

# Safe Neighborhood for Adolescent Girls: The Case of Urban Dense Kampong In Yogyakarta City Center

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the percentage of adolescents living in urban areas is increasing, including in Indonesia. Unfortunately, urban planning and design are very limited in involving the perspective of youth, including the provision of safe public space. This paper is concerned with understanding safe public spaces from the perspective of adolescent girls. This paper aims to explore whether the neighborhood, specifically its public spaces, according to the girls' perspective is safe enough by using a case study approach with the case of a dense organic neighborhood in the city of Yogyakarta, Kampong Code. The information was obtained by observation, forum group discussion (FGD), and also by conducting a safety walk with local adolescent girls. This paper found that although from a normative perspective, public spaces in the neighborhood are considered as not safe enough, because they were familiar with this condition, they tend to perceive that as a usual situation.

**Keywords:** safe space; public space; adolescent girl; kampong

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence as a dynamic phase of development in an individual's life is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood characterized by physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Neither children nor adults, the distinctive needs of adolescents are often not addressed, including their access to particular spaces such as public space that is capable of accommodating their activities. The use of public space by adolescents is often considered to have a different conception of values from adults, therefore, also assumed as negative things. Nevertheless, the existence of public space has an important role in adolescents' growth. Public space becomes a place of social interaction and the development of their social identity.

Meanwhile, the recent high and uncontrolled rate of urbanization has created chaotic settlement patterns with a very low share of public space, including those that occur in urban kampong as organic settlement that has irregular physical characteristics (CABE, 2004). In line with this, the quality of some public spaces also decreased, causing some issues, one of which is associated with a sense of safety in public spaces. In conditions considered unsafe, several studies have suggested that women are more vulnerable than men. (Carmona, Magalhães & Hammond, 2008; Gehl, 2011; Jagori, 2011; Johansson, Laflamme & Eliasson, 2012), and among women, adolescent girls who have emotional instability and frequently visit new places are more affected than adult women (Johansson, Laflamme & Eliasson, 2012). Furthermore, adolescent girls' perceived safety in public spaces will influence their physical activity and autonomous mobility within or over their neighborhood.

By the description mentioned above, this study aims to explore the perceptions of adolescent girls living in an urban kampong (Kampong Cokrodirjan) in using public spaces within their neighborhood, to find out whether they also have a sense of safety in their kampong which is considered as a safe neighborhood (with a low crime rate).

### **Defining Public Space and Its Activities**

Some authors define public space by distinguishing it according to several issues, including the ownership of the space, control, access, and the use of the space (Loukaitou, 2006), and also its scope. For this paper, the definition of public space in the neighborhood will limit its scope, access, and use. In this case, the discussion of public space will only encompass external public space (outside/open space), consisting of the built and natural environment, which is freely accessible to the public, thereby generating active and passive social behavior.

1. The paper must be a real work of the author Necessary activities, which are activities that we have to be involved in regularly, such as walking to work or school, shopping, etc.
2. Optional activities, which can be adjusted to our desires and if only the situation allows, such as walking around the neighborhood, sitting and sunbathing, etc.
3. Social activities, depend on the existence of other people in public spaces, such as communal activities, children playing, talking to each other, etc. Passive contacts like hearing as well as seeing are also considered social activities

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- a. Related to the use of open public space, activities could be divided into three categories (Mehta, 2014): Necessary activities, which are activities that we have to be involved in regularly, such as walking to work or school, shopping, etc.
- b. Optional activities, which can be adjusted to our desires and if only the situation allows, such as walking around the neighborhood, sitting and sunbathing, etc.
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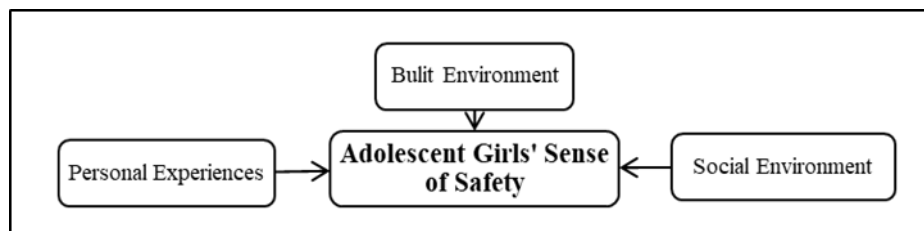
Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the quality of public space. They propose that there are several elements to measure its quality. One of them is safe or providing a sense of safety (Loukaitou, 2006; Mehta, 2014; Ratnayake, 2013; Setiawan, 2010). Lack of safety or perceived safety in using public space could lead to a decrease in space inclusiveness. However, the perceived safety may not always correlate with the actual safety rate.

The sense of safety which will be assessed in this study is not only limited to fear of crime, but also to all the possibilities of any threats, such as physical or verbal harassment, a conflict that is likely to happen in the use of space, or traffic injury. In brief, any kind of

physical and social factors which enable the adolescent girl to feel safe in public spaces will be discussed.

Activities carried out in public spaces have an important role in determining the perception of space (Mehta, 2014). However, in addition, for adolescents, specifically adolescent girls, perceptions of public space could be affected by a variety of different factors, such as their experiences, the influence of parents, peers, and various aspects of youth culture (Carmona, Magalhães & Hammond, 2008). In general, there are at least three factors that influence the sense of safety when using public spaces, consist of:

1. Built environmental
2. Physical characteristics of a place can form our perception as well as determine our behavior in using space. These consist of infrastructure elements, such as quality of lights, maintenance of spaces (including the availability of natural surveillance), state of the street/pathways, and other visual landscape or environment features (Jagori, 2011; Setiawan, 2010; UWomen, 2017).
3. Social environmental
4. Social environmental factors are related to the characteristic of people in public space, such as the kind of people and how they use the space, and also the sense of community in the neighborhood (UWWomen, 2017). In addition, social incivility, such as unsupervised dogs, rubbish, and juvenile delinquency could also generate a perception of unsafe (Gehl, 2011).
5. Personal experience.
6. These encompass experience and memories relate to the particular setting which produces mental maps of unsafe places, including familiarity with an environment. It is also undeniable that sometimes warnings from parents or police regarding some places that should not be visited could also trigger the feeling of unsafe (Gehl, 2011).

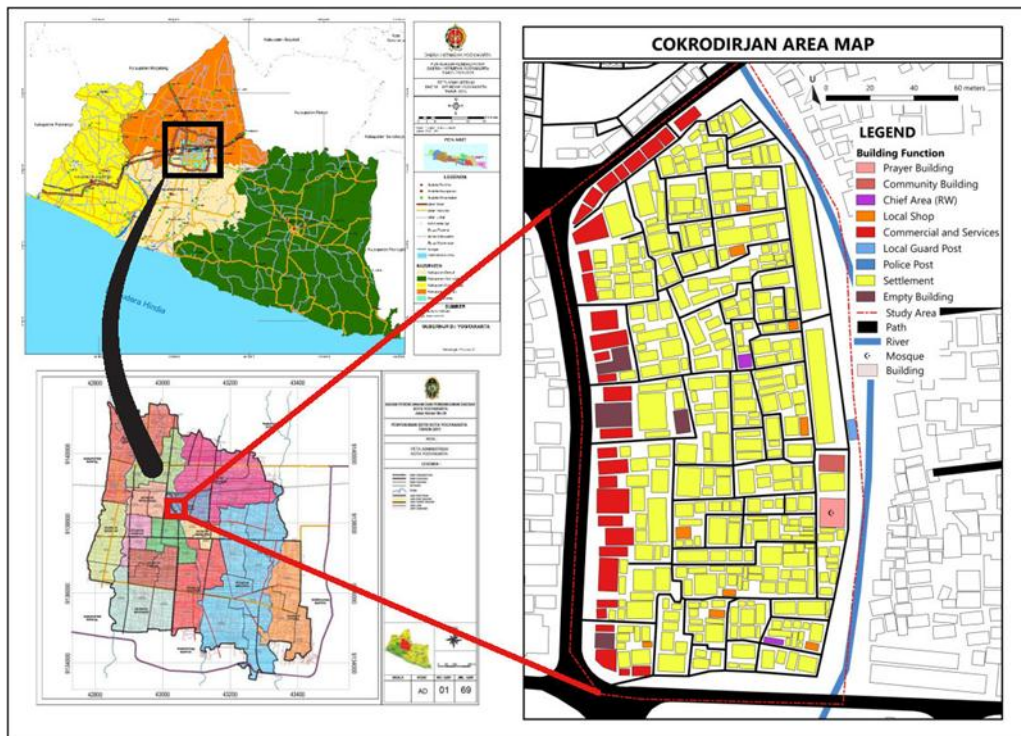


**Figure 1.** Factors Influence Adolescent Girls' Sense of Safety

## METHOD

### Case Study

Kampong Cokrodirjan has a unique spatial character due to its proximity to the activity center of Yogyakarta City, namely Malioboro. It is a settlement neighborhood located along the Code Riverbank, hence physically having diverse contours. As a typical kampong, this area also has a high level of building density with narrow alleys in it. Within the neighborhood, besides organic settlements, there is also two vertical housing provided by the government for low-income people. This increases cultural diversity in Kampong. This area is also known as a residence for people who work in the informal sector.



**Figure 2.** Map of Study Area

## Methods

Two distinguishable different methods, Focus Group Discussion and Safety Walk are used in this research.

### 1. Focus Group Discussion

Two focus group discussions were conducted with a purposeful sample of 13 – 18 years old adolescent girls living in the study area. By that age, most adolescents tend to be free to explore their neighborhoods independently. The focus group was considered a suitable method since the adolescent girls, as the subject of this study, knew each other and discussed common environments and experiences. Thus, they could collaborate in building a general understanding of a certain issue or even contradict each other. In addition, this method was chosen because of the possibility that when in a group, they would be more likely to share particular experiences and feelings they could not share in individual interviews.

In the discussion, participants were also asked to do a safety mapping process to give a brief description of where the location they considered unsafe spots in their kampong. The result of this process will be used as a primary note in conducting a safety walk later

### 2. Safety Walk

Safety Walk is a participatory method of exploring elements of public space that contribute to creating a sense of safety and vulnerability (Setiawan, 2010). This is a simple process that can be done by walking through a place that the subject is familiar with and assessing the factors which make the place feel safe or unsafe. The safety walk method used in this study was adapted from the Women Safety Audit guideline published by Jagori in collaboration with UN Women (Wekerle & Whitzman, 1995).

Since the size of the observed area is still within walking distance, the safety walk route covered all roads and alleys within the kampong. The safety walk was conducted

just before the dark to see the different use of public spaces between day and night. Some parameters were assessed, including the quality of light, availability of natural surveillance, the presence of people, maintenance of the area, state of the street/pathways, cleanliness, gender diversity in using the area, and the feeling that arises from being in that place.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Adolescent Girls' Activities in Public Space

Adolescent girls in Kampung Cokrodirjan described that most of them tend to use public space not as a place to hang around with their peers, but only as a place to be passed when heading to a particular place. This is reasonable, considering that not much open public space such as a park is available within the neighborhood because of the high density of the building. Based on our observation, there are only two spots that can be referred to as open public spaces: between two vertical house buildings and near the mosque. The first public space is in an abandoned condition, while the second is particularly to be used by adult men.

In contrast to small children who use wider alleys for playing, these girls prefer to gather indoors rather than outside. However, some groups of girls (ages 13-15) sometimes walk around their neighborhood aimlessly. While those who are older prefer to do more activities outside Kampong.



**Figure 3.** The Process of FGD and Safety Walk

### Possibility of Threats Faced by Adolescent Girls in Their Neighborhood

Being safe and feeling safe are two distinct concepts. In this case, feeling safe is an emotional concept, part of the mental map that is formed due to experience combined with support from the surrounding environment. The sense of place that each person perceives can be varied from the others, therefore the outcome will be very subjective.

The results of this study represent that there are several possible sources of threats when adolescent girls carry out activities in public spaces within their Kampong. Based on their discussion, they considered these things as "threats" since these could hinder their sense of safety and make them uncomfortable to be in that place or when just passing through it. Common issues that emerged in the discussion were the lack of lighting or dark alleys, as well as abandoned buildings.

Those potential threats can be divided into two groups, consisting of :

#### 1. Physical Issues

Physical issues here refer to infrastructure or built environment aspects. The safety walk method used was very useful in emphasizing these issues, to identify any tangible elements that arouse their unsafe perceptions.

The first issue that appears to be the most important for generating a sense of safety for adolescent girls is lighting. They already knew very well which alleys/paths have poor lighting and were afraid that something unpleasant might be happening when they pass through, notably when walking alone at night. Besides, there are also some alleys which are considered dark even though during the day, due to their location between two big high buildings and without windows. It indicates a lack of natural surveillance of the surrounding area. They feel insecure, especially if there are strangers (mainly men) crossing together. Regardless, they prefer other routes to avoid these alleys. In the other words, the safety principle of "seen and to be seen" does not apply to this issue.

Similar to the effects of lack of lighting, the second issue agreed upon by the girls was the presence of abandoned buildings. There is several abandoned building in the area, mostly located on the edge of the main road (Mataram Street), and only one within the neighborhood. The girls would prefer to keep away any locations that are poorly maintained because they appear quiet and do not have sufficient light. Regarding this, there was something unique about their statement, which may not be included in western literature, that abandoned buildings were perceived as unsafe because of scary stories related to ghosts in that place.

The state of streets/pathways becomes the third issue that emerges and affects their sense of safety in using public space. More specifically, this relates to their personal experiences. Two different types of streets/pathways which they are not interested in passing through are steep roads and slippery roads. Since Kampung Cokrodirjan is located on the banks of Code River, its landscape varies in contours, hence affecting the slope of the street/pathway. For girls, they indicate that the steep road takes longer to take and increases their anxiety, mainly at night and in quiet circumstances. Meanwhile, the fear of falling made them evade some slippery alleys in their surroundings.

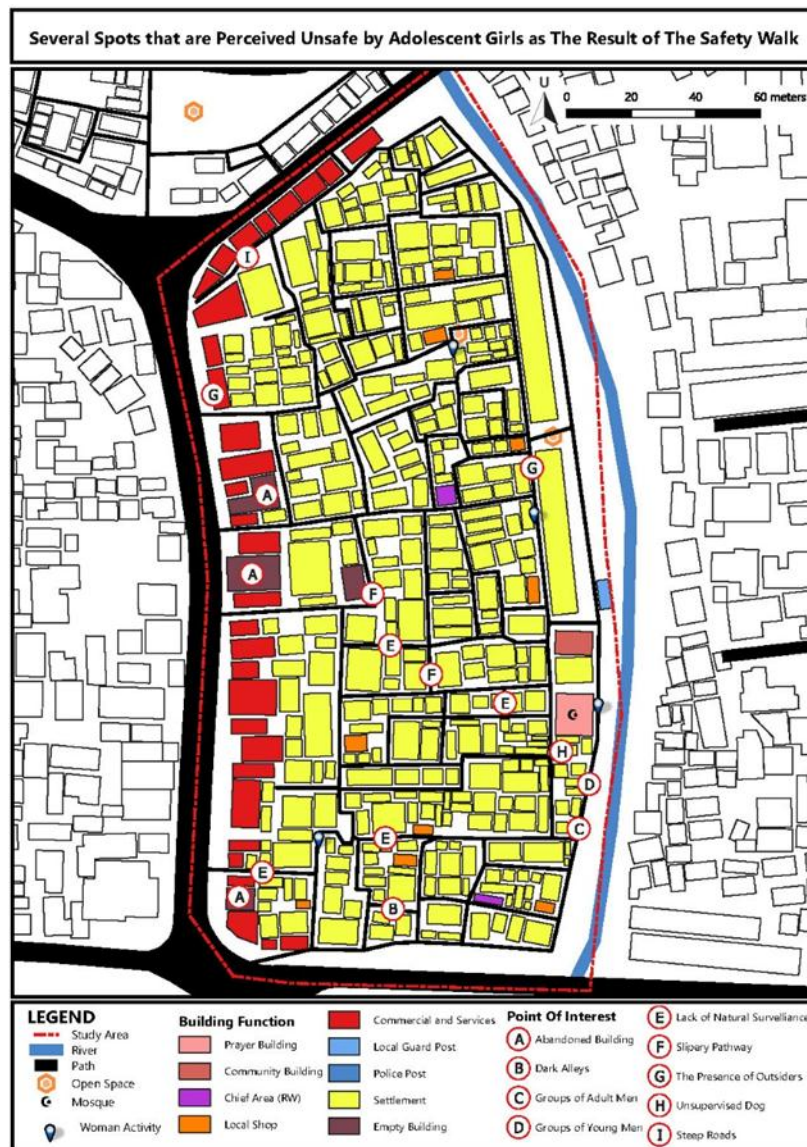
## 2. Socio-cultural Issues

Some studies mentioned that in public spaces, the presence of people could increase the perception of safety (Loukaitou, 2006). But on the contrary, it turns out that certain groups of people could diminish of adolescent girls' perception of safety. It was recorded in Kampung Cokrodirjan that the social use of space has a significant impact on their sense of safety and inclusion. The presence of outsiders at some point makes them unease. Some of the girls had negative experiences related to strangers in form of verbal harassment, such as catcalling or passing comment. Ever since, they have become more vigilant when there are unknown persons loitering outside their environment, specifically if they are men and under the influence of alcohol.

Another issue is that the domination of the use of space by a group of adult men in some places also generates their discomfort when going through it. Even though they were familiar with these people, they prefer to use other places to perform their activities. Furthermore, the girls also encounter gender exclusion in using public space several times since a group of young men occupy certain areas and refuse to share. Some girls also mentioned that the existence of some unsupervised dogs roaming their surroundings scared them. Consequently, they have become accustomed to taking further paths to reach certain places.

As a wrapping discussion, indications emerged that although the girls perceive their neighborhood to be less safe, but with the familiarity of the spaces within Kampong, they can take precautions in order that these threats do not impede them from using public space.





**Figure 4.** Several Spots that are Perceived Unsafe by Adolescent Girls

## CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that safety perception has consequences for adolescent girls in using public space. For instance, the lack of sense of safety could influence the selection of the preferred route to go to school or when simply exploring the neighborhood. Even though place identity already constructs their perception and their familiarity of spaces, but the state of neighborhood yet could be improved to accommodate the girls' sense of safety, such as by improving lighting condition, increasing sense of community, and also providing shared public space.

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