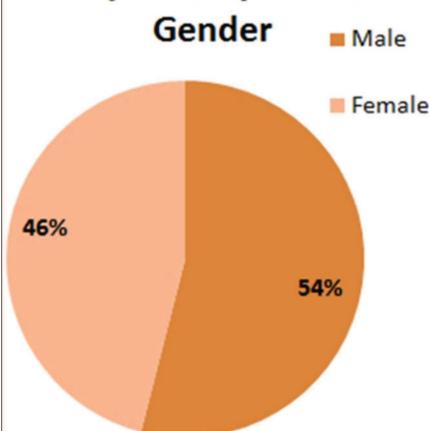


Fig. 1: Sample Composition – Gender (Male\*Female)

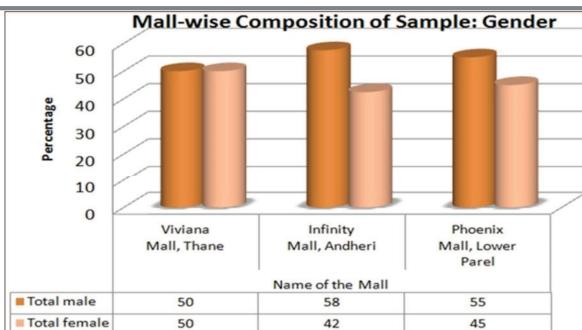


Fig. 2: Sample composition – Gender for Three Malls

With respect to the substrata ‘Age’ it has been observed that most visitors are from age group 26-45 followed by age group 15-25 and the least number of visitors are from age group 60 plus (Fig. 3).

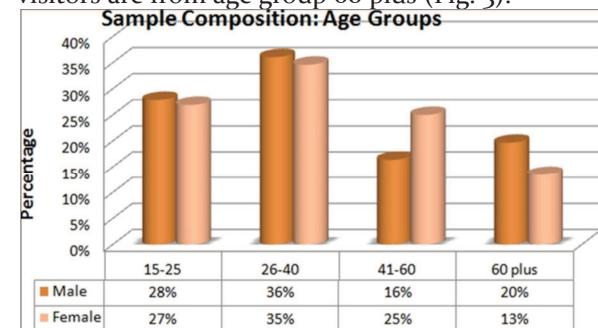


Fig. 3: Sample Composition – Age Groups

**Methods of Analysis:** The coding of the raw data was then statistically analyzed with the software IBM-SPSS v20. The frequencies were identified to understand gender sample composition and cross tabulation helped comprehend the composition of sample throughout the four main strata and substrata. Non-parametric statistical tests of ‘Friedman chi-square’ and ‘Independent Sample T-test’ were performed to identify the relationship between variables or significance for a particular phenomenon.

**Results and Analysis:** With respect to purpose of visits across gender, it has been found that men and women visit malls equally for essential or leisure shopping whereas more men are found visiting malls for movie, games and eating out than women (Fig. 4).

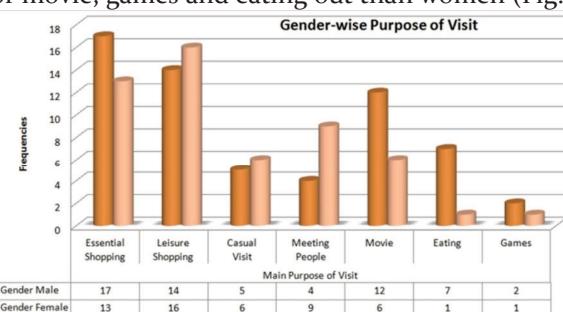
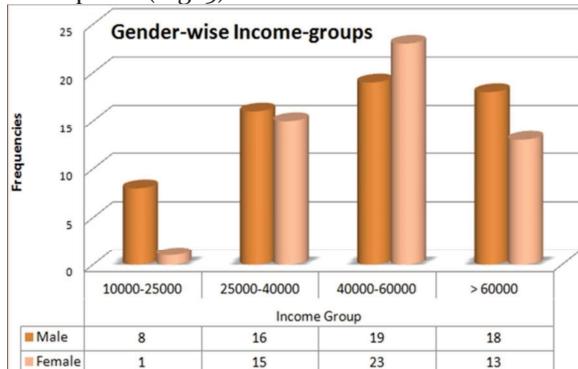


Fig. 4: Gender-wise Purpose of Visit

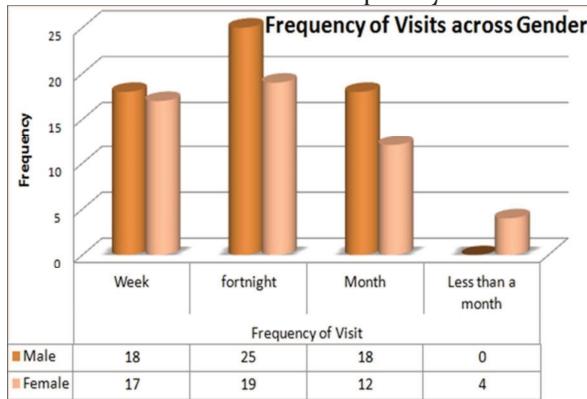
It has also been observed that the access is largely guided by income or spending capacity of the visitor. There is a noticeable drop in the visitors that have income below Rs. 10000 and it has been further

observed that women from this lowest income group are the most affected group with minimum access to such spaces (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 5: Gender-wise Income Groups**

Frequency of visits (Fig. 6) as well as amount of time spent in the malls (Fig. 7) by men and women do not differ much yet it has been found that there are more women who visit malls less frequently than men.

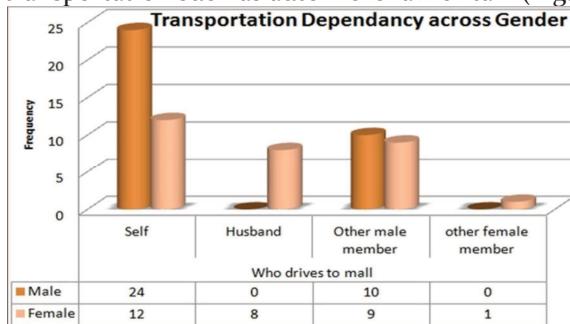


**Fig. 6: Frequency of visits across gender**



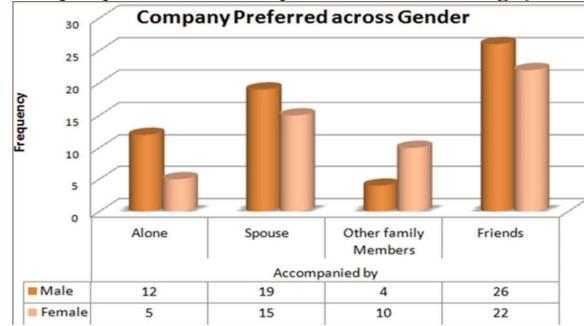
**Fig. 7: Time spent in the mall across gender**

The observations with respect to dependency on transport or another person to accompany while visiting malls reflect women's dependency on men for driving the own vehicle or other means of transportation such as auto-rickshaw or taxi (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 8: Transportation Dependency (Who drives) across gender**

It has been also observed that men and women visit such spaces equally with spouse yet a difference is noticed that men visit them alone or with friends more than women do whereas women prefer company of other family members too. (Fig. 9)

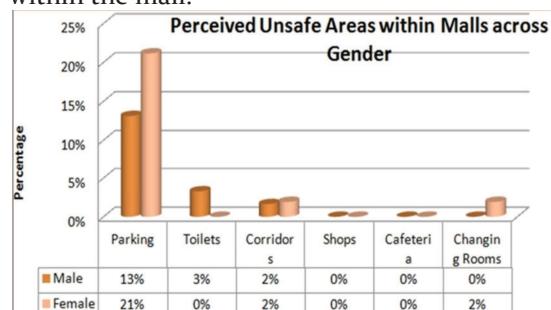


**Fig. 9: Company preferred while visiting malls across gender**

Parking or basement areas were perceived as most unsafe areas by both men and women though the percentage of women is more than men (



Fig. 10). Most people were aware of cameras at the entrances and corridors and opined that provision of CCTV cameras is good for increased sense of safety within the mall.



**Fig. 10: Perceived Unsafe Areas within Malls across Gender**

**Discussion:** The literature review puts forth the issues of unequal access to outdoor leisure by men and women in terms of time, space and activities. This study examines whether the phenomenon of unequal opportunities based on gender is true / applicable in the shopping malls.

The field of inquiry included-

1. Whether women visit these spaces for leisure purpose and if yes, what type of leisure they prefer in malls?
2. What is the frequency of their visits and how much time do they spend in malls as compared to men?
3. Do their visits depend largely upon mode of transport and assistance in terms of driving in case of own vehicles, company?
4. What is the extent of perceived safety in malls with further specific inquiries into different locations within the mall?
5. Do CC TV cameras and its awareness attribute to perceived sense of security?

The results of these surveys positively point towards women's visits to malls for their own leisure, where essential and leisure shopping as well as socializing is the main purpose of visit. Yet it has also been identified that watching movies, eating and games are least preferred by women as leisure activities. It supports our hypothesis that in contemporary leisure spaces such as malls, women obtain more freedom of access to leisure, yet it also directs us to their preferences in leisure typologies indicating their more social nature and spending capacity. The results clearly indicate that income does control access to this type of leisure and it has also been found that women from Low Income Groups are least in numbers in terms of visitors to malls. Women's frequency of visits to malls as well as the time spent in malls is considerably less as compared to men's though within very few visitors who spend more than three hours in malls, percentage of women is more. In case of own vehicles as mode of transport, it has been found that women were largely dependent upon male member driving the vehicle which is a constraint in access to leisure. Almost all the visitors stated that they feel safe in the environment of shopping mall yet more women are afraid of certain lonely/ dark areas such as basement/ car parks and changing rooms to some extent. They expressed that provision of CC TV cameras certainly add the sense of security to the place and such arrangement is always welcome though they were not much aware of the locations of cameras.

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