

**ENCOURAGING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DRIVING TO ENSURE WOMEN'S
SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSPORTATION**

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Abstract:

Women's ability to drive vehicles is closely linked with their education, employment, health services, social empowerment, economic independence, and the use of their constitutional rights. Even though Article 19(1)(d) of the Indian Constitution gives every citizen the right to move freely throughout the country, the participation of women in driving for personal or work purposes is still very low.

Patriarchal beliefs in society, lack of safety, poor transport facilities, and difficulties in the licensing process affect women's driving ability and mobility. The purpose of this study is to examine and understand the issues related to women driving, transport systems, vehicle ownership, and the social and legal barriers in getting a driving license.

This research uses descriptive and analytical methods. It includes literature review, government policies, provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act 1988, state and central women transport schemes like Pink Rickshaw and BRTS women drivers, and survey responses.

There is a need for supportive policies, awareness, and safe transport systems to improve women's mobility at both social and legal levels.

Keywords:

Women driving ability, women empowerment, motor vehicle act 1988, transport safety and accessibility.

Introduction:

In India, especially in a progressive state like Gujarat, women are progressing well in education, employment, and social life. However, their driving ability and transport independence are still much lower compared to men. Driving is not just a personal skill for women—it is directly linked to their social empowerment, economic independence, access to healthcare services, and effective use of their constitutional rights. Article 19(1)(d) of the Indian Constitution gives every citizen the freedom to move anywhere in the country, yet in reality, women's mobility is still restricted due to patriarchal beliefs, poor road safety, limited public transport facilities, and difficulties faced during the driving licence process.

The need to improve women's mobility is closely connected with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality, because transport freedom allows women to participate equally in all areas of life. Similarly, the development of safe, inclusive, and accessible transport systems is a core part of SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which emphasizes making cities safer, more accessible, and gender-sensitive.

Even though India has introduced many initiatives such as the Nirbhaya Fund, Pink Rickshaw services, women-only buses, and the women-driven BRTS system in Surat, the availability of women-friendly transport infrastructure, safety measures, awareness, and legal support is still inadequate. The gender gap in mobility and driving continues to create barriers for women in education, employment, healthcare, and daily activities—making it difficult to achieve both SDG 5 and SDG 11.

Therefore, analyzing women's driving ability, transport safety, government policies, the Motor Vehicles Act, and the social–legal barriers affecting women is essential. This study aims to understand these social, legal, and safety factors related to women's driving and to highlight their role in women's empowerment.

Literature review:

1. The report “Women and Mobility: A Case Study of Bhopal, Gwalior & Jodhpur” written by Ankita Kapoor provides a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by women in these three cities, including insecurity in public transport, gender-based discrimination, poor infrastructure, lack of lighting and footpaths, harassment, the impact of poverty, and socio-cultural norms. The report includes survey data, focus

group discussions, safety audits conducted through the Safetipin app, and recommendations for improvements at physical, institutional, and policy levels. However, the report discusses only issues related to public transport and does not cover aspects related to private transport, which are included in this research article.¹

2. In the study titled “Young Women’s Perception of Safety in Public Buses: A Study of Two Indian Cities – Ahmedabad and Bangalore” authored by Meghna Verma, Nikhita Rodeja, M. Manoj, and Ashish Verma, the researchers focus exclusively on understanding the safety perceptions of young college-going women who travel by public buses, without examining the experiences or safety concerns of all categories of women passengers. In contrast, the research articles used in my study cover a much wider group of women— including college students, working women, businesswomen, and homemakers — thereby presenting a more inclusive and comprehensive assessment of women’s safety in public transport.²
3. The paper titled “Gender Sensitive Mobility Policies: Case Studies from Two Indian Cities, Kochi and Surat” is written by H. M. Shivanand Swamy, Shalini Sinha, G. P. Hari, and Dennis Jose. The paper mainly covers the participation of women and the transgender community, their mobility needs, safety and accessibility in public transport, various socio-cultural barriers, women-centric transport interventions implemented in Kochi and Surat, and successful practices such as Kudumbashree, Pink Patrol, and inclusion of women in the transport workforce, along with gender-sensitive transport planning models. However, the paper does not include any survey of women who use public transport, nor does it study transport-related legal cases or the Motor Vehicles Act in detail—though the paper refers to these issues in a general manner.³

¹ Kapoor, A. (2020). *Women and mobility: A case study of Bhopal, Gwalior & Jodhpur*. Safetipin & The Asia Foundation. <https://www.safetipin.com>

² Verma, M., Rodeja, N., Manoj, M., & Verma, A. (2020). Young women’s perception of safety in public buses: A study of two Indian cities (Ahmedabad and Bangalore). *Transportation Research Procedia*, 48, 3254–3263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trpro.2020.08.151>

³ Swamy, H. M. S., Sinha, S., Hari, G. P., & Jose, D. (2021). Gender sensitive mobility policies: Case studies from two Indian cities, Kochi, and Surat. *Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific*, 91, 1–13.

Objectives of study:

1. To assess the social views, beliefs, and attitudes about women's driving.
2. To assess women's safety while driving, their awareness of traffic laws, and their ability to follow these laws.
3. To study the legal support, policy improvements, and the role of the government and society needed to promote women's driving ability.

Research methodology:

In this research, a mixed method has been used to study women's driving ability from the point of view of women's empowerment. Both qualitative (theoretical analysis) and quantitative (percentage and charts) data were collected. Primary information was taken through a questionnaire and observation. Secondary information was collected from books, journals, government policies, government reports, state government initiatives, literature, authentic internet sources, and the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

Research problem:

In India, and especially in a progressive state like Gujarat, women are growing socially, economically, and professionally at a fast pace. But even today, the number of women who drive is much lower than men. Lack of proper driving training, safety issues on the roads, and low legal awareness create barriers for women to learn driving and to drive independently.

When women's mobility decreases, it directly affects their education, employment, access to health services, and other basic elements of women's empowerment. The ability to drive gives women independence, safety, better time management, and economic and social self-reliance.

However, there is still not enough research available on the problems, challenges, and legal support related to women's driving. Therefore, it is important to study the social, legal, and safety factors that affect women's driving ability and to analyze how these factors influence the level of women's empowerment.

Hypothesis:

4. Increasing driving training and legal awareness leads to higher participation of women in driving.
5. Improving safety facilities in public transport enhances women's mobility.
6. Government women-friendly policies encourage women's empowerment and their freedom to drive.

Motor vehicle act 1988:

Section – 3: Need for Driving Licence

No person is allowed to drive any motor vehicle on a public road without a valid driving licence.

Section – 4: Age Limits for Driving Motor Vehicles

A person below 18 years of age cannot drive any motor vehicle in a public place. However, after turning 16, a person may drive a motorcycle with an engine capacity not exceeding 50 cc, subject to the conditions of Section 18. No person below 20 years of age is allowed to drive a transport (commercial) vehicle in any public place.

Section – 5: Responsibility of Motor Vehicle Owners for Violating Sections 3 and 4.

The owner of a motor vehicle, or the person in charge of it, must not allow anyone to drive the vehicle if that person does not follow the rules of Sections 3 and 4.

Section 19 — Power to Suspend/Cancel Driving Licence

If a person repeatedly drives dangerously, drives under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or keeps breaking traffic rules, the authority can take strict action. Based on these repeated violations, the driving licence can be suspended for a period of time or even cancelled completely.

SECTION 66 — Public Transport Permit

A public transport vehicle cannot be operated without a valid permit.

Section 112 – Limits of Speed

This section empowers the Central Government, State Government, and local authorities to prescribe maximum and minimum speed limits for motor vehicles on different roads.

A driver must not exceed the maximum speed limit notified for that road.

Government may set different limits depending on vehicle type, road condition, weather, traffic density, etc.

Authorities must display traffic signboards indicating the speed limit.

Defence vehicles may receive exemptions under special circumstances.

Punishment (Section 183 applies)

First Offence: Fine up to ₹1,000 for light motor vehicles; ₹2,000 for medium/heavy vehicles.

Subsequent Offences: Higher penalty—up to ₹4,000 and possible disqualification of licence.

Section 129 – Wearing of Protective Headgear (Helmet)

Every person riding or driving a motorcycle shall wear a protective helmet securely fastened with straps.

Helmet must be of prescribed standards (ISI/BIS).

Exception: Sikhs wearing a turban are exempt.

2019 amendment: Children below 4 years are exempt, but safety harness is required. States may impose additional safety rules.

Punishment (Section 194D – 2019 Amendment)

Fine: ₹1,000 License disqualification for 3 months may be imposed.

Section 134 – Duty of Driver in Case of Accident

The driver of a vehicle involved in an accident has three mandatory duties:

1. Duty to Arrange Medical Aid

Transport the injured to the nearest doctor or hospital. Doctor must provide immediate treatment without waiting for legal formalities.

2. Duty to Inform Police

Inform the nearest police station within 24 hours about the accident. Provide written reasons if medical assistance could not be provided.

3. Duty to Inform Insurance Company

Driver (or owner) must provide: Insurance policy number, Validity period, Date, time, place of accident, Details of injured persons, Driver's licence number

Punishment

Violation of duties under Section 134 is punishable under Section 187: First Offence: Imprisonment up to 3 months or fine up to ₹500 or both.

Subsequent Offence: Imprisonment up to 6 months or fine up to ₹1,000 or both. (States often enhance penalties through traffic rules.)

Section 185 – Drunken Driving

A person is guilty of drunk driving if: Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is more than 30 mg per 100 ml, detected by breath analyses; OR The person is under the influence of drugs, impairing control over the vehicle.

Punishment (Enhanced by Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019)

First Offence: Imprisonment up to 6 months, or Fine of ₹10,000, or both.

Second/Repeated Offence (within 3 years): Imprisonment up to 2 years, or Fine of ₹15,000, or both.

Additional Consequences

- Suspension of driving licence.
- Vehicle impound in some states.

- Court may order mandatory alcohol-awareness program.⁴

Initiatives by the Central and Gujarat Governments for Women's Safety in Transportation:

- Nirbhaya Case 2012

On 16 December 2012 in Delhi, a young woman was brutally raped and assaulted in a bus. This incident created huge anger across the whole country and became a major national topic about women's safety. After this, the government started many initiatives for women's safety in transportation.

Nirbhaya Fund 2013

After the Nirbhaya incident, the Central Government created a special fund of ₹1000 crore for women's safety. This fund is used to develop safety measures in public transport like buses, taxis, and autos. These include installing GPS trackers and panic buttons in all public transport vehicles, CCTV surveillance, women's safety apps, the Safe City Project, and other safety facilities.

- Surat Municipal Corporation started the Pink Auto Service in 2017. It is completely



operated by women and meant only for women passengers. SMC provided driving training to women, helped them obtain driving licenses, and also arranged loans of ₹84,000 for each auto in partnership with Bank of Baroda. Out of this amount, 25%

subsidy is given under a Central Government scheme. In the initial phase, a batch of 70 women was prepared, out of which 15 women drivers were ready to start the service

⁴ Dave, R. B. (2023). The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 (in Gujarati), Gujarat Motor Vehicles Rules (Gujarat Motor Vehicles (Second Amendment) Rules, 2023), and The Gujarat Motor Vehicles Tax Act, 1958. Western Publications.

immediately. SMC also arranged work for them by assigning routes for nearby girls' schools. This initiative empowers women economically, increases their mobility, and creates a safe and respectful environment for them.

- On April 14, 2024, a pink rickshaw campaign was launched in Vadodara city by the



Alembic CSR Foundation.

- In Kevadia, about as many as 60 local tribal women have started operating e-rickshaws.



• Surat Municipal Corporation has taken an important step toward women's empowerment by giving, for the first time in Gujarat, a woman the opportunity to drive a BRTS bus. A woman named Nisha sarama is operating a 12-meter electric BRTS bus for women passengers on the ONGC–Sarathana route. Earlier, the city already had more than 450 electric buses running on 13 routes, out of which three buses are specially reserved for women.

Challenges:

- Lack of awareness:
Many women do not know about government services like Pink Auto or women-only buses.
- Costly and poor transport:

Public transport has long lines, overcrowding, not enough streetlights, no toilets, and less services for women. Because of this, women face many problems.

- Big gender gap in mobility:
Women go out less at night because they do not feel safe. Families also do not allow them to travel at night.
- Safety issues:
Women have faced teasing, bad comments, or physical harassment while travelling.
- Difficulty in reporting:
When harassment happens, filing an FIR or reaching a police station is difficult. Therefore, many women do not file complaints. Also, daily minor harassment is often normalized and ignored.
- Few women in transport jobs:
There are very few women drivers. Because of this, women feel less safe and less confident in transport.
- Policy gap:
Different states have different schemes. There is no single national plan, so implementation is not the same everywhere.
- Lack of personal vehicles:
Many women do not have their own vehicle, so they depend only on public transport. This makes it hard for them to travel for work or study.

Conclusion:

This study shows that the limited participation of women in driving in India is not just a result of personal choice, but is the result of the interrelated influence of social, cultural, economic and institutional barriers. Patriarchal beliefs, concerns about safety in public and private transport, lack of self-confidence, family-imposed restrictions and difficulties in obtaining a driving license significantly limit women's access to mobility, education, employment and economic independence. On the other hand, analysis of the survey responses shows that there is widespread support in society for encouraging women to learn to drive and there is also a clear acceptance of pink autos and women-run public transport services, indicating a conducive social environment for change.

Non-Doctrinal Research Work:

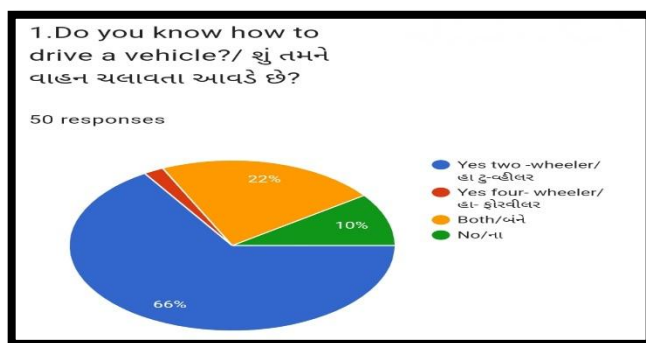
Method: Questionnaire

Mode: Google Form

Responses: 51

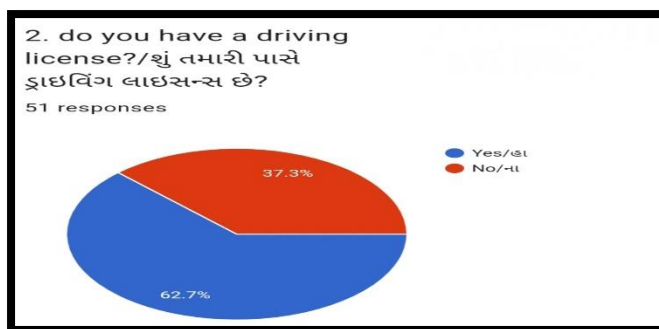
Analysis of chart no.1:

Most respondents (66%) can drive only a two-wheeler, while very few know four-



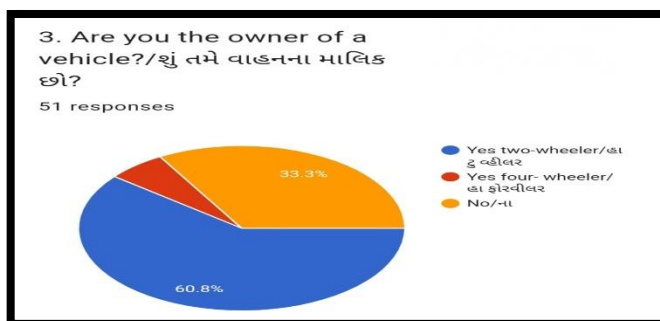
wheeler driving. Only 10% can drive both, and 22% cannot drive at all. This shows a clear gap in overall driving skills, especially for four-wheelers, indicating the need for better mobility training.

Analysis of chart no.2:



Most respondents (62.7%) have a driving license, while 37.3% do not. This shows that a sizeable group is still not formally licensed to drive.

Analysis of chart no.3:



Most respondents (60.8%) own a two-wheeler, while only 5.9% own a four-wheeler. About one-third (33.3%) do not own any vehicle. This shows that two-wheelers are the primary mode of personal transport, and vehicle ownership is still limited for many respondents.

Analysis of chart no.5:/

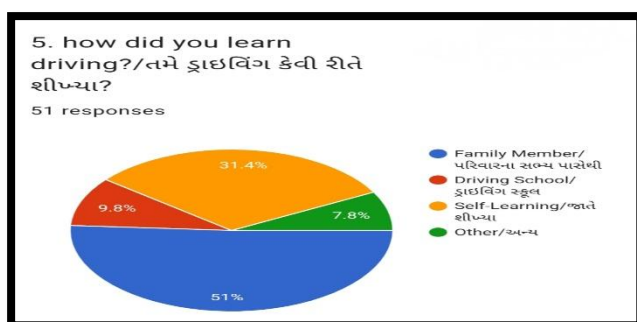


Chart No. 5 shows that most respondents (51%) learned driving from family members, while only 9.8% received formal training from a driving school. A considerable share (31.4%) learned by themselves, indicating that informal learning dominates and structured driving education is limited.

Analysis of chart no.6:

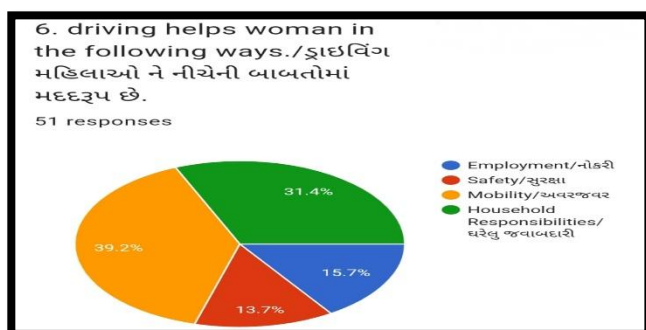


Chart No. 6 indicates that driving is perceived to benefit women mainly by enhancing mobility (39.2%) and supporting household responsibilities (31.4%). Comparatively fewer respondents associate driving with employment (15.7%) or safety (13.7%).

Analysis of chart no.7:

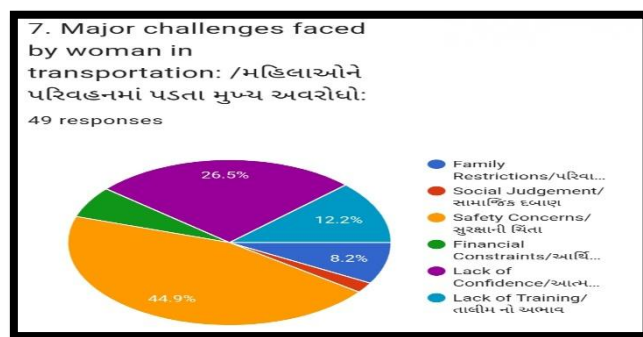


Chart No. 7 shows that safety concerns (44.9%) and lack of confidence (26.5%) are the major challenges women face in transportation. Family restrictions (12.2%) and financial issues (8.2%) are reported less frequently. This indicates that psychological and safety-related barriers are the most significant obstacles to women's mobility.

Analysis of chart no 9:

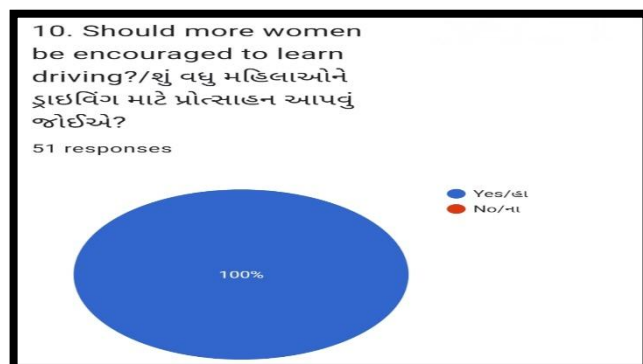
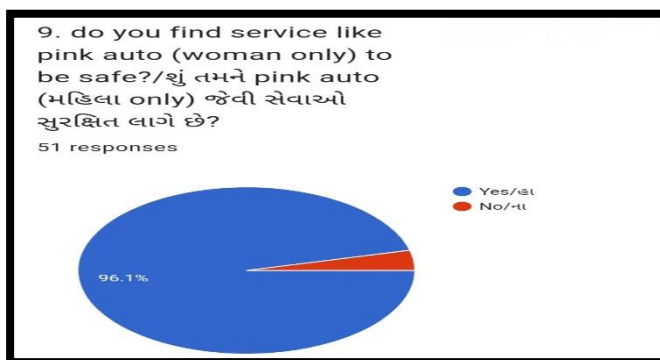


Chart No. 9 shows that an overwhelming majority (96.1%) of respondents consider women-only services like pink autos to be safe. Only a small fraction (3.9%) feel otherwise.

Analysis of chart no 10:



All respondents (100%) agree that more women should be encouraged to learn driving.

Recommendation:

- Conduct awareness campaigns for women:
The government and urban transport departments should expand services like Pink Auto, Pink Bus, women-only buses, and women-driven taxis. Positive public response—such as Surat’s first woman BRTS driver—should be used to highlight such role models and spread messages of women’s empowerment in society.
- Strengthen women’s safety:
Increase CCTV coverage, patrolling streets, safe bus stands, and auto stands. Improve helpline numbers and quick police response. A “request-stop policy” like Telangana should be implemented in other states as well.
- Encourage women drivers:
Provide driving training for women, give subsidy for vehicle purchase, and make the driving licence process more women-friendly.
- Create an easy complaint system:
When harassment occurs, there should be a facility to file complaints quickly through a mobile app or WhatsApp.
- Develop a unified national policy:
All states should follow uniform rules and facilities to improve women’s transport safety and mobility.

- Remove social stereotypes about women drivers:

Women are often judged for their driving ability, but research shows that women drive as safely as men, and often even safer. Policies should focus on increasing women's confidence and providing equal opportunities.

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