





PUBLIC SPACE IS

WORKSHOP NOTE

THE PUBLIC AND THE DIGITAL: EXAMINING THE SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF INCREASING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN INDIA

NING THE
NING THE
VSIONS OF
VDER-BASED
V INDIA





HOW CAN WE PUSH FORWARD THIS SOCIAL 4000 TOGETHER?





NGOE HAVE

ORGS





This note summarises discussions from a workshop on the spatial dimensions of genderbased violence in India, organised by Krea University in Chennai from 19-20 December 2022. The workshop examined the spatiality of gender-based violence and how it shapes participation in public spaces, with a critical reflection on the shifting nature of the public and the public-digital continuum. Over 25 leading experts, practitioners, academics, and representatives from civil society and policy participated in the two-day workshop to explore synergies across disciplines. On Day 1, participants reflected on the underlying drivers of violence in public and digital spaces and how they mirror each other. On Day 2, participants delved into the concept of masculinity (-ies) and how binary gender and spatial constructs influence our understanding. The workshop concluded with a deliberation on the role of law and preventive approaches in addressing gender-based violence and policy implications for designing more inclusive and safe spaces for persons of all genders.

Background

There has been an exponential rise in Gender-based Violence in the last decade, unmitigated by national and international policies and initiatives. The National Crime Records Bureau, in its Crime in India report 2021, documented a 15.3% increase in crimes against women, compared to 2020. One in every three women has experienced gender-based violence (Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018, WHO).

Purpose

The purpose of this workshop was to facilitate an exchange of diverse perspectives from academia, practice, and policy on the spatiality of gender-based violence in the Indian context, from a theoretical and policy lens. The workshop also focused on identifying conceptual and implementation gaps in policies, interventions, and legislations and mapping areas for further research inquiry.



Inaugural Session

The inaugural session set the context for the workshop, highlighting the importance of situating the discussions within an emerging liberal arts university setting and the need to examine the complex issue of gender-based violence from an interdisciplinary lens. Sharon Buteau from LEAD highlighted the importance of harnessing synergies and collaborating across disciplines and sectors to co-create solutions for such complex challenges. Bishnu Mohapatra highlighted the importance of creating a space to bring threads of thoughts together. Aparna Uppaluri touched upon the Foundation's work in the Global South and gave an insight into the collaboration with Krea University, highlighting the opportunity to produce autonomous knowledge, seed and bring forth new thinking, and engage with younger generations.

Aparna Uppaluri, (formerly, Program Officer, Ford Foundation)

Sharon Buteau, Executive Director, LEAD at Krea University

Dr Bishnu Mohapatra, Director, Moturi Satyanarayana Centre for Advanced Study and Professor of Politics, Krea University



Understanding Violence in Public Spaces: Offline and Online

Chair

Vijayalakshmi Chandrasekaran, Professor, OB & HRM, Krea University

Speakers

Laxmi Murthy, Head, Hri Institute for South Asian Research and Exchange

Dr. Niveditha Menon, Senior Research Advisor, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies

Poonam Kathuria, Founder-Director, Society for Women's Action and Training Initiatives



- While there has been a lot of emphasis on creating safer cities for women, majority of India's population still resides in rural areas and there is a need to widen the discourse on safety in public spaces. The boundary between public and private spaces gets further blurred in rural areas with poor access to essential services such as water and sanitation.
- Persistence of hegemonic masculinity is among the primary drivers of gender-based violence, along with economic factors such as rising unemployment, migration, and increased conflict as women come into conventional spaces occupied by men.
- Early feminist movements made an effort to visibilise violence that occurs in private spaces e.g., domestic abuse, sexual violence, etc. However, over time, there has been increasing state interference in private spaces, with the state defining what violence against women is, what the violation of bodily integrity is, and so on.
- Drivers of violence in digital spaces often mirror physical spaces, for instance, the marginalisation of gendered castes and minorities. In contrast, these spaces also offer immense potential for mobility and visibility, which can be a driving force for change.
- Storytelling and narrative change can offer a powerful medium to challenge dominant narratives.

The first session of the workshop examined the fundamental question of dignity and how violence in various forms impinges on dignity. In her opening remarks, Vijayalakshmi C highlighted how everyday acts of violence have blurred the distinction between public and private spaces and raise complex questions of 'where private ends and where does the public start.' While in popular discourse, 'public' is situated mainly in the cities, nearly 65 percent of India's population still lives in rural areas. In

the more extensive discussion on safe mobility and resource mobilization for women, cities are disproportionately represented, leaving behind rural areas and the women, particularly young girls inhabiting the spaces. Our conceptual understanding of public spaces and issues related to equitable access must extend beyond cities. Defecation in the open is an example of an act in a public space but a private to the individual. 'Is the pond where I wash the clothes a public or private space?' Poonam Kathuria also spoke of the social and economic divides that mediate rural spaces, such as caste and religion.

Examining the underlying drivers of violence, panellists stressed hegemonic masculinity and how it strikes back to quell changing femininity. Hegemonic masculinity has seeded a sense of entitlement that "I can do this" and manifests in unconscious responses to women occupying public spaces. Other emerging factors that influence violence include rising unemployment, migration, and an increasing gender conflict as women begin inhabiting conventional spaces occupied by men. On the other hand, initiatives that seek to advance women's employment opportunities do not always translate into empowerment. For instance, women working in factories are subject to intensive surveillance and unfavorable working conditions. In this context, speakers underscored the need to distinguish between the drivers and triggers of violence. For instance, alcoholism resulting from unemployment may be interpreted as a trigger rather than a driving factor.

Speaking of the history of feminist movements, Laxmi Murthy emphasized that the focus of feminist movements emerging in the early 1980s was to make visible and articulate acts of violence occurring in the private sphere, such as marital rape, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. The laws enacted subsequently have brought the state into the private spaces, into their sexual and reproductive lives. The state has defined what violence against women is, what the violation of bodily integrity is, and so on. The concept of privacy is also inherently linked with privilege. For instance, in conflict states, the armed forces have the right to enter private spaces and conduct searches

Reflecting on the construct of digital spaces and violence therein, speakers emphasised that the drivers of violence in the digital world often mirror physical spaces, e.g., marginalisation of genders, social castes, and minority groups, and moral policing of 'outspoken' women. However, digital spaces also offer immense potential for mobility, which can be a driving force for change. In this context, Laxmi Murthy raised an

important question: "What really has changed then if we are going to have this whole arena of possibilities that also mirrors the same kind of marginalization and violence that we see in physical spaces?". Digital spaces have altered the age-old feminist slogan, personal is political and political is personal, to "personal is public." The presence of big tech corporations in the digital space adds another layer of complexity. While corporations have extensive surveillance powers, there is considerable legal ambiguity regarding data protection, user safety, and redressal mechanisms.

Women's representation as news subjects, particularly in mainstream news media, has dropped from 22% in 2010 to 21% in 2015, and further down to 14% in 2020, as indicated in figures released by the Global Media Monitoring Project. The figures are alarming as, on the contrary, there is an emphasis on bringing in the gender lens, which is adequately highlighted by women reporters, as stated by Global Media Monitoring Project.

Storytelling can help frame issues of genderbased violence in public spaces. However, existing narratives are firmly embedded in patriarchal mores and dynamics of power. Nivedita Menon posed an important question, "what kind of spaces we are engaged with when we talk about the public." The discussion of 'what kind of spaces' leads to concerns of privilege and risk, and the reflection of these concerns raise the question of whose privilege and risk we are referring to. Thus, the public space is a social construct, like gender, constructed by time and space.

Given the contested nature of patriarchy, it becomes imperative to understand how patriarchy operates in specific ways, which helps to unpack how violence works. Violence wholistically is about human interaction, emotions, ideologies, socio-economic conditions, and relationships. It has often been understood to share an affinity with patriarchy which obfuscates the understanding and meaning of both concepts. Simultaneously, paternalism allows women to exercise their agency and power, for example, through patriarchal bargains, enabling their desires to be fulfilled with little or no force.



Spaces and Violence:
Public Spaces as the
Primary Terrain of
(ontestation with
Digital Emerging as
(ounter/parallel public

Chair

Dr. Anita Gurumurthy, Founding member and Executive Director, IT for Change

Speakers

Bishakha Dutta, Co-founder and Executive Director, Point of View

Dr. Kalpana Vishwanath, CEO and Cofounder, Safetipin

Meera Sundararajan, Team Lead, Gender Policy Lab



- The essence of public spaces is shifting in nature, with digital spaces emerging as a counter or parallel public space. 'Digital' has been understood as all permeating spatial dimension that has destabilised notions of space and time and the idea of public and publicness.
- The absence of violence in rural areas from the public discourse and imagination is a cause for concern.
- The emergence of threats is a new form of violence rather than a precursor to violence, for e.g., threats against women expressing their views on Twitter. The hybrid nature of online spaces leads to the realisation of public, private, and personal simultaneously.
- Women are both hyper-visible and subjected to everyday harassment such as staring and, invisible at the same time, as seen in the absence of a gender lens in urban planning.

The second session delved into the shifting nature of public spaces. Chair Anita Gurumurthy posed a pertinent question on whether digital is a counter-public at all and whether its institutional and technological architectures point to its eminence as a counter-public. The characterisation and shaping of digital spaces will help us to understand their present form and how these may be conceived in the future. This entails linking techno-social, political, and juridical aspects of the digital that influence the discourse of these spaces. The presence of metacorporations complicates and compromises, to an extent, the idea of justice and leads to an entrenchment of power in digital spaces. The sociocultural space in digitality has to be studied, and the state's role and institutions become prominent here to actualize democracy and politics. In the process, it is invoking the ideals of feminist justice and initiating new constitutionalism to seize the complexity of the form and character of digital spaces.

The social norms that govern women's use of physical public spaces have permeated to digital spaces as well. As women are told not to go out at night, they are also told not to use mobile phones and social media. Every day violence also gets transferred. For instance, women in rural india receive blank calls on their phones - this phenomenon is uncommon in the Global North.

Moreover, the feeling of being public in online spaces has its share of complexity pertaining to accountability, as private corporations currently manoeuvre online spaces with limited control by the State. Community standards do exist to provide the necessary safeguards; however, they miss entirely the lived experiences of people in digital spaces, for example, women, trans and non-binary people. For instance, while Meta users have the provision to choose from over 52 gender categories, they are reduced and oversimplified to binaries to extract data for advertisements.

It is easy to say that violence in digital space is a violation of data privacy and not a violation of any human being facing GBV. Hence, data is taking precedence over human experience. For example, consent is critical from a feminist lens. When women complain about their intimate images being shared online without consent. It gets booked not under the provision for violation of consent but under obscenity provisions, under which women themselves are also seen as guilty of their actions. One of the central focuses should be on getting the body back into the picture when it comes to digital violence.

In the Indian city context, particularly the urban context, there needs to be a nuanced understanding of public and private spaces as homeless people have their homes (private sphere) in public spaces and women workers in solid waste management, their workplace is public which might pose a threat to them. The concerns of safety and primarily the perception of safety, along with gendered usage of public space, are obstacles inhibiting the presence of women in public space and their access to public spaces. Public toilets are a big concern for women as their usage depends on the location and lighting of the space. The general nature of violence against women in public spaces is the ongoing harassment that is mostly unreported, affecting their mobility pattern and the potential to avail opportunities.

There needs to be more visibility in these spaces owing to the infrastructural designs. Bus stops have a similar issue. All these public spaces result in threats. The last session of the first day leaves the audience with a question for them to reflect on, "what do bystanders do when harassment happens?" This is a meaningful change to be brought about in collective consciousness. to deepen not the presence but the utilization of public spaces by girls and women.

A few questions raised in Q & A round are: How can we visualise the project of Justice in digital capitalism as private companies incentivised by profit-making have allowed harmful content to be online? What are some of the safety enablers in the digital context? The bystander effect may play out in the digital context, so should we look at policing and data point of view or from a discourse point of view?

Across your different experiences as practitioners, how do you characterize the role of digital in the accelerated experience of violence and what is about the digital that is facilitating this acceleration, especially as there seems to be continuity between the existing patriarchal notions of power and experiences of surveillance that predates the digital?



Men as the other:
Understanding
(ompeting (laims
of Masculinity in
Interaction with Women
and their Femininity

Chair

Dr. Geeti Das, Assistant Professor of Politics, Krea University

Speakers

Amu Vinzuda, Thematic Director, Jan Sahas Social Development Society

Shilpa Phadke, Professor, Tata Institute of Social Science



- Gender is fiction in all these documents and spheres; even then, we continue to work with the gender binary given the complexity of everyday lives; this is an inherent paradox in policy and planning.
- There is a need to think beyond binaries, to think about masculinities in their pluralities and hierarchies. There is the problem of co-optation and displacement.
- Governing institutions such as planning bodies are inherently masculine with conventional power structures in place, often resulting in gendered outcomes. For instance, in public transport planning, cisgender men in engineering notoriously dominate.
- Another binary we need to shed when we talk about the construction of space is the public vs private.
- Women do not need safety to access public spaces but the right to take risks, which implies that their presence in the public space should not be questioned.
- Digital publics replicate the streets in the public space. Against this backdrop, masculinity has been understood as 'protection.' Thus, in the policy framework, masculinity needs to be contested and rooted in visions of citizenship, emphasising ideals of equality.

The third session began with a reflective question "What does looking at masculinity add to our understanding of all these other dimensions of violence and space that are not covered or revealed by a feminist analysis of women's experiences, and the experiences of gender minorities and sexual minorities." Masculinity plays a role in creating, maintaining, and restricting public spaces. There are numerous ways masculinity enacts violence and gatekeeping in everyday life. There are also masculinities operating in the institutions that structure and design space, especially

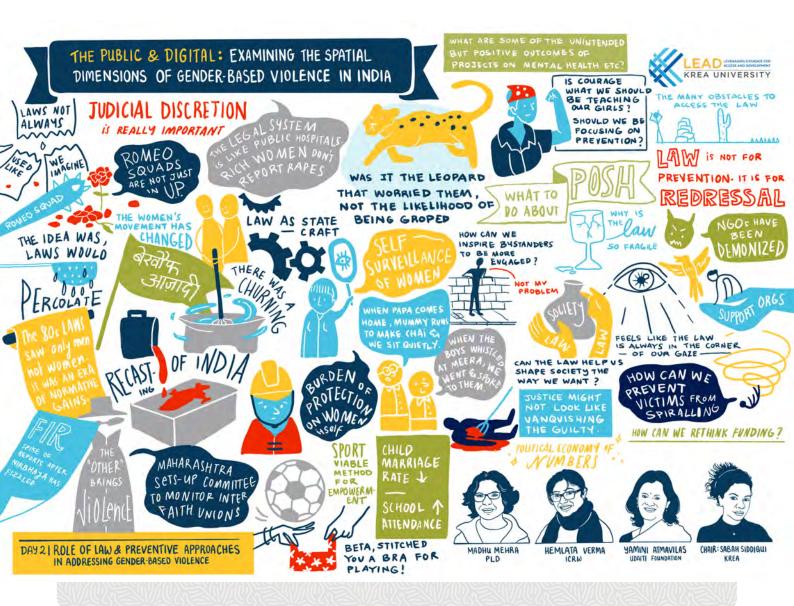
public transport which cisgender men in engineering notoriously dominate. Emotionality can be understood as part of social behaviour than linked to any particular gender identity. Violence against children and women is the highest and some core masculinity traits are important to understand gender-based violence. There is a knowledge gap in evidence-based research around boys and men, but owing to the efforts of feminist scholars and activists, for instance, Kamala Basin, discussion around the same started decades ago. This has led to positive engagement on the part of men, thereby questioning hegemonic sexuality and emotionality.

Caste panchayats, primarily headed by men still operate in villages, leading to further entrenchment of patriarchal norms that are passed on through generations. Gender as a construct is fiction, but in people's lived experience, gender and gender binaries are deeply entrenched. Moreover, gender binaries as they strongly play out in mainstream media and policy planning. The need of the hour is to focus on violence in private spaces and challenge the belief that public and private violence are binaries; instead, they are deeply tied to and often mirror each other. The structure of patriarchy within institutions such as the family allows private violence to be hidden and unspoken. Significantly, private violence also structures public violence, as evident in women's experiences of and in public spaces, mediated by anxiety about what their family members will think. For instance, curfews are imposed on young women in the name of protection and keeping them safe. In this case, while there is no overt act of violence, but at home, the young woman faces restrictions on mobility as a form of violence. Safety as a goal is compatible with patriarchy as it is sustained and manufactured through a protectionist approach.

In these scenarios, based on the logic of private violence, women were more concerned about the risk to their reputation than their physical safety. For example, women living in buildings habited by the same caste often asked their male friends to drop them a little far from their homes to avoid any risk to their reputation but knowingly taking physical risks to their safety. This example helps to understand how ideology operates to create mental maps leading to paths of movements for men and women to reflect on their reputation and their consequences. In public spaces, women experience their gender as the most visible and engaged form of their identity.

The intersectionality of binaries perpetuates class differences (oppositional binary between lower-caste men and middle-class women), notions of a good woman (to be protected) versus evil woman (source of contagion), and exclusions that prohibit a lower caste group of men from public spaces and are under constant

surveillance. Policy framing should be rooted in citizenship and how belongers and 'unbelongers' are framed with respect to all kinds of spaces. People of all genders and identities should be able to exercise the right to belong, for example, nonbinary, disabled people, hawkers, older people, and migrant men.



Role of Law and Preventive Approaches in Addressing Genderbased Violence

Chair

Dr. Sabah Siddiqui, Assistant Professor of Psychology, Krea University

Speakers

Madhu Mehra, Founder, former ED and current Head of Research and Trainings, Partners for Law in Development

Hemlata Verma, Senior Technical Specialist, ICRW

Dr. Yamini Atmavilas, President (Head Strategy & Research), Udaiti Foundation



- There is a psychoanalytic fear of accepting that someone closer can cause harm; hence, the anxieties around the other have taken a particular mold in the laws.
- Every space that opens up, digital or physical, is gendered with inherent power dynamics.
- The fear and incidence of sexual harassment in public spaces influence the behaviours of women and girls, and they continue to negotiate around it. Most girls and women feel that safety is solely their responsibility and often dress and act in a manner where safety as a primary concern is foregrounded.
- Preventative strategies are required to bring subtle yet necessary changes in the micro-processes of social norm-setting and the how violence plays out in everyday life.
- To make the journeys in the formal sector for women safer and empowering, we need to disaggregate the concepts of gender, violence, and young women in specific ways.

The last workshop session was titled "Role of Law and Preventive Approaches in Addressing Gender-based Violence." The spike in violence has not tapered off. The distinctive ideations have not translated into actions. The trope of stranger danger still exists. Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have taken decisive steps like creating strong committees against intercaste and interfaith marriages. The trope is to save women who have been swayed or are confused about their choices. This leads to a false narrative of families having the best interests of the women. Therefore, 'families' as an institution are not considered dangerous, invalidating the work of women's organisations, which have argued that the perpetrators of sexual violence are often known to the woman.

Apart from focusing on sexual violence, laws are being passed by states looking at interfaith marriages, and within interfaith, one is aware of what is under the scanner. It is India's journey, which is the feminist vision, and then there is the

new nationalist vision. The feminist engagement with the law started in the 1970s and early 1980s when there was no recognition of the category of women in law, and it wholly focused on men. This was the time of identifying offenses, naming offenses, getting legal recognition, and changing the normative understanding of what accounts as violence. Hence, justice was conceptualized in a novel manner, and it would trickle down in society. The building blocks have been established to realize justice in a gender-sensitive legal landscape. Different kinds of feminism are emerging, with their fissures opening newer areas of criticality.

Moreover, primarily women from poorer sections file rape cases; women from economically more robust backgrounds hardly file FIR. Thus, the legal system is like a public hospital now. Law changes must be coupled with a change in individual and collective mindset to bring the desired change.

Similarly, in policy, evaluation is hardly undertaken. Most of the laws are just there in the everydayness of lives and another entity that girls and women have to negotiate. It is essential to focus on the role of the executive, the pillar of the government responsible for the execution of laws. The implementation in the policy framework or even organizations working on gender-based violence does not measure the perception and fear of violence. When asked about attitudes toward gender-based violence, boys and men generally agreed that there should be restrictions on women's movements. Men and women both adhere to social norms.

Women have to shoulder the responsibility to protect themselves, and in case of violence, they did not report either because they felt it to be expected or embarrassing to tell. Moreover, fear of experiencing violence as they become visible in the wrong light upon reporting. ICRW runs two gender transformative prevention programs, Parivartan in Mumbai and PAnKH in Rajasthan, which use sport as a medium for young girls to mark their presence in the public space. The program accounts for profound changes in the mobility patterns of girls as it was through sports; they were introduced to playgrounds that earlier were missing in their mental maps, primarily focused on going to school from home and vice-versa. Apart from this, specific enablers such as language to express their body and bodily movements and their parent's permission to play helped build confidence, thereby increasing school attendance. A massive unintended consequence of the program was the positive influence on the mental well-being of the girls.

Young women can become sources of rural transformation, yet episodic incidents of sexual harassment make her question the strategy. For the family, it is these very young women through whom they look for relocation to deal with covid and rural distress. This leads to some profound interventions in the form of questions, "should then preventive measures be implemented to build courage in these young women or look at the systems?" "How do you bring a systemic solution that is tactical, quick, easy, and doable in a context that is diverse and separated." The whole question about prevention is turning it upside down and asking, "How does genderbased violence prevent young women from thinking, acting, or being different?".

While bystanders' intervention focusing on social good has been potent, the role of bystanders in disseminating violence through video recording has become problematic.

POSH law will complete a decade next year; however, given the poor implementation and conceptualization, one can decipher the fragility of the law and as well our inability to respond to the lack of adequate safety measures. How do you communicate that to young women from rural backgrounds entering the formal sector? For women, home is one of the primary worksites, and this fact remains unrecognised, even in the context of gig work. Gig work lacks security, offers poor wages and is poorly governed. Social building blocks for meaningful prevention and redressal are community-based interventions and collectives for women programmatic mechanisms that the development sector can bring into the picture. Hence, these institutions can become lasting public goods.

Annexure - List of Participants

| Akhila Krishnamurthy Kre Amu Vinzuda Jar Dr. Anandhi S Mai Anindya Mani LE, Dr. Anita Gurumurthy IT f | ternational Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC) ea University In Sahas Indicate Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) IAD at Krea University for Change i University /WAGE |
|---|--|
| Amu Vinzuda Jar Dr. Anandhi S Ma Anindya Mani LEA Dr. Anita Gurumurthy IT f | n Sahas adras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) AD at Krea University for Change i University |
| Dr. Anandhi S Ma Anindya Mani LE, Dr. Anita Gurumurthy IT f | adras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) AD at Krea University for Change i University |
| Anindya Mani LEA Dr. Anita Gurumurthy IT f | AD at Krea University for Change i University |
| Dr. Anita Gurumurthy IT f | for Change i University |
| | i University |
| | i University |
| Dr. Anjana Raghavan Sai | /WAGE |
| Aparna G IW | |
| Aparna Uppaluri For | rd Foundation |
| Bishakha Datta Poi | int of View |
| Dr. Bishnu Mohapatra Kre | ea University |
| Diksha Singh LEA | AD at Krea University |
| Fedrica Edin Brow Inte | rernational Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC) |
| Dr. Geeti Das Kre | ea University |
| Hemlata Verma ICF | RW |
| J. J. Rajendran UN | N Women India |
| Kalpana K IIT | Madras |
| Dr. Kalpana Viswanath (Virtual) Saf | fetipin |
| Karthik Rao Cavale Kre | ea University |
| Keerthana Ramaswamy LEA | AD at Krea University |
| Kutti Revathi Poe | et |
| Laxmi Murthy Hri | i Institute for Southasian Research and Exchange |
| Lekshmi Gopinathan Kre | ea University |
| Madhu Mehra Par | rtners for Law and Development |
| Madhuri Menon Bar | nyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM) |
| Meera Sundararajan Gel | ender Policy Lab, Greater Chennai Corporation |
| Dr. Niveditha Menon Cer | entre for Budget and Policy Studies |
| Poonam Kathuria SW | VATI |
| Preethi Rao LEA | AD at Krea University |
| Preeti Bawa LEA | AD at Krea University |
| Ramkumar Parameswaran LEA | AD at Krea University |
| Rashmi Mohanty IW | /WAGE |
| Dr. Sabah Siddiqui Kre | ea University |
| Sakthivel Arumugam LE | AD at Krea University |
| Dr. Shailender Swaminathan | AD at Krea University |
| Shailja Tandon LE | AD at Krea University |
| Shakhti S Pra | ajyna Trust |
| Sharon Buteau LE | AD at Krea University |
| Dr. Shilpa Phadke (Virtual) | SS |
| Steffi Cherian Ger | ender Policy Lab, Greater Chennai Corporation |
| Susanta Chakraborty LE | AD at Krea University |
| Swaeta Singha Roy LE | AD at Krea University |
| Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan Pra | ajyna Trust |
| Vaishnavi C Nathan Ger | ender Policy Lab, Greater Chennai Corporation |
| Vijayalakshmi C Kre | ea University |
| Yamini Atmavilas Uda | laiti Foundation |



LEAD at Krea University

LEAD is a part of IFMR Society with strategic oversight from Krea University.











7th Floor, B Block, IIT-Madras Research Park, Kanagam Road, Taramani, Chennai – 600113, Tamil Nadu.