



Streets of risk: Mobility, safety, and urban inequality among people experiencing homelessness in Delhi, India

Pratishtha Singh

The George Institute for Global Health (India)

Rapid urbanization in low- and middle-income countries has intensified urban inequalities, with people experiencing homelessness bearing a disproportionate burden of injury, violence, and exclusion from essential urban systems. In India, homelessness is shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities including gender, caste, poverty, and displacement, yet little research has examined how these forces interact with everyday mobility and safety in megacities. This interpretive qualitative study aimed to explore perceptions and experiences of risk and safety among people experiencing homelessness navigating urban Delhi. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine individuals experiencing homelessness and five thematic experts, recruited through shelters, identified street-sleeping "hotspots," and snowball sampling in partnership with a community-based NGO. Data were analyzed inductively using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: (i) routine exposure to harm characterized by fear of road traffic injuries, gendered violence, and poor environmental sanitation; (ii) navigation of hostile urban environments marked by unsafe traffic conditions, exclusionary infrastructure, and abuse in public transport systems; (iii) systemic precarity driven by evictions, police aggression, lack of identity documentation, and weak institutional accountability; and (iv) pathways toward inclusive urban mobility emphasizing intersectoral coordination, trauma-informed policing, shelter-linked infrastructure investments, and recognition of homeless individuals as legitimate urban residents and road users. Findings highlight how mobility is inseparable from structural violence and injury risk for homeless populations in megacities. Addressing urban health inequalities requires embedding the lived realities of homelessness into transport planning, injury prevention, and governance frameworks to create safer, more inclusive urban environments.

