Ethnicity, Gender, and the Performance of Urban Spaces in Multi-Ethnic Cities (Case Study: Zahedan City)

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The present study deals with the performance of urban spaces in Zahedan City by reviewing the problems faced by female citizens due to their ethnicities. As the citizens of a multi-ethnic city, women in Zahedan are basically exposed to two types of restrictions; the first stems from their gender while the second is rooted in their ethnic subcultural ideologies. It is important for female populations of multi-ethnic cities to have a positive sense of citizenship, particularly the women who belong to ethnic groups and bear a set of patterns and values, as well as next generation socialization, on their shoulders. According to official statistics, 16.5% of women and 10.8% of men in Iran suffer from depression; albeit, individuals over the age of 60 and women are more exposed to depression. During the past 26 years, the prevalence rate of depression has been doubled in Iran. Subsequently, conducting the present inquiry was considered essential as a result of weakness or disorder in the performance of public urban spaces in Zahedan. The population of this city has been increased from 17,500 to nearly 600,000 in a 60-year period (1956-2016), i.e. 32 times larger than the population 60 years ago. Part of the population in Zahedan consists of tribal immigrants who are unfamiliar with urban life, hence unable to properly interact within public urban spaces.

2. Review of Literature

Having an active social life reduces the risk of depression, particularly for women and retired individuals. In the majority of developing countries, urban spaces are unresponsive environments for the presence and social interactions of women. In cities with ethnic structures, such unresponsiveness exposes women to increased challenges and damages. Having conducted a study on the deeply divided city of Jerusalem, Jabarin and Hilly Hirsch (2019) showed that every city has a particular urban landscape of fear and security which is the product of spatial perception of fear and spatial result of power relations in cities. Qazal Reed (2003) argued that ethnicity and religion has a significant impact on women’s views on gender; religious Arab-American women believed in traditional gender roles more than others. Fanni and Vahedi Yeganeh (2017) analyzed quality of life indices in urban spaces of Sanandaj City; they found that according to women, the most desirable index was the sense of belonging, followed by accessibility, physical comfort, mental comfort, aesthetics, security, performance, safety, awareness, and participation. Mack and Jim (2018) demonstrated that lack of proper entrance such as the observation of undesirable objects like syringes or suspicious individuals such as possible addicts, thieves, or mentally unstable people in parks are key elements of fearful and worrisome emotions.

3. Method

The present inquiry is an applied study conducted using the descriptive-analytical approach; data collection was carried out using surveys. The target population of the study included 18-year old citizens who are mostly residents of the regions under examination (226691 individuals); sample population was indicated as 383.02 based on Cochran’s formula. Subsequently, 410 questionnaires were prepared for assurance. Data were collected using researcher made closed-ended questionnaires and sampling was done using two-stage random sampling. Data were analyzed via inferential statistic models including variance analysis, Chi squared model, Phi model, and cross sectional tables. The region of the study was Zahedan city where 7 districts in zones One and Five of Zahedan municipality were investigated. The selected districts consist of top level areas such as Daneshgah Blvd., Moalem Blvd. and Bozorgmehr Blvd. and districts with low levels of facilities such as Karimabad and its surrounding streets.

4. Results and Discussion

Forty nine percent of Balooch and 17.5% of Fars citizens have a literacy level of secondary school or lower. The significance of the relation between ethnicity and literacy was proved using Chi squared model. The apartment building residency rate for Balooch and Fars citizens were 30% and 45%, respectively. Results obtained from the Phi model point to the relation between ethnicity and housing. Citizens’ gender and purpose of travelling to districts showed shopping as the main purpose of 40% of women and 23% of men; meanwhile, the purpose of 39% and 54% of women and men was to go to work, respectively. Nearly 15% of both genders had recreational purposes while 5.5% travel for religious affairs. 40% of Balooch and 29% of Fars citizens believed that security in Zahedan is high to very high, compared to Mashhad and Tehran. According to one sample t test model, the citizens satisfaction value average was -0.297 compared to the test value of 3 at significance level of 0.000; citizens’ gender is effective in their presence and use of urban spaces. The relation between citizens’ ethnicity and perception of insecurity within urban spaces was tested using chi squared model and confirmed at significance level of 0.000.

The findings of this study are in line with a number of pervious research including Giddens’ theory (1996) on the distinction between cultural norms and values of ethnic groups, as well as the study by Goli, Ghasemzadeh, Fatah Baqaei and Ramadan Moghadam (2014) on the relation between women’s sense of security and physical and spatial factors. Results were also compatible with the study by Qazal Reed (2003) on the effect of ethnicity and religion on women’s views and gender roles along with Cao’s emphasis on various social groups (Cao, 2019). However, findings did not correlate with parts of Howard’s views (1999) in which gender is considered as the most important character factor in perception of security.

5. Conclusion

The performance of urban spaces in Zahedan city is significantly low. Furthermore, the effect of citizens’ gender on their use of urban spaces involves significant deterrence. Additionally, citizens’ ethnicity element significantly affects and restricts female citizens’ sense of security and the extent of their presence and use of urban spaces, particularly in women with ethnic sub-cultures. Insecurity perception index (due to lack of feminine urban spaces) is a function of citizens’ ethnicity which causes non-existent or weakened social participation, faded social identity, health issues, and mental problems. To prevent and reduce such damaging consequences, it is recommended to establish feminine urban spaces such as women’s parks and to provide, equip, and immobilize the present urban environment.

**Keywords:** Gender, Zahedan, Multi-ethnic City, Urban Spaces, Ethnicity

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