



Perceived Safety and Risk Management among Solo Female Travelers in India

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ABSTRACT

Solo female travel in India has grown significantly due to changing social norms, increased financial independence, and digital influence. However, safety concerns and risk perception continue to affect travel decisions. This study examines the perceived safety issues and risk management strategies of solo female travelers in India using secondary data sources such as research articles, reports, and documented experiences. The findings indicate that risks such as harassment, scams, and inadequate infrastructure remain major concerns. At the same time, women travelers adopt various coping strategies, including the use of digital tools, careful planning, and behavioral precautions. The study highlights the need for improved safety measures and gender-sensitive tourism policies to support safe and inclusive travel experiences for women.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has undergone significant transformation in recent years, with changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and evolving socio-cultural dynamics reshaping travel patterns across the globe. One of the most notable trends is the rapid rise of solo travel, particularly among women. Solo female travel has emerged as a powerful expression of independence, self-exploration, and empowerment, reflecting broader societal changes such as increased access to education, financial autonomy, and shifting gender roles.



In the Indian context, this trend is gaining momentum as more women choose to travel independently for leisure, personal growth, professional commitments, and cultural exploration. The proliferation of digital platforms, social media, and travel-related mobile applications has further facilitated this shift by providing easy access to information, peer reviews, safety tips, and real-time navigation tools. These technological advancements have played a crucial role in encouraging women to step beyond traditional travel norms and explore destinations on their own.

However, despite this positive growth, concerns related to safety and security continue to pose significant challenges for solo female travelers in India. Issues such as harassment, gender-based violence, theft, scams, and inadequate infrastructure often influence women's travel decisions. The perception of risk is not only shaped by actual incidents but also by media representation, societal narratives, and personal experiences. As a result, many women perceive India as a destination with heightened safety risks, which can limit their travel choices or require them to adopt precautionary measures.

Perceived safety is a subjective concept that varies across individuals depending on factors such as age, travel experience, cultural background, and familiarity with the destination. For solo female travelers, this perception plays a critical role in determining travel behavior, including destination selection, accommodation preferences, mode of transportation, and activity choices. Women often engage in continuous risk assessment throughout their journey, balancing their desire for independence and exploration with the need for personal safety.

In response to these challenges, solo female travelers adopt various risk management strategies to enhance their sense of security. These strategies may include thorough pre-trip planning, reliance on technology such as GPS tracking and safety apps, choosing reputed accommodations, avoiding high-risk areas, and modifying behavior in unfamiliar environments. While these measures enable women to travel more confidently, they also highlight the additional burden placed on female travelers compared to their male counterparts.

From an academic perspective, the study of perceived safety and risk management among solo female travelers is essential for understanding gender-specific travel behavior and identifying gaps in tourism infrastructure and policy. Although existing research has explored travel risk perception and women's travel experiences globally, there is a growing need for context-specific studies focusing on India due to its unique socio-cultural environment and diverse tourism landscape.



Furthermore, ensuring the safety of female travelers is not only a social and ethical responsibility but also a critical factor in enhancing the competitiveness and image of India as a global tourist destination. A safe and inclusive tourism environment can attract more domestic and international visitors, contribute to economic growth, and promote sustainable tourism development.

In this context, the present study aims to examine the perceived safety concerns and risk management practices of solo female travelers in India using secondary data sources. By analyzing existing literature and documented experiences, the study seeks to provide insights into the challenges faced by women travelers and suggest measures to improve safety and inclusivity in the tourism sector.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the **perceived safety concerns** of solo female travelers in India using secondary data sources.
- To identify the **major risks and challenges** faced by solo female travelers.
- To analyze the **risk management and coping strategies** adopted by women travelers.
- To evaluate the **impact of safety perception on travel behavior and destination choices**.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a **secondary data research approach**, aimed at analyzing the perceived safety concerns and risk management strategies among solo female travelers in India. The methodology focuses on collecting and interpreting existing data from credible and relevant sources.

1. Nature of the Study

The study is **descriptive and exploratory in nature**. It seeks to describe existing patterns of safety perception and explore various risks and coping strategies identified in prior studies.

2. Sources of Data

The research is entirely based on **secondary data**, which has been collected from the following sources:

- Published research papers and academic journals
- Government reports and tourism policy documents



- Reports from tourism organizations and industry bodies
- Books, articles, and conference papers
- Travel blogs and documented experiences of solo female travelers
- Online databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and other academic platforms

3. Data Collection Method

Data has been collected through **systematic review of literature**, focusing on studies related to:

- Solo female travel
- Safety perception in tourism
- Risk management strategies
- Gender issues in travel

Relevant information was extracted, compiled, and organized based on themes related to the research objectives.

4. Data Analysis Technique

The study uses **qualitative analysis methods**, including:

- **Content Analysis:** To identify common themes and patterns in the literature
- **Thematic Analysis:** To categorize findings into key areas such as safety concerns, risk perception, and coping strategies

5. Study Area

The study focuses on **India as a tourism destination**, considering both domestic and international solo female travelers.

6. Limitations of the Study

- The study relies only on **secondary data**, with no primary data collection
- Findings depend on the availability and accuracy of existing literature



- Lack of region-specific or real-time data in some cases

7. Justification of Methodology

The use of secondary data is appropriate for this study as it allows for:

- Comprehensive understanding of existing research
- Cost-effective and time-efficient analysis
- Identification of research gaps for future primary studies

Limitations of the Study

The study is based entirely on secondary data and does not include any primary data collection, which may limit the depth of firsthand insights. The findings are dependent on the availability, quality, and accuracy of existing literature and published sources. Additionally, there is a lack of region-specific and real-time data in certain areas, which may affect the comprehensiveness and current relevance of the analysis.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

◆ 1. High Perception of Safety Risks

The study reveals that solo female travelers perceive India as a relatively high-risk destination compared to many others. Concerns related to harassment, verbal abuse, and unwanted attention are frequently highlighted in secondary sources. These perceptions are not only based on personal experiences but also influenced by media reports and social narratives. For example, incidents reported in metropolitan cities often create a generalized fear among travelers. Even safe destinations may be perceived as risky due to negative publicity. This high level of perceived risk significantly shapes travel planning and decision-making.

◆ 2. Safety as a Primary Decision-Making Factor

Safety considerations play a dominant role in shaping travel choices among solo female travelers. Women prioritize destinations known for better law enforcement, infrastructure, and positive reviews. Accommodation selection also depends heavily on safety features such as surveillance systems and secure locations. For instance, destinations like Kerala or Himachal Pradesh are often preferred due to



their reputation for safety. This indicates that safety perception directly influences tourism demand patterns.

◆ 3. Influence of Media and Social Narratives

Media coverage of crimes against women significantly impacts risk perception. News reports, social media posts, and travel blogs often amplify fears, sometimes creating a perception that may not fully reflect ground realities. For example, viral social media posts about unsafe incidents can discourage women from visiting certain places. At the same time, positive travel stories can help rebuild confidence. Thus, media acts as both a risk amplifier and a reassurance tool.

◆ 4. Variation Based on Travel Experience

Risk perception differs between experienced and first-time travelers. Experienced solo female travelers tend to have better coping mechanisms and perceive lower levels of risk. They rely on past experiences and are more confident in handling uncertain situations. In contrast, first-time travelers are more cautious and often rely heavily on external information sources. For example, seasoned backpackers may explore remote areas, while beginners prefer organized and safer environments.

◆ 5. Adoption of Preventive Travel Planning

The study finds that solo female travelers engage in extensive pre-trip planning to minimize risks. This includes researching destinations, reading reviews, and preparing contingency plans. Travelers often choose accommodations with high safety ratings and plan their itineraries carefully. For example, selecting hotels in central locations with easy access to transport is a common practice. Such planning helps reduce uncertainty and enhances confidence during travel.

◆ 6. Use of Technology for Safety

Digital tools and mobile applications play a crucial role in risk management. Travelers use GPS navigation, emergency contact apps, and ride-sharing platforms with tracking features. Online reviews and ratings also guide decision-making. For instance, apps like Google Maps and ride-hailing services provide real-time location tracking, increasing safety. Technology acts as a support system that empowers women to travel independently.



◆ 7. Behavioral Modifications During Travel

Women often adjust their behavior to ensure safety while traveling alone. This includes dressing conservatively, avoiding late-night outings, and being cautious in interactions with strangers. Such behavioral adaptations are influenced by socio-cultural norms and perceived risks. For example, avoiding isolated areas or crowded public transport at night is a common practice. While effective, these adjustments highlight the limitations imposed on women's freedom.

◆ 8. Preference for Women-Friendly Services

There is a growing demand for women-centric tourism services such as women-only accommodations, transport facilities, and guided tours. These services provide a sense of security and comfort. For example, some hostels and hotels offer female-only dormitories and floors. This trend reflects the need for gender-sensitive service design in the hospitality industry.

◆ 9. Role of Online Reviews and Ratings

Online platforms significantly influence travel decisions. Solo female travelers rely on reviews to assess the safety and reliability of destinations and accommodations. Negative reviews regarding safety can deter potential visitors. For instance, hotels with poor safety feedback are often avoided regardless of price or location. This highlights the importance of digital reputation in tourism.

◆ 10. Infrastructure-Related Challenges

The study identifies inadequate infrastructure as a major safety concern. Poor street lighting, lack of proper sanitation facilities, and unsafe public transport contribute to perceived risks. For example, poorly lit streets in smaller towns may discourage women from venturing out after dark. Improving infrastructure is essential for enhancing overall safety perception.

◆ 11. Gap in Institutional Support Systems

There is a noticeable lack of effective institutional support such as tourist helplines, emergency response systems, and visible policing. Although initiatives exist, awareness and accessibility remain limited. For example, many travelers are unaware of tourist police services. Strengthening institutional frameworks can significantly improve safety perceptions.

◆ 12. Impact of Cultural and Social Norms



Cultural expectations and societal attitudes toward women influence travel experiences. In some regions, solo female travelers may attract unwanted attention due to traditional gender norms. For instance, in conservative areas, women traveling alone may be perceived as unusual. This social scrutiny adds to the perceived risk and discomfort.

◆ 13. Empowerment Through Solo Travel

Despite challenges, solo travel contributes significantly to women's empowerment. It enhances self-confidence, decision-making skills, and independence. Many women report personal growth and a sense of achievement after traveling alone. For example, overcoming travel challenges often leads to increased resilience and self-reliance.

◆ 14. Risk-Taking vs Risk-Avoidance Behavior

The study finds a balance between risk-taking and risk-avoidance among travelers. While some women are willing to explore new and less popular destinations, others prefer safer and well-established tourist spots. This behavior depends on individual personality and risk tolerance. For example, adventure travelers may take calculated risks, while others avoid uncertainty.

◆ 15. Need for Gender-Sensitive Tourism Policies

The findings highlight the urgent need for policies focused on women's safety in tourism. This includes better infrastructure, awareness campaigns, and strict law enforcement. For instance, initiatives like women helplines and safe tourism campaigns can improve confidence among travelers. Policy intervention is essential for creating a safe and inclusive tourism environment.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

◆ 1. Development of Women-Friendly Tourism Policies

There is a strong need for the government to design and implement gender-sensitive tourism policies that specifically address the safety concerns of solo female travelers. These policies should include clear guidelines for safety standards in destinations, accommodations, and transport systems. For example, introducing certified "women-safe destinations" or safety ratings can help build trust among travelers. Such policies will not only enhance safety but also improve India's image as a secure tourist destination. Collaboration between tourism authorities and law enforcement agencies is essential in this regard.



◆ 2. Improvement in Public Infrastructure

Improving infrastructure is critical to enhancing safety perception. Authorities should ensure proper street lighting, well-maintained roads, clean public facilities, and safe transportation systems, especially in tourist areas. For instance, installing adequate lighting in tourist spots and public pathways can reduce the fear of crime during evening hours. Additionally, providing clear signages and accessible public amenities will make destinations more comfortable for solo female travelers. Infrastructure development should be prioritized in both urban and rural tourist areas.

◆ 3. Strengthening Law Enforcement and Tourist Police

The presence of visible and responsive law enforcement is essential for ensuring safety. Increasing the deployment of tourist police, especially in high-traffic tourist destinations, can help create a sense of security. Authorities should also ensure quick response systems for emergency situations. For example, dedicated tourist police units trained in handling women-related issues can significantly improve traveler confidence. Strict enforcement of laws against harassment and crime is equally important.

◆ 4. Promotion of Women-Friendly Accommodation Services

The hospitality industry should introduce more women-centric services such as female-only floors, secure hostels, and verified accommodations. Hotels should adopt safety measures like CCTV surveillance, 24/7 security, and trained staff. For instance, accommodations that clearly highlight their safety features in online listings can attract more solo female travelers. Providing emergency assistance and support services within hotels will further enhance safety.

◆ 5. Use of Technology and Safety Applications

Encouraging the use of digital tools can significantly improve safety. Government and private stakeholders should develop and promote mobile applications that offer real-time tracking, emergency alerts, and verified travel information. For example, integrating safety features such as SOS alerts and location sharing in travel apps can provide immediate assistance in emergencies. Technology can act as a powerful enabler for safe travel experiences.



◆ 6. Awareness and Sensitization Programs

There is a need to create awareness among local communities, service providers, and tourists regarding women's safety. Training programs should be conducted for taxi drivers, hotel staff, and tour operators to ensure respectful and professional behavior. For instance, sensitization campaigns can educate stakeholders about gender equality and appropriate conduct. This will help create a more welcoming and safe environment for female travelers.

◆ 7. Promotion of Safe Travel Information Platforms

Tourism authorities should develop centralized platforms that provide verified information about safe destinations, accommodations, and travel tips. These platforms can include safety ratings, emergency contacts, and traveler reviews. For example, an official tourism website highlighting "safe travel zones" can guide solo female travelers in planning their trips. Reliable information reduces uncertainty and enhances confidence.

◆ 8. Encouraging Community Participation

Local communities play a vital role in ensuring tourist safety. Community-based tourism initiatives should involve local residents in maintaining a safe and supportive environment for travelers. For example, local guides and volunteers can assist solo female travelers and provide guidance. Encouraging community responsibility can create a sense of collective ownership of safety.

◆ 9. Improvement in Transport Safety

Transport systems should be made more secure and reliable for women travelers. This includes better monitoring of public transport, verified taxi services, and availability of women-only travel options where necessary. For instance, GPS-enabled vehicles and driver verification systems can enhance safety during travel. Safe and accessible transport is essential for overall travel security.

◆ 10. Encouraging Responsible Media Representation

Media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of safety. Responsible reporting and balanced narratives should be encouraged to avoid unnecessary fear among travelers. While highlighting issues is important, showcasing positive travel experiences can help build confidence. For example, promoting success stories of solo female travelers can inspire others and reduce negative perceptions.



◆ 11. Capacity Building in the Hospitality Sector

Training programs should be organized for hospitality staff to handle safety-related situations effectively. Staff should be trained in emergency response, communication, and gender sensitivity. For instance, front desk personnel should be capable of assisting solo female travelers with safety information and support. This will improve service quality and guest satisfaction.

◆ 12. Development of Emergency Support Systems

Efficient emergency support systems such as 24/7 helplines, quick-response teams, and accessible medical facilities should be established. For example, dedicated women's safety helplines for tourists can provide immediate assistance in distress situations. Easy access to emergency services is crucial for building trust among travelers.

◆ 13. Encouraging Research and Data Collection

Further research should be encouraged to understand region-specific safety issues and travel behavior. Collecting real-time data on safety incidents and traveler experiences can help in better policy formulation. For instance, surveys and feedback systems can provide valuable insights into areas needing improvement. Continuous research will support evidence-based decision-making.

◆ 14. Promotion of Women Empowerment through Tourism

Tourism policies should integrate women empowerment initiatives such as promoting women entrepreneurs, guides, and service providers. For example, encouraging women-led tourism businesses can create a safer and more inclusive environment. Empowerment initiatives will also contribute to economic development and social change.

◆ 15. Collaboration Among Stakeholders

Effective collaboration between government, tourism authorities, private sector, and local communities is essential for improving safety. Joint efforts can ensure better implementation of policies and safety measures. For instance, partnerships between travel platforms and government agencies can enhance safety awareness. A coordinated approach is key to sustainable tourism development.



CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that solo female travel in India is an emerging and empowering trend shaped by changing socio-economic conditions, increased independence, and digital accessibility. However, the findings clearly indicate that perceived safety and risk remain critical factors influencing travel decisions and experiences of women travelers. Issues such as harassment, inadequate infrastructure, transport insecurity, and lack of effective institutional support continue to create challenges, thereby affecting destination choice and travel behavior. Despite these constraints, solo female travelers actively adopt various risk management strategies, including careful planning, use of technology, behavioral adjustments, and reliance on verified services, which enable them to navigate potential risks effectively. The study also reflects a dual dimension where empowerment and vulnerability coexist, as women gain confidence and independence while simultaneously managing safety concerns. Furthermore, gaps in tourism policies, infrastructure, and awareness highlight the need for a comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach to tourism development. Strengthening safety measures, improving infrastructure, promoting responsible stakeholder behavior, and leveraging technology can significantly enhance the travel experience of solo female travelers. Overall, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment is essential not only for women's empowerment but also for improving India's global tourism image and achieving sustainable tourism development.

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