



CHANGING URBAN REALITIES AND WOMEN'S VULNERABILITY: A METROPOLITAN ANALYSIS OF CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN USING *CRIME IN INDIA* REPORTS, 2021–2023

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Abstract: India's major urban centres are growing rapidly, opening new opportunities for employment, mobility, and social interactions, but also increasing risks for women in these bustling areas. As urbanisation speeds up, patterns of gender-based violence emerge, requiring careful attention. This article examines how crimes against women have changed in five metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad by analysing three years of official data from the Crime in India Reports (2021, 2022, and 2023), which are published annually by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) under India's Ministry of Home Affairs. The study aims to reveal trends in women's vulnerability within the five selected metropolitan cities and pinpoint regions where crime rates are either rising or holding steady. Using a descriptive approach, it reviews NCRB data on specific crimes such as rape, kidnapping, cruelty by relatives, assault on women, and cybercrime for these three consecutive years. Year-over-year comparisons across metropolitan regions show varied trends: Delhi consistently reports high crime rates, whereas cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune see significant rises in cybercrimes and domestic abuse. These patterns imply that urban shifts, particularly post-pandemic mobility and increased digital reliance, impact both the nature and reporting of violence. The article recommends strengthening gender-sensitive urban policies, improving digital safety measures, expanding police capacities, and

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launching targeted community awareness programs. It emphasises city-specific approaches over one-size-fits-all solutions. Limitations involve dependence on secondary NCRB data, which only captures reported crimes and might not include underreporting or social obstacles. Future studies should consist of qualitative interviews, urban safety audits, and intersectional risk analysis to gain a clearer understanding of women's everyday vulnerabilities in India's fast-evolving cities.

Keywords: Gendered Vulnerability; Public Spaces; Law Enforcement; Crime Pattern; Metropolitan Cities

Introduction

Urbanisation marks a significant shift in the 21st century, fundamentally transforming societal living, working, and connecting. It starts when people migrate from rural areas to cities seeking better jobs, education, healthcare, and social mobility (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). This complex, evolving process continuously reshapes economic, social, and spatial aspects, promoting progress while introducing new vulnerabilities. Fueled by industrial growth and the rapid rise of service sectors, more individuals are attracted to urban centres. As cities grow, they convert farmland and the outskirts into residential and commercial areas, changing the physical landscape. This leads to densely populated, socially diverse environments where new relationships, ambitions, and lifestyles develop. Urbanisation also puts pressure on infrastructure, requiring ongoing upgrades in transportation, housing, water, and sanitation to accommodate the increasing populations. Although cities drive innovation, economic growth, and improved access to services, they also face issues like congestion, pollution, inequality, and rising living costs. The cultural landscape becomes more fluid as traditional customs mix with modern influences, notably impacting women, youth, and migrant communities (Zhang & Deng, 2017).

As urbanisation accelerates and reshapes societies, one of its most striking outcomes is the emergence of large metropolitan cities across the world. Globally, metropolitan centres have flourished alongside industrialisation, globalisation, and the rise of modern service economies, transforming cities like New York, London, Tokyo, and Shanghai into dense hubs of finance, technology, culture, and innovation. These cities expand by absorbing nearby towns, suburbs, and peri-urban regions, forming vast urban agglomerations interconnected

through transport networks and economic flows. Their expansion reflects global patterns of mobility, capital circulation, and the growing concentration of opportunities in major urban centres (Sharma, 2004).

In India, too, this metropolitan growth mirrors global trends but is shaped by the country's unique demographic pressures and development pathways. As per the 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution and the Census of India, a metropolitan city is defined as an area with a population of 10 lakh (1 million) or more, comprising one or more districts, with two or more municipalities, panchayats, or contiguous urban areas specified by the Governor. As of the 2011 Census, India has 53 such metropolitan cities—urban areas with populations exceeding one million—highlighting how small settlements historically grew into major urban centres through various economic and social processes.

Prominent cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Ahmedabad, Surat, Jaipur, and Lucknow are among the most significant metropolitan regions, each shaped by unique paths involving political significance, colonial urban planning, industrial expansion, and modern economic transformation. Many of these cities originated as administrative or trade hubs in ancient and medieval times, later expanding under colonial rule via port-based commerce, railways, and industry. After independence, planned industrial zones, public sector enterprises, and a boom in services—including IT, finance, education, and real estate—further fueled metropolitan growth. Over time, cities merged neighbouring towns and rural areas, forming sprawling urban clusters with suburbs, satellite towns, and complex socio-economic ties. As these regions grow, they face challenges such as congestion, pollution, overloaded infrastructure, and rising social disparities. While vital for economic growth and attracting migrants, they must also combat overcrowding, environmental damage, and infrastructure shortages (Tandon et al., 2022).

While metro cities are vital for economic advancement and mobility, they also face complex social issues, especially gender-based vulnerabilities. In global metropolises, women often navigate crowded, anonymous spaces where offenders can disappear into the crowd, reducing accountability and increasing insecurity. Public transport—such as buses, metros, and trains—often becomes a hotspot for harassment due to overcrowding, limited surveillance, and a lack of gender-sensitive features like proper lighting and secure entry points. Poorly designed infrastructure, including dark streets, isolated alleys, and neglected public areas, further hampers women's mobility and restricts their right to

move freely. Male-dominated public spaces, reinforced by the persistent “male gaze,” create psychological barriers that discourage women from active participation in social and economic activities, even in modern cities (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014). These global trends are evident in India’s metropolitan areas, where structural and cultural factors influence gendered access to the city. Research shows that women in cities like Delhi often delay using public transport, worry about safety outside their homes, and experience harassment in streets and transit zones (Bharucha & Khatri, 2018; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). These vulnerabilities are intensified by high domestic violence rates, further limiting women’s autonomy and mobility (Pal et al., 2017). Economic stress, long commutes, and weak institutional responses, such as dismissive policing and poor reporting systems, exacerbate these risks, leaving women with few options for safety or justice. Consequently, even as metropolitan cities symbolise modernity and opportunity, they also sustain gender inequalities that deeply affect women’s urban experiences.

As metropolitan cities grow and encompass large populations, the increased density, anonymity, and social diversity have contributed to a sharp rise in crimes against women, as shown in National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. Delhi continues to top the list with the highest reported cases of women-related crimes. The NCRB’s Crime in India-2023 report states that Delhi recorded 13,366 cases, far surpassing the other major metros. Mumbai and Bengaluru follow as the second and third most-affected cities, with 6,025 and 4,870 cases respectively, close behind Delhi in total numbers. This high rate of incidents highlights how factors like urban density, constant movement, and anonymity can heighten women’s vulnerabilities, particularly in public spaces, transit, and workplaces (Mitra & Chakrabarti, 2021).

Studying NCRB data is crucial for understanding gendered violence in urban India. It provides an official, systematic record of crimes, making it one of the few large-scale, comparable sources of empirical evidence across various cities. This data helps identify overall trends and shifts over time. Analysing NCRB statistics also highlights the structural and institutional factors affecting vulnerabilities, such as policing, reporting mechanisms, socio-economic influences, and urban planning, moving beyond viewing violence as isolated incidents (Ansari, 2017; Dandona et al., 2022).

This study examines crime patterns against women in India’s five major metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad—

using NCRB reports from 2021 to 2023. These densely populated cities, characterised by rapid growth, often see higher vulnerability for women to violence in both public and private spheres, influenced by factors such as mobility, anonymity, and infrastructure challenges. Analysing data over three years helps identify trends and differentiate between short-term fluctuations and long-term systemic issues. NCRB, as the only comprehensive national database that standardises crime categories, is essential for evidence-based research on urban gender safety.

The study highlights the absence of long-term, data-driven research connecting city growth to women's vulnerabilities, stressing the need for reliable national data like NCRB. It points out that these cities are hotspots of violence, inequality, and insecurity for women, fueling discussions on urban safety and gender justice. The results are intended to support policymakers, urban planners, law enforcement, and civil society in developing targeted strategies such as safety audits, better public transport, gender-sensitive urban design, and improved reporting systems.

Context and Literature Background

Urbanisation in India has reshaped metropolitan areas into dynamic yet gendered environments where women frequently face profound insecurity. Consistent research indicates that Indian cities—especially Delhi—have some of the highest rates of harassment, sexual violence, and threats to women's mobility. Nalla (2020) highlights that young women in mega-cities often encounter sexual harassment, with Delhi recording the highest national crime rates against women—over half of surveyed women report harassment within a year. Similar patterns appear in other cities: Dhillon and Bakaya (2014) find that crowded public spaces and daylight hours are standard harassment zones, worsened by societal attitudes and weak legal enforcement. These findings normalise public sexual harassment as a routine aspect of urban life in India. Scholars also explore how women navigate gendered spaces shaped by fear and limited mobility. Paul's (2011) study in Kolkata shows that women's use of public spaces is driven by socially rooted fears, heightened by socioeconomic differences. Bharucha and Khatri (2018), studying Mumbai, report that 91% of women feel constantly or frequently unsafe. Viswanath and Mehrotra (2007) link vulnerability to poor infrastructure—such as inadequate lighting, encroachments, and low visibility—that restrict women's access to

public areas in Delhi. Datta and Ahmed (2020) in Thiruvananthapuram reveal that disconnected infrastructure—physical, digital, and social—creates “dark spots” and “blind spots,” where proximity to security does not reduce fear or victimisation. These studies show that urban vulnerabilities are closely tied to city design and infrastructure, and that urban change influences patterns of violence.

Sen, Kaur, and Zabiliūtė (2020) analyse how sexual violence—including rape and honour killings—pervades urban life, driven by shifting social and spatial relationships. Gupta, Ashtt, and Monga (2024) argue that Delhi’s rapid urban growth exacerbates women’s insecurity through uneven infrastructure access, poor lighting, and safety gaps, despite government efforts at gender-sensitive policies. Bhattacharyya (2015) emphasises the importance of urban planning tools and safety audits to identify vulnerabilities, especially after the Nirbhaya case. His work in North-East India examines how policies like the Verma Committee reforms influence women’s safety and crime prevention across cities. Research also reveals how women navigate these risky environments by continually negotiating safety strategies. Anand and Nanda (2022) describe how women in Delhi NCR adapt their routines to threats like groping and stalking. Roy and Bailey (2021) identify common strategies, such as avoidance and vigilance, to cope with hostile public spaces shaped by the male gaze and everyday incivility.

Mitra and Chakrabarti (2021), examining nineteen urban centres, suggest that modern urban life increases women’s vulnerability—balancing public participation with patriarchal restrictions. Quantitative studies on crime patterns highlight the scale of violence; Nagaraj Naik (2020) contextualises metropolitan crime within South Asian urban settings, emphasising the need for prevention and justice strategies. Madan and Nalla (2016) link perceived and actual victimisation in Delhi’s transit systems, reaffirming the city’s high crime rates against women. Adur and Jha (2018) report that, despite initiatives like the Delhi Safe Cities program, harassment remains widespread—90% of women experience street harassment at some point—pointing to gaps between policy and experience.

Critical scholarship addresses the limitations of NCRB crime data, which are often under-reported and lack detailed demographic information, as explored by Ansari (2017) and Dandona et al. (2022). This critique underscores both the utility and shortcomings of NCRB data in understanding violence against

women. Despite extensive research on women's experiences, vulnerabilities, and data issues, a key gap exists: no systematic, multi-year analysis of NCRB crime trends from 2021 to 2023—post-pandemic urban context. Current studies focus on individual cities, specific themes, or data critiques, but do not combine official crime data over multiple years with broader social and spatial research. Additionally, few compare Delhi's high crime rates with national patterns, and there is limited understanding of how data limitations influence the interpretation of trends in rapidly changing cities after 2020. This research fills that gap by analysing NCRB reports from 2021 to 2023, identifying emerging violence patterns against women in Indian metros, and linking these to ongoing urban transformations documented in existing literature.

Data and Method

This study utilises secondary data from the annual *Crime in India* reports published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), an agency of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, covering the years 2021–2023, following the COVID-19 pandemic. This study concentrates on crimes committed against women across five major metropolitan cities in India, each with a population exceeding 2 million (20 lakh). These cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad—are notable for having the highest crime rates related to violence against women, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures. The NCRB compiles standardised data submitted by State and Union Territory police departments and Central Armed Police Forces (See Figure 1). However, the data are based on police records and adhere to the “Principal Offence Rule,” which counts only the most serious offence in a multi-offence FIR, potentially under-representing specific crime categories. Crime rates are calculated per lakh population; for metro cities, these figures are derived from the 2011 Census due to the absence of recent city-

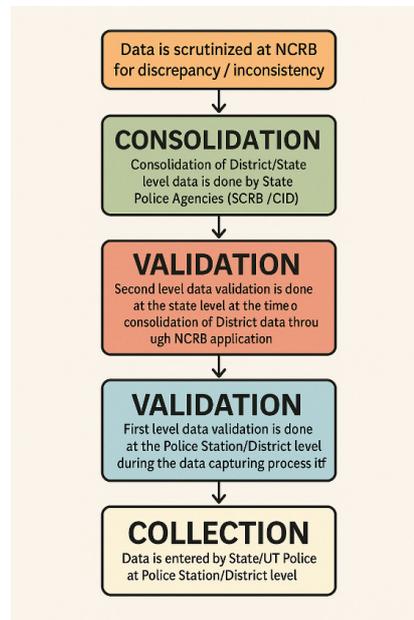


Figure 1: Process of Data Collection, Consolidation, and Validation in NCRB's Crime in India Report

level data, which might impact precision but allows for consistent comparisons over time. Data collection follows the calendar year (January 1–December 31). It undergoes quality checks at the police station, district, and state levels before final review at the NCRB, ensuring internal consistency and making the data reliable for analysing trends and changes in urban crimes against women.

Methodological Limitations

This study has several inherent limitations commonly acknowledged in previous analyses of NCRB crime data. Since it relies solely on police-recorded statistics, it is susceptible to underreporting caused by social stigma, lack of awareness, and inconsistent FIR registration standards across different States and UTs. The use of the “Principal Offence Rule,” which records only the most serious offence in cases with multiple crimes, may underestimate the accurate scale of gender-based offences. Moreover, crime rates for metropolitan cities are based on 2011 Census populations because of the lack of recent projections, which might distort rate comparisons in rapidly growing urban areas. Differences in digital infrastructure, police capacity, and state validation processes also affect the completeness and accuracy of the data. Lastly, with a focus on five cities and only three years post-pandemic, the study’s scope is limited in terms of geography and time, advising caution against broad generalisations about national crime trend patterns.

Analysis of Trends and Patterns in Crimes Against Women in Metropolitan Cities

Across the 19 metropolitan cities identified by the NCRB—each with populations exceeding two million—the total reported crimes against women have steadily increased over three years. Cases rose from 43,414 in 2021 to 48,755 in 2022, reaching 51,393 in 2023. Analysing the NCRB data (2021–2023) for five major metropolitan areas—Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad—Delhi consistently recorded the highest number of cases each year, with a slight increase from 2021 to 2022, followed by a decline in 2023. Mumbai showed a similar pattern, with a rise in 2022 and a slight decrease in 2023. Bengaluru experienced the most significant growth, with cases rising sharply annually, especially between 2022 and 2023. Jaipur exhibited a steady and consistent increase, possibly reflecting higher reporting or worsening conditions. Hyderabad showed a moderate but clear upward trend, aligning

closely with Jaipur by 2023. Overall, these five cities saw cases rise from 28,529 in 2021 to 31,955 in 2023, indicating an overall post-pandemic escalation and highlighting growing urban vulnerabilities or more comprehensive reporting.

Table 1: Crime Against Women in Selected Metropolitan Cities (IPC + SLL), 2021–2023

Metropolitan Cities	Year		
	2021	2022	2023
Delhi (New Delhi)	13982	14158	13366
Mumbai (Maharashtra)	5543	6176	6025
Bengaluru (Karnataka)	3127	3924	4870
Jaipur (Rajasthan)	2827	3479	3872
Hyderabad (Telangana)	3050	3145	3822
Total (5 Cities)	28529	30882	31955

Notes: Table 1 displays the number of cases reported under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL) over three consecutive years, as published by NCRB's Crime in India (2021-23), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

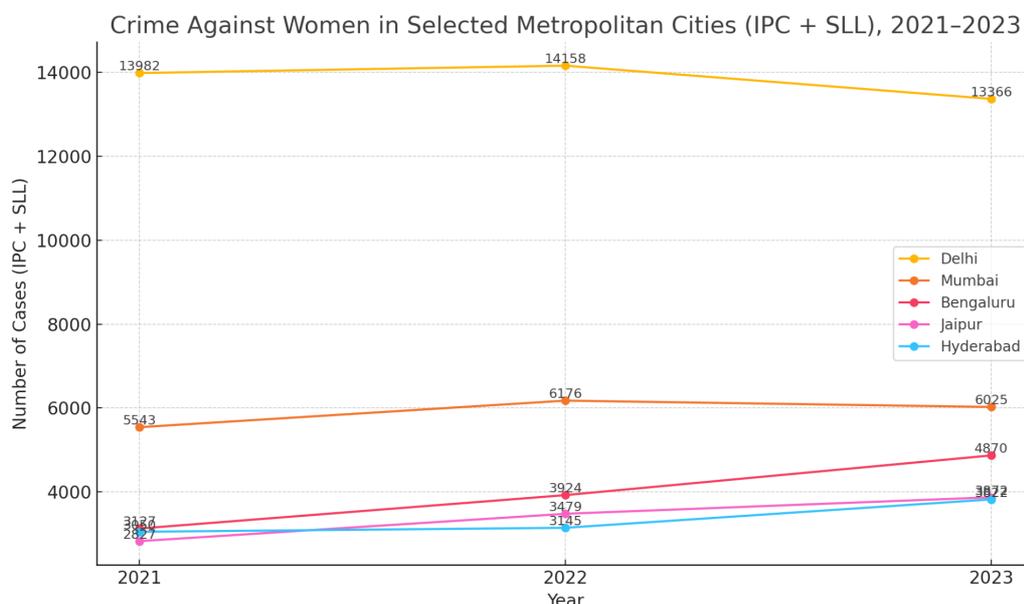


Figure 2: Crime Against Women in Selected Metropolitan Cities (IPC + SLL), 2021–2023

Notes: Figure 1 displays the number of cases reported under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL) over three consecutive years, as published by NCRB's Crime in India (2021-23), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

Between 2021 and 2023, the rates related to Total Crime Against Women (2021–2023) in five major metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad—exhibit notable differences between cities and significant annual fluctuations. Crime rate is defined as the number of crimes reported per lakh (100,000) population during a given year. As per the NCRB, the crime rate is calculated to provide a standardised measure of the incidence of crime, enabling comparison across regions and time periods. Jaipur consistently reports the highest crime rate, which increased sharply from 194.4 in 2021 to 266.3 in 2023, representing the most substantial growth among all cities. Bengaluru also shows a significant upward trend, rising from 77.1 to 120, possibly indicating increased vulnerabilities or better reporting. Meanwhile, Delhi’s crime rate remains high but fluctuates slightly, peaking in 2022 before dropping to 176.4 in 2023. Mumbai’s rates stay relatively low and stable, with a slight increase in 2022 and a minor decrease in 2023. Hyderabad experiences steady, moderate increases over the three years. Overall, the combined rate across these cities increases from 80.3 in 2021 to 95 in 2023, suggesting a general rise in urban crime exposure for women.

Table 2: Rate of Total Crime Against Women (2021–2023) for Selected Metropolitan Cities

Metropolitan City	Year		
	2021	2022	2023
Delhi (New Delhi)	184.6	186.9	176.4
Mumbai (Maharashtra)	65.1	72.5	70.7
Bengaluru (Karnataka)	77.1	96.7	120.0
Jaipur (Rajasthan)	194.4	239.3	266.3
Hyderabad (Telangana)	81.0	83.6	101.5
Total Metropolitan Cities (All 19 cities)	80.3	90.1	95.0

Notes: Table 2 displays the rate of Total Crime Against Women over three consecutive years, as published by NCRB’s Crime in India (2021-23), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

Indian Panel Code (IPC) Offences Committed Against Women in Metropolitan Cities

Crime patterns across the five metropolitan cities exhibit noticeable shifts in both magnitude and direction over three years. In Delhi, dowry deaths

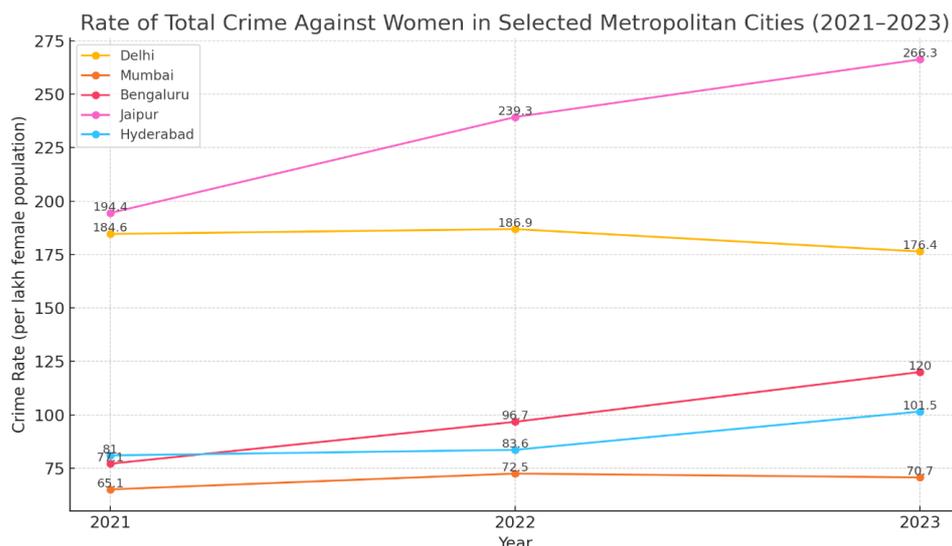


Figure 2: Rate of Total Crime Against Women (2021–2023) for Selected Metropolitan Cities

Notes: Figure 2 displays the rate of Total Crime Against Women over three consecutive years, as published by NCRB’s Crime in India (2021-23), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

decreased from 136 in 2021 to 114 in 2023, a 16.2% reduction, while Jaipur saw an increase from 34 to 38, up 11.7%. Mumbai experienced fluctuations with 12 cases dropping to 8 (33.3%). Acid attacks remained rare but persistent, with Delhi moving from 8 to 6 (25% decrease) and Bengaluru showing a temporary spike from 0 to 5 before returning to zero in 2022. Cases of cruelty by husband/relatives (498A) surged significantly in Bengaluru (429 to 706, +64.6%) and Jaipur (1200 to 1627, +35.6%), but declined in Delhi from 4674 to 4219 (–455, –9.7%). Kidnapping and abduction cases rose sharply in Bengaluru (578 to 766, +32.5%) and Jaipur (401 to 632, +57.6%), while Hyderabad saw a decrease from 198 to 273, although still an increase over previous years. Rape cases declined in Delhi from 1226 to 1088 (–11.3%), but increased in Jaipur from 502 to 573 (+14.1%) and spiked in Hyderabad from 116 to 173 (+49.1%). Assault on women (354 IPC) increased dramatically in Bengaluru (585 to 1163, +98.8%), Jaipur (586 to 732, +24.9%), and Hyderabad (420 to 751, +78.8%), with Delhi showing a slight decrease from 2022. Total IPC crimes against women declined in Delhi from 12,500 to 11,620 (–880), but significantly increased in Bengaluru

(1819 to 2985, +64.1%), Jaipur (2775 to 3645, +31.3%), and Hyderabad (2638 to 3229, +22.4%). Overall, although Delhi still records the highest crime volume, the most significant growth is observed in Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad across multiple crime categories (Table 3).

City-based analysis highlights shifting patterns of vulnerability. Delhi, consistently recording the highest crime figures, shows reductions in several areas: dowry deaths decrease by 16.2%, rape by 11.3%, cruelty by 9.7%, and overall IPC crimes by 7%, suggesting a relative improvement despite high totals. Mumbai remains comparatively stable and low in crime, with dowry deaths dropping by 33%, a slight increase in rape cases by 6.3% (364 to 387), and modest fluctuations in total crimes (4494 to 4869; +8.3%). Bengaluru, however, experiences significant surges: cruelty up by 64.6%, kidnapping by 32.5%, rape by 44.4% (117 to 169), assault by 98.8%, and total IPC crimes by 64.1%, indicating a rapid deterioration. Jaipur similarly shows rising concerns, with rape increasing by 14.1%, kidnapping by 57.6%, assault by 24.9%, cruelty by 35%, and overall crimes by 31.3%. Even dowry deaths grow by 11.7%. Hyderabad exhibits steady but notable growth: crime up by 3.8% (1678 to 1743), rape jumping by 49.1%, assault by 78.8%, and total crimes rising by 22.4%, despite some fluctuation in kidnapping cases. Overall, these profiles demonstrate that although Delhi maintains the highest total crime count, cities like Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad are experiencing rapid increases across various violence categories against women.

Temporal Patterns of Crime in Metropolitan Cities

Between 2021 and 2022, most metro cities experienced notable increases in crime rates: Bengaluru saw a 24.4% rise in total crimes, Jaipur 14.8%, Hyderabad 3.7%, and Mumbai 11.8%. Delhi remained nearly stable with a 0.4% increase. In 2022, specific crime categories grew significantly—Bengaluru's kidnapping by 6.1%, assault by 29.3%, and rape by 29.1%. Jaipur's cruelty increased by 26.3%, assault by 4.6%, and overall crimes by 14.8%. From 2022 to 2023, Delhi diverged from other cities, showing consistent declines: rape decreased by 9.6%, dowry deaths by 11.6%, cruelty by 12.9%, assault by 5.4%, and total crimes by 7.4%. Conversely, Bengaluru's crimes surged further—assaults up 53.6%, kidnappings 24.9%, rape 11.9%, and total crimes 31.8%. Jaipur also experienced substantial increases: rape up 15.3%, kidnapping 31.3%, assault 19.4%, and total crimes 14.4%. Hyderabad recorded a 10.9% rise in total

crimes, with assaults and rape cases increasing by 66% from 2022 to 2023. These yearly trends highlight 2023 as a turning point: while Delhi's crime rates improved, cities like Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad saw accelerated growth in multiple crime categories, reflecting a shift in the spatial distribution of women's vulnerability across urban India.

Crime in Metropolitan Cities: A Comparison

A comparative analysis of the five metropolitan cities reveals a shifting landscape of women's vulnerability, with apparent differences in the trends and severity of crime from 2021 to 2023. Delhi, although consistently recording the highest absolute numbers, is the only city showing improvement across most categories—dowry deaths decrease by 16.2% (136→114), rape declines by 11.3% (1226→1088), cruelty decreases by 9.7% (4674→4219), and total IPC crimes drop by 7% (12,500→11,620). Conversely, Bengaluru and Jaipur demonstrate the sharpest increases: Bengaluru's total IPC crimes rise by 64.1% (1819→2985), assault cases nearly double by 98.8% (585→1163), rape increases by 44.4% (117→169), and cruelty grows by 64.6% (429→706), making it the fastest worsening city. Jaipur shows a similar upward trend, with kidnapping increasing by 57.6% (401→632), cruelty rising by 35.6% (1200→1627), assault growing by 24.9% (586→732), and total crimes up by 31.3% (2775→3645), while rape also climbs by 14.1% (502→573). Hyderabad's figures depict a mixed but upward trajectory, with rape surging by 49.1% (116→173), assault rising by 78.8% (420→751), and total crimes increasing by 22.4%, although kidnapping rates fluctuate. Mumbai remains the most stable and least burdened city, with a 33% reduction in dowry deaths (12→8), only a slight rise in rape (+6.3%), and a modest overall increase of 8.3% in total IPC crimes. Crime comparisons show that assault (354 IPC) exhibits the most significant variation across cities—from Delhi's decline to nearly doubling in Bengaluru—while rape and kidnapping shift geographically, decreasing in Delhi but rising sharply in Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad. Overall, 2023 marks a turning point, with Delhi demonstrating improvement while other cities accelerate, indicating a redistribution of high-risk zones. This suggests that the burden of gender-based crime is no longer confined to Delhi alone but is increasingly spreading across India's growing urban centres (see Table 3).

Table 3: Incidents of Crimes Against Women Under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), by City, 2021–2023

Crime Category / Year		Delhi	Mumbai	Bengaluru	Jaipur	Hyderabad
Dowry Deaths (Sec. 304B IPC)	2021	136	12	26	34	15
	2022	129	6	29	33	11
	2023	114	8	25	38	15
Acid Attack (Sec. 326A IPC)	2021	8	1	0	2	0
	2022	5	1	5	0	0
	2023	6	0	0	2	0
Cruelty by Husband/Relatives (Sec. 498A IPC)	2021	4674	826	429	1200	1678
	2022	4847	901	584	1515	1577
	2023	4219	919	706	1627	1743
Kidnapping & Abduction of Women (Various IPC Sections)	2021	3948	1103	578	401	198
	2022	3909	1164	613	481	346
	2023	3952	1167	766	632	273
Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	2021	1226	364	117	502	116
	2022	1204	370	151	497	104
	2023	1088	387	169	573	173
Assault on Women (Sec. 354 IPC)	2021	2022	1625	585	586	420
	2022	2002	1859	757	613	468
	2023	1791	1672	1163	732	751
Total IPC Crimes Against Women	2021	12500	4494	1819	2775	2638
	2022	12552	5026	2264	3186	2737
	2023	11620	4869	2985	3645	3229

Notes: Table 3 displays the incidence of Indian Panel Code(IPC) crimes against women across different crime categories and across selected metropolitan cities over three consecutive years, as published by NCRB's Crime in India (2021-23), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

Special and Local Laws Offences Committed Against Women in Metropolitan Cities

The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 reports a high concentration of cases in Bengaluru, with 736 in 2021, increasing to 964 in 2022 (+31%), and reaching 1013 in 2023 (+4.8%), marking a 37.6% rise over three years. Cases in Delhi remain mostly stable, while Mumbai's cases dropped from 8 to zero. Jaipur and Hyderabad report few or no cases, suggesting low incidence or under-reporting. Under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956, some cities experience dramatic increases: Delhi's cases surged from 3 in 2021 to 26 in 2022 (+766%) and then to 59 in 2023 (+126%). Mumbai showed similar growth, especially

in 2023, with cases rising to 38 from 1 in 2022. Bengaluru maintained steady figures at 155 cases in both 2022 and 2023. Hyderabad, previously reporting no cases, sharply increased to 32 in 2023, indicating trafficking issues. Jaipur's case count remained low. Cyber Crimes against Women reveal changing digital vulnerabilities: Delhi's cases increased from 102 to 125 (+22.5%) between 2021 and 2022, then dropped significantly to 36 in 2023 (-71%), possibly due to reporting changes. Bengaluru's cases steadily grew from 53 in 2021 to 73 in 2022, then dramatically rose to 127 in 2023 (+139.6%). Hyderabad saw the most notable increase, from 11 to 53 (+381%). Mumbai and Jaipur showed moderate or fluctuating trends.

City-Wise Variation Across Crime Categories

A city-wise comparison highlights distinct patterns in SLL crime concentration and shifts. Delhi faces a significant rise in trafficking cases—from 3 to 59 over three years—and continues to report notable cybercrime activity, though there was a sudden decline in 2023. Mumbai shows relatively low numbers of dowry prohibition cases but a sharp increase in trafficking incidents, especially in 2023, along with moderate cybercrime levels. Bengaluru stands out as the hotspot for SLL violations, reporting the highest figures in both the Dowry Prohibition Act and Cyber Crimes among metro cities, with dowry cases exceeding 1000 by 2023 and cybercrimes doubling over the period. Jaipur maintains very low SLL case numbers across all categories, possibly due to genuinely low occurrences or reporting gaps. Hyderabad, initially reporting low numbers, became more relevant by 2023, with emerging trafficking cases (32) and a sharp rise in cybercrimes (from 11 to 53), indicating increasing vulnerability in digital and trafficking domains. Overall, the data shows Bengaluru has persistently high rates of gender-related offences, while Delhi and Mumbai are experiencing rising trafficking vulnerabilities, and Hyderabad is seeing accelerated growth in cyber-enabled crimes(see Table 4).

Year-Wise Variation and Emerging Patterns

The year-by-year comparison shows an overall upward trend in all categories of SLL crime, with sharp increases from 2021 to 2022. The total SLL crimes in all cities rose from 1482 in Delhi, 1049 in Mumbai, 1308 in Bengaluru, 52 in Jaipur, and 177 in Hyderabad in 2021 to much higher numbers in 2022—most notably, a rise of 563 cases in Bengaluru (+43%), 241 in Hyderabad (+136%), and

Jaipur's surge from 52 to 293 cases (+463%). By 2023, most city totals continued to increase, except Jaipur, which dropped from 293 to 227 cases (-22.5%). Delhi showed steady growth, from 1,482 to 1,606 and then to 1,746 cases (+17.8% overall), while Mumbai's numbers remained relatively stable with slight rises. Bengaluru's cases reached 1885, a 44% jump since 2021. Hyderabad experienced the fastest growth over three years, from 177 to 593 cases (+235%), mainly due to rising cybercrime and new trafficking reports. These yearly changes indicate that SLL crimes are increasing across metropolitan areas, especially in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, with Delhi maintaining steady growth and Mumbai showing modest increases. Jaipur remains an outlier with low initial figures but highly volatile yearly data variations (see Table 4).

Table 4: Incidence of Crimes Against Women under Special and Local Laws (City-Wise Data, 2021–2023)

Crime Category / Year		Delhi	Mumbai	Bengaluru	Jaipur	Hyderabad
Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	2021	16	8	736	1	0
	2022	18	0	964	0	0
	2023	16	0	1013	0	0
Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	2021	3	5	129	3	0
	2022	26	1	155	1	0
	2023	59	38	155	1	32
Cyber Crimes/Information Technology Act (Women Centric Crimes only)	2021	102	16	53	5	11
	2022	125	12	73	18	16
	2023	36	5	127	9	53
Total SLL Crimes against Women)	2021	1482	1049	1308	52	177
	2022	1606	1150	1660	293	408
	2023	1746	1156	1885	227	593

Notes: Table 4 presents the incidence of crimes against women under Special and Local Laws across various crime categories and selected metropolitan cities over three consecutive years, as reported in NCRB's Crime in India (2021-23), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

Discussion

The analysis of the three-year NCRB Crime in India (2021-23) report across India's five major cities illustrates how urban growth influences women's vulnerability in multifaceted ways. Although Delhi records the highest number of absolute IPC crimes, its crime rate has decreased from 184.6 to 176.4. Meanwhile, Bengaluru and Jaipur experience sharp increases, reaching 120.0 and 266.3, respectively. The rise in cruelty, kidnapping, cybercrimes, and SLL

violations in cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad reflects challenges linked to rapid urbanisation, demographic changes, and overburdened civic services. These trends indicate that as cities grow denser and more socially fragmented, women face a broader, more complex risk environment that affects homes, streets, workplaces, and digital spaces (Paul, 2011; Mitra & Chakrabarti, 2021).

Urban mobility patterns significantly influence exposure to crimes like kidnapping, assault, and trafficking (Anand & Nanda, 2022). The rise in IPC kidnapping cases across cities, especially in Jaipur and Bengaluru, highlights the dangers linked to expanding transport corridors, inadequate last-mile connectivity regulation, and increasingly anonymous public areas (Gupta, Ashtt, & Monga, 2024). The surge in trafficking incidents in Delhi—from 3 to 59—further illustrates how transport hubs and migration increase vulnerabilities. As commuting distances grow and urban travel becomes more complex, women are more exposed to opportunistic crimes, especially in cities where infrastructure and surveillance have not kept up with population growth (Bhattacharyya, 2016).

Cybercrime trends illustrate how gendered violence is rapidly transitioning into digital environments (Narayani, 2024). The escalation of cybercrime cases in Bengaluru from 53 to 127, and in Hyderabad from 11 to 53, exemplifies how increasing dependence on digital platforms—such as work-related applications, mobility services, financial transactions, and social media—introduces new risks. Although Delhi experienced a reduction in cybercrime incidents in 2023, its rise in trafficking cases suggests that this variation may result from changes in reporting practices rather than an actual decline. In general, the deficiency in digital literacy, data protection measures, and cyber-policing capabilities amid technological advancements contributes to the emergence of new forms of exploitation (Banerjee & Singh, 2021).

The high rate of cruelty by husbands and relatives under Section. 498A IPC—over 9,000 cases annually in urban areas—highlights ongoing household inequalities. Bengaluru's increase in dowry-related violations, from 736 to 1013, shows that patriarchal customs persist even in India's most developed cities. Factors like rising living costs, job insecurity, and migration-related family changes heighten stress and predominantly affect women. Urban life alters women's vulnerability by exposing them to constant movement, anonymous social interactions, and fragmented community support (Pal et al., 2017). Cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Jaipur experience multidimensional rises

across IPC and SLL indicators—including cruelty, cybercrime, trafficking, and kidnapping—demonstrating layered risks in expanding urban systems. Increased rates in Jaipur (239.3→266.3) and Bengaluru (77.1→120.0) prove that vulnerability extends beyond megacities; mid-sized and emerging metros also face evolving threats. These trends show that urban complexity heightens women’s daily insecurities, making safety dependent on multiple spatial, social, and digital factors.

Policing patterns greatly influence observed crime trends. Delhi’s significant increase in trafficking reports likely reflects improved detection rather than an actual rise in incidents (Adur & Jha, 2018). In contrast, cities like Jaipur and Hyderabad report almost no cases of dowry prohibition, indicating ongoing under-reporting or limited enforcement efforts. Bengaluru’s consistent reporting in IPC and SLL categories suggests better record-keeping and genuinely high crime levels. The rise in cybercrimes in Bengaluru and Hyderabad exposes gaps in digital policing, while fluctuations in Mumbai mirror changes in reporting practices. These differences emphasise the need for more targeted, specialised, and adaptable policing strategies to effectively tackle the changing urban crime landscape (Gupta, Ashtt, & Monga, 2024). Overall, data from 2021–2023 show a geographic shift: as Delhi stabilises, Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad become new hotspots, driven by economic pressures, urban expansion, online exposure, and socio-cultural changes. The increase in crime rates from 80.3 to 95.0 in Total Metropolitan Cities highlights how urbanisation continues to increase women’s exposure to both traditional and emerging forms of violence across metropolitan India.

Policy Recommendations

Metropolitan cities require policing systems tailored to their size, density, and specific crime issues. The rise in IPC crimes, trafficking, and cybercrime in Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad highlights the need for specialised units, faster FIR processing, and integrated digital reporting channels. Cities should also improve women’s helpdesks, apply survivor-friendly procedures, and bolster coordination between police, cyber units, and social services.

As crimes like kidnapping, assault, and mobility-related offences increase, cities must incorporate safety measures into urban planning. This includes well-lit streets, improved pedestrian pathways, CCTV-equipped transport routes, monitored last-mile connectivity, and secure waiting areas at transit points.

Targeted actions are essential in crowded and expanding areas, involving safety audits, better night services, and urban designs that enhance visibility to protect women (Nagaraj Naik, 2020). The rise in cybercrimes, particularly in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, highlights the need for a robust digital safety framework, featuring advanced cyber-police stations, real-time complaint systems, and specialised female response teams. Digital literacy initiatives for students, migrant workers, and women in informal sectors should be expanded, along with collaborations with social media and telecom providers to identify online harassment and trafficking early. Enhancing technological capacity is vital as women's vulnerabilities increasingly shift online (Banerjee & Singh, 2021).

The high prevalence of domestic violence and dowry-related crimes necessitates community-based initiatives, neighbourhood safety committees, crisis centres, and NGO partnerships (Dandona et al., 2022). Awareness campaigns focusing on gender norms, financial dependence, and cyber threats are vital, particularly in rapidly urbanising cities such as Jaipur and Hyderabad. Peer support groups in colleges, workplaces, and residential communities can offer early help and alleviate social isolation. Crime patterns differ across cities: Delhi remains steady, while Bengaluru and Hyderabad experience rising rates, and Jaipur's levels remain high, demonstrating that a uniform safety strategy is ineffective. Each city requires a customised safety plan tailored to its specific crime trends, demographics, digital exposure, and social environment.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study relies mainly on secondary data from NCRB's Crime in India reports over three years and faces several limitations that restrict the depth and interpretive scope of its findings. Issues like under-reporting, social stigma related to gender-based violence, and inconsistencies in FIR registration likely cause official figures to underestimate the true extent of harm (Ansari, Verma & Dadkhah, 2015). Differences in policing capacity, enforcement practices at the state level, and incomplete SLL data further hinder cross-city trend comparisons. The dataset also lacks contextual insights, making it hard to grasp the structural and experiential aspects of vulnerability (Ansari, 2017). These limitations underscore the need for future research that employs qualitative and mixed methods beyond mere quantitative indicators. Approaches like in-depth interviews, ethnographies, and participatory safety audits can shed light on

how women manage risks at home, work, in public, and online. Incorporating intersectional analyses considering caste, class, age, disability, migration, and occupational status is crucial for understanding how overlapping identities influence vulnerability differently across metropolitan areas. Neighbourhood mapping, long-term studies, and community-based research can reveal spatial inequalities and dynamic safety issues that broad crime data cannot fully capture. These expanded methods will produce more nuanced, contextually relevant evidence to guide targeted urban safety policies for women.

Conclusion

An analysis of the three-year NCRB Crime in India (2021-23) report across India's five major cities reveals a rapidly changing landscape of women's safety. Urbanisation, technology growth, demographic shifts, and entrenched gender norms influence this landscape. While Delhi reports the highest number of IPC crimes, its rates remain stable or decline, in contrast to emerging metros like Bengaluru, Jaipur, and Hyderabad. These cities face increasing cybercrimes, domestic violence, trafficking, and mobility-related offences, reflecting deeper socio-economic and infrastructural issues. These trends show that women's vulnerability to violence is linked not only to individual actions but also to city design, transport quality, digital security gaps, and uneven policing and civic services. For urban policy, this highlights the importance of moving beyond one-size-fits-all frameworks to develop city-specific strategies that address each city's unique risks and structural challenges. A thorough understanding of crime patterns in metropolitan areas is essential for creating inclusive, safe, and equitable cities for women amid rapid urban growth transformation.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this research. No financial or personal relationships have influenced the conduct or outcomes of the study.

Ethical Statement: This study uses only secondary data from the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) Crime in India reports. Since the data is publicly available and does not involve direct contact with human participants, ethical approval was not necessary. The research complies with standard ethical guidelines for utilizing publicly accessible government data.

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