

Critical Evaluation of Social Generic Issues in Urban Areas: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization is usually understood to represent development and advancement; nevertheless, it also has a broad set of social issues that greatly influence the life of the city. In this research, the general social problems that are common in cities, such as poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, slum formation, poor health, poor sanitation, crime, and increasing inequality, are critically examined. These problems, though frequently interconnected, differ in severity from one urban context to another because of socio-economic variation, governance systems, and resource allocation. The aim of this paper is to identify, evaluate, and analyze the underlying social issues that are typically witnessed in urban contexts, both with respect to systemic causes and actual impacts on urban communities. Based on a mixed-methods research strategy using surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis, the work brings to the fore the manner in which these social problems have transformed over the last few years as a result of fast population growth, unauthorized development, environmental pressure, and socio-political considerations. The work gives special emphasis to vulnerable populations like women, migrants, slum residents, and workers in the informal sector, who tend to suffer most from these matters but are accorded the least policy attention. This study also delves into the urban governance-citizen lived experience divide. Using grassroots perspectives and locality-level observations, it pinpoints the policy implementation and public service delivery weaknesses that worsen urban issues. The study also exposes models of urban development that advance economic growth at the expense of human development and environmental concerns. The study findings indicate that most urban problems are the outcome of disjointed planning, inadequate infrastructure, and poor participatory governance. The paper concludes by presenting actionable recommendations, such as building strong grassroots urban governance, inclusive planning, investment in urban infrastructure, and enhancing inter-agency coordination for effective policy implementation. Through the illumination of the complex and interlinked characteristics of city social issues, this research extends the understanding of urban hardship and calls for coordinated, inclusive, and human-oriented urban policy reforms.

Keywords: Urbanization, Social Issues, Poverty, Housing, Urban Governance, Inequality, Migration, Urban Planning, Sanitation, Informal Sector, Slums, Public Services, Policy Gaps.

Introduction

Population movement from rural to urban regions has become one of the identifying patterns of the 21st century. As cities grow, they are centers of economic activity, innovation, and modernization. With rapid urbanization, however, there are a number of generic social problems that confront the sustainability and equity of urban development. The mismatch between urban growth and the ability of infrastructure and social services generates problems like the spread of slums, unemployment, lack of housing, water shortages, poor sanitation, congestion, and crime. The marginalized groups of the urban poor, migrants, women, and informal workers are most hit by these problems, increasing socio-economic disparity. India, one of the world's fastest urbanizing countries, is facing serious urban challenges. Following the Census of India (2011), more than 31% of the population already lives in urban settlements—a percentage bound to grow enormously. Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad are

experiencing the double burden of economic vibrancy with social disintegration. Urban planning has largely been unable to tackle the increasing need for inclusive development. The policy-practice disconnect is increasing, putting pressure on public services such as housing, education, healthcare, and transport.

This research seeks to undertake a critical analysis of the dominant social problems in urban settings with a focus on the understanding of the root systemic causes, their expression across various social groups, and the efficacy of existing responses. By focusing on lived experiences, community observations, and governance mechanisms, the research highlights the real face of urbanization, far removed from policy rhetoric. It draws from both primary data and secondary sources to capture the complexity of urban social dynamics.

Through this critical analysis, the paper aims to add to the debate on sustainable and inclusive urban development. It aims to find out gaps and recommend pragmatic action that can be taken by urban local bodies, planners, and policymakers to enhance the socio-economic texture of our cities.

Concept of Urbanization

Urbanization is the growing concentration of population in towns and cities due to migration of people from the countryside in quest of improved employment, education, health, and living standards. It is both a spatial and demographic phenomenon and signifies structural change from agricultural economies towards industrial and service economies. Although urbanization is also associated with modernization and prosperity, it also raises new challenges for handling scarce resources and providing equal access to primary amenities.

Urbanization in the Indian context is prompted by a mix of forces: rural suffering, jobs, infrastructure growth, and life-style dreams. Post-liberalization accelerated urban migration, causing metropolitan cities to grow and new clusters of urban settlements to develop. But this growth has not been evenly positive. Most urban residents reside in slums with poor access to water, sanitation, accommodation, and safety. The experience of "urban poverty" is now more visible than ever before.

Urbanization is also responsible for social diversification, which is usually followed by tension, exclusion, and marginalization of some groups. With inadequate urban planning and regulatory control, overcrowding, traffic, pollution, increase in crime, and health risks are common phenomena. Further, the informal economy on which a significant percentage of urban livelihoods depend is still mostly unprotected and unregulated.

Crucially, urbanization is not merely a question of population increase but also one of governance, space planning, and citizen participation. The capacity of urban local bodies (ULBs) to provide basic services and control growth has been perpetually in doubt. Smart city projects and urban regeneration schemes have achieved some dividends, but they tend to be devoid of grassroots participation and do not touch upon underlying social inequities.

Hence, the phenomenon of urbanization must be understood in multi-dimensions. It cannot be limited to infrastructure creation alone but must encompass socio-cultural factors, environmental sustainability, and inclusive growth. This research considers urbanization as a multifaceted process that generates opportunities and vulnerabilities. It underlines the fact that the success of urbanization is not merely measured in economic terms but in the capability of cities to sustain a decent quality of life for all citizens, irrespective of socio-economic level.

The Requirement for the Research

Despite all the policies and city development plans, Indian cities are still plagued by chronic social issues that act as a setback for inclusive growth and public well-being. The steep urbanization process, coupled with poor infrastructure and inefficient governance, has led to various problems like slums, unemployment, gender inequality, inadequate sanitation, and environmental degradation. The issues are no longer limited to metropolitan cities but are now infiltrating tier-2 and tier-3 city centers as well.

This research is required to critically examine the root social problems facing urban dwellers and determine their underlying causes, differences, and consequences. Most literature tend to emphasize economic or environmental aspects of urbanization, but this research aims to put more emphasis on the human and social nature of life in the city. It is very important to grasp the lived experiences of marginalized groups in the city and measure the performance of urban governance in meeting their needs.

Through this research, policymakers, planners, and scholars will obtain significant information regarding neglected aspects of urban distress. It also hopes to indicate actionable, people-focused solutions to reverse these social issues, promoting people-friendly and sustainable urban development.

Statement of the Problem

- Urbanization is resulting in growing social inequalities within cities.
- Urban poor and migrants are subject to housing insecurity and have no access to basic services.
- Sanitation, health, and education facilities are inadequate and unevenly spread.
- Increasing urban crime and exploitation of informal labor point towards social insecurity.
- Public policy usually does not touch the issues at the grassroots level in urban settings.
- Urban planning is oriented towards economic development, overlooking social well-being.
- There is inadequate participatory administration and accountability in service delivery.

Study Objectives

Identifying and categorizing typical urban social problems.

- To understand the socio-economic effects of these problems on various population segments.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of current urban policies and interventions.
- To study community attitudes and experiences concerning urban distress.
- To suggest implementable and participatory urban development strategies.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

- **Scope**
 - Concentration on urban social problems like housing, health, sanitation, employment, and inequality.
 - Combines both metropolitan and small cities
 - Involves primary data (surveys/interviews) and secondary literature.
 - Includes socio-economic and governance aspects.
- **Limitations**
 - Constricted geographical range might not account for all Indian cities.
 - Time and resource limitations may restrict sample size and field visits
 - Based on self-reported data which might include response bias.
 - Variables such as mental health or violence based on gender might be underreported.

Review of Literature

- **Nitish Kumar Singh, Geeta Devi & Mahendra S. Nathawat (2022)** Examined poverty and urban slum vulnerability across Indian states based on NSS and BPL data, and found ~29% of Indian slum dwellers vulnerable and poverty high in some states
- **Shruti Vaishampayan & Sanjukta Bhaduri (2022)** Examined multi-dimensional poverty among Delhi slum migrants, noting persistent deprivation in water, sanitation, and health services despite income increases
- **Manasi S., Malini L. Tantri et al. (2023)** Discussed civic leadership challenges in colonial Ahmedabad, tracking exclusion of peripheral voices and low rates of participation in public governance—particularly in communal cities
- **Moitree Bhattacharya (2024)** Explored affordable housing in Delhi, critiquing market-led planning that exacerbates segregation and worsens subaltern urban groups' quality of life
- **Chandana Sarkar, Bimal K. Kar et al. (2024)** Comprehensively analyzed the gendered aspects of housing rights in Indian cities, exploring how social norms and legislations restrict fair access to housing for women
- **Snehashish Mitra & A. G. Baruah (2024)** Assessed urbanization issues in India's hill regions, highlighting infrastructural, housing, and climatic vulnerabilities of inhabitants

- **ORF Study (2023/24)** – "A Tale of Three Cities" Detailed spatial segregation along caste lines and migration status and its contribution to unequal access to municipal services in cities such as Ahmedabad and Pune
- **Aravalli urban forest study (2024)** Although not formally social, this Gurugram case does underline environmental strain affecting civic well-being and access in urban communities
- **Rahul Goel (2022)** Examined gender mobility gap in urban India, which concluded that 53% of women never went out of the house on an average day compared to 14% of men, hugely restricted access to employment and public life
- **R Vaidehi, A. Bheeramshwar Reddy & Sudatta Banerjee (2021)** Examined caste-based digital divide in India, which found deep-rooted inequality in access and digital skills among underprivileged caste groups
- **Rajesh Shukla's NCAER research (2015–2021)** Established comprehensive national datasets measuring urban well-being, inequality, regional disadvantage, and middle-class indicators critical to urban social study
- **Indian Institute for Human Settlements / Uppsala Conf. Papers (2024)** Panel on urban marginalities discussed sanitation, municipal access, gendered labor—e.g., women laborers in Ahmedabad marketplaces
- **NIUA "Urban India" journal series (2024)** Featured papers on resilience through local ponds, public participation planning in Andhra Pradesh, indicating participatory gaps in Indian urban policy
- **NIUA "Urban India 2019" Patil & Raj (2019)** discussed governance shortcomings in Karnataka/Telangana cities—emphasis on water and sanitation delivery gap in marginalized districts
- **Varun Gandhi (2023) Book** The Indian Metropolis offers an integrated critique of Indian cities, chronicling poverty, inequality, crime, planning failures, and exclusion—grounding social issue contexts

Research Methodology

- **Research Design**

This research has a descriptive and exploratory research design for critically analyzing the common social concerns in cities. The study seeks to obtain the perceptions, experience, and problems of city dwellers in terms of housing, sanitation, employment, health, and security. Data derived from qualitative and quantitative (percentage) findings are employed, emphasizing primary data gathered through structured interviews and surveys.

- **Population and Sample Size**

The population of interest consists of urban dwellers from five zones of a metropolitan city. The sample frame comprises 200 respondents equally divided among the five zones (i.e., 40 from each zone), making it representative in terms of gender, age, income group, and occupation.

- **Sampling Method**

The survey employs purposive sampling in the selection of households from neighborhoods recognized for undergoing unique urban problems (e.g., slum settlements, industrial peripheries, middle-income colonies, old city areas, and urban peripheries). Random sampling was applied at each neighborhood to select individual respondents.

- **Data Collection Tools**

- Structured questionnaires with few open-ended and closed-ended questions
- Personal interviews
- Field observation
- Photography for documentation (optional)

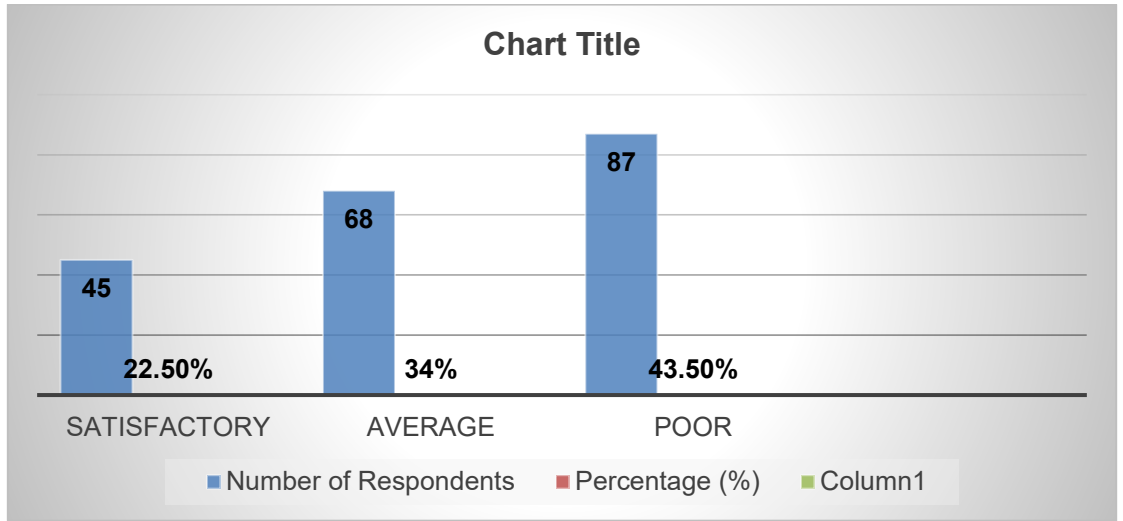
- **Data Analysis Techniques**

- Percentage-based analysis devoid of the application of sophisticated statistical tools.
- Data is depicted via tables and interpretative description.
- Dominant responses and trends are the subject of identification.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Perception of Sanitation in the Locality

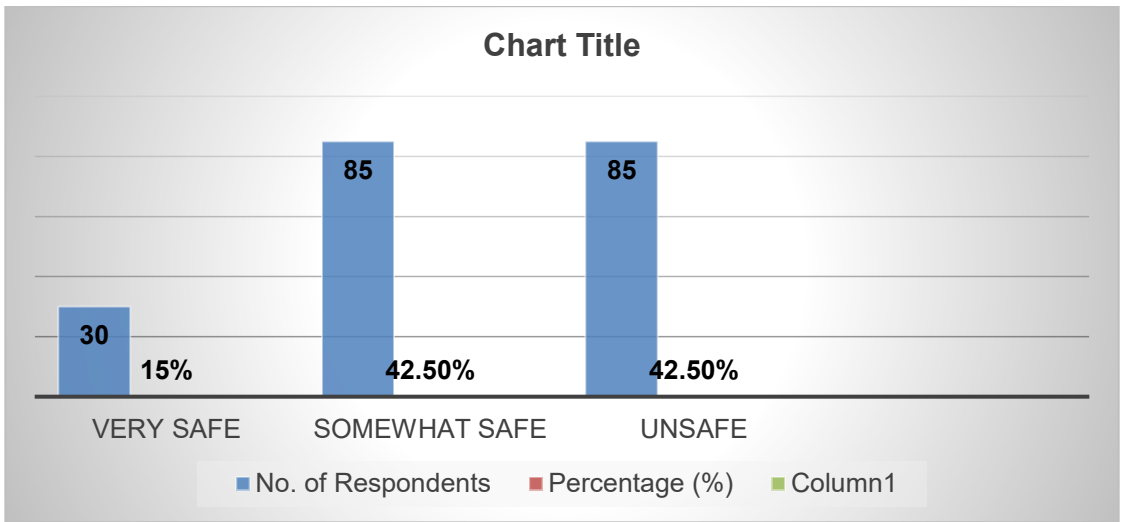
| Response Type | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Satisfactory | 45 | 22.5% |
| Average | 68 | 34% |
| Poor | 87 | 43.5% |



Interpretation: A significant portion (43.5%) of respondents rated sanitation as poor, indicating a major area of concern in urban governance.

Table 2: Level of Safety and Security Felt

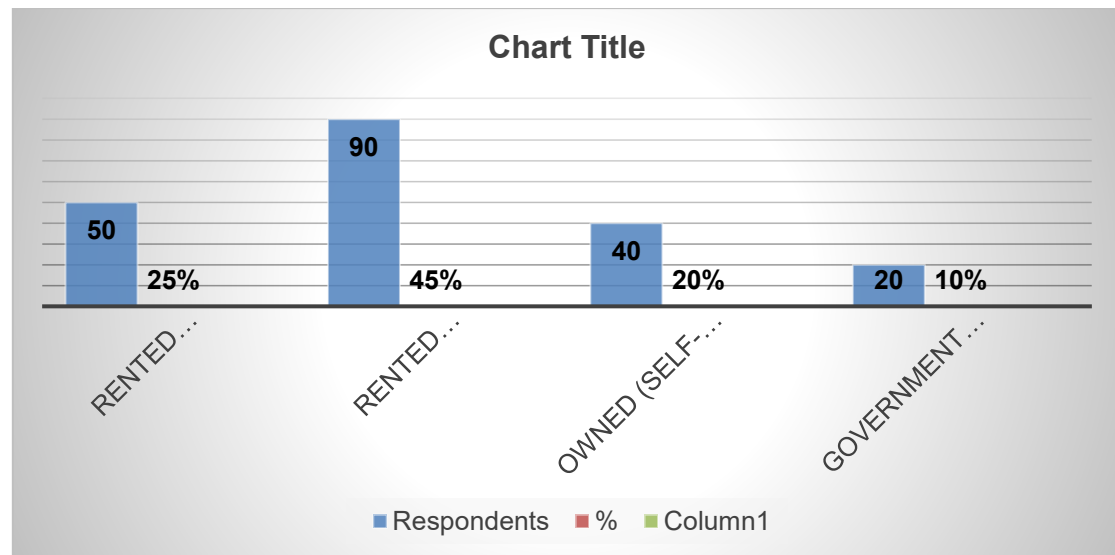
| Response | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Very Safe | 30 | 15% |
| Somewhat Safe | 85 | 42.5% |
| Unsafe | 85 | 42.5% |



Interpretation: Only 15% feel very safe, while 85% experience insecurity, suggesting gaps in urban policing and street lighting.

Table 3: Access to Affordable Housing

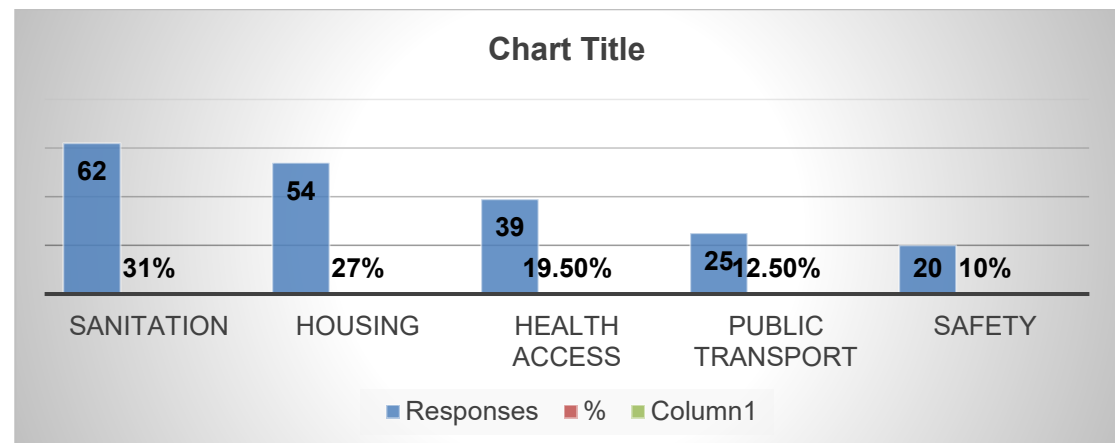
| Housing Status | Respondents | % |
|--------------------------|-------------|-----|
| Rented (formal) | 50 | 25% |
| Rented (informal/slums) | 90 | 45% |
| Owned (self-constructed) | 40 | 20% |
| Government provided | 20 | 10% |



Interpretation: Nearly 45% live in informal housing, reflecting high dependence on substandard rental accommodation.

Table 4: Primary Social Concern Identified

| Issue | Responses | % |
|------------------|-----------|-------|
| Sanitation | 62 | 31% |
| Housing | 54 | 27% |
| Health Access | 39 | 19.5% |
| Public Transport | 25 | 12.5% |
| Safety | 20 | 10% |



Interpretation: Sanitation and housing dominate public concerns, accounting for 58% of primary issues.

Findings

The research shows that urban regions still experience multi-layered social problems that have a direct impact on quality of life. The most serious issues the respondents pointed out were bad sanitation (43.5%), poor housing (45% in informal tenancies), and lack of public safety (85% feel only somewhat safe or unsafe). There is also a perceived discontent with public services including garbage collection, sewage systems, and clean drinking water. A majority of the urban poor remain without access to low-cost and formal housing options, which forces them into squalid rental housing in slums. Women and the elderly felt the least secure. The majority of the respondents were of the opinion that they had insufficient access to public healthcare, which becomes a problem in slum clusters. Underemployment and increased competition were mentioned by the youth as becoming issues since they have limited employment opportunities. This is indicative of systemic urban planning gaps, in implementation, and social infrastructure.

Conclusion

The study concludes that urban centers, though opportunity nodes, are still beset by long-standing social issues. A major chunk of the population in urban areas continues to not have access to essential services like sanitation, safe housing, and quality healthcare. Infrastructure might be on paper, but it is ineffectively implemented in slum areas. Urban planning appears to be serving majorly formal sectors, while informal population is ignored by policy. Security, especially for women and senior citizens, is threatened with inadequate lighting and a lack of police deployment. The research also brings to light the disconnect between public policy and on-ground scenario, where welfare programs fail to reach the targeted beneficiaries owing to bureaucratic red-tape or ignorance. There is a necessity for participatory governance where local community participation exists in the planning and implementation process. Without solving these generic social ailments, the philosophy of sustainable urban development remains unfinished. The results emphasize the necessity for comprehensive, inclusive, and locally tailored city policies.

Recommendations

- Encourage community-based sanitation monitoring with ward-level accountability.
- Design affordable housing plans with public transport integration.
- Enhance public safety features such as streetlights and CCTV coverage.
- Initiate awareness campaigns regarding public health services and schemes.
- Deploy mobile health clinics in underprivileged localities.
- Engage urban local bodies and NGOs in participatory governance.
- Organize quarterly urban audits to monitor progress and challenge

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