

# Challenges women face when trying to play in public spaces

**Access to public spaces is a fundamental right, yet for young girls, it remains a privilege. Playing outside with your friends and neighbours is a core and essential part of childhood that creates a way to form stronger bonds with your peers.**

MAHPARA FAATIN

Having grown up in an apartment building in Dhaka, I was never allowed to join my male peers to go outside and play. For me – as well as most other girls – we had to be creative and redefine what a “playground” meant. Sometimes, the corridor connecting all our apartments became our cricket field. At other times, the dining table doubled as a table tennis court and the paper ball was a necessary substitute to avoid breaking any of our mothers’ cherished glassware. On rare occasions, we would sneak upstairs to the rooftop to play badminton – constantly worrying about losing the cork to the ceaseless traffic ten stories below.

Even in this day and age, it appears to me that we keep regressing regarding issues centred around women. Our mothers often boast about how even a couple of decades back, they could spend all their evenings playing freely under the open sky. Why then were we denied that same freedom?

Maliha Muskan, a grade 11 student at Ideal School & College, Motijheel, says, “My mother would allow me to go play on the streets, based on the condition that I played where she could see me from the balcony of our home. Her focus would always be on what I was wearing. As a result, I had to constantly ask myself if I was covered up enough to be allowed downstairs.”

Evidently, another concern guardians often have is the unwelcoming and unsettling stares from strangers when women play in sportswear. Public spaces should be designed to be inclusive, yet they often fail to welcome women.

15 year-old student Nafisa\* states, “I was playing badminton early one winter morning at the Dhanmondi Lake Park. Both my older sister and I were covered from head to toe. We had to change courts at least four times because a couple of strangers kept on closely watching us play, snickering and exchanging glances at each other.”

For women, safety is a prerequisite for participation but even then, it is rarely if ever ensured.

A lot of women try to tackle this issue by playing in groups, that include their male friends, hoping it wards off unwanted attention. But that approach invites a whole new set of issues. Noushin Siddique, a student at Mastermind English Medium School



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recalls, “Playing with my male cousins was as good as not playing at all. They would never pass me the ball. As a child, I don’t remember a single time where I wasn’t assigned the *dudhbhaat* (inactive player) label.”

As it turns out, men often underestimate and even look down upon the athletic capabilities of their female counterparts regardless of how hard they work to prove themselves. In addition, the notion that men have to be present to act as a shield of protection for their female peers itself is defeating. After all, instances of women being assaulted or harassed by trusted

individuals are not unheard of.

Moreover, the patriarchal society sees no issue with adult men playing football in public spaces but sees middle-aged women playing sports in public as blasphemous. Even at family or corporate picnics, when all the men are assigned to play football matches, the ladies must make do with musical chairs. For many women, public spaces are not just areas for physical activity, they are battlegrounds for visibility, respect, and equality. Additionally, a lot of academic institutions don’t have proper playgrounds or allow students the free time to go outside and play.

Recent developments have seen some secure playgrounds pop up, but they remain accessible only to a few.

Access to public spaces is a fundamental right, yet for young girls, it remains a privilege. Playing outside with your friends and neighbours is a core and essential part of childhood that creates a way to form stronger bonds with your peers. It keeps you active and is perhaps the only way to help children discover their innate passion for a sport. Ensuring that girls are able to access and utilise public recreational areas without any hurdles is, therefore, very important. We must

make the existing public spaces more secure and implement measures for greater inclusivity. All that, however, will be dictated by addressing and changing the impositions that are perpetuated by patriarchy. Only then can we ensure that women’s enthusiasm to play is not met with exclusion.

As Maliha points out, “It’s not just about me. It’s about every little girl who dreams of playing freely, without fear or judgement.”

\*Names have been changed upon request.

Mahpara is freezing. Send her warm wishes at mahparafaatin@gmail.com

## DOOMSCROLLING AND ITS IMPACT ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Doomscrolling can overwhelm your mind, leaving you mentally exhausted and emotionally drained.

It can heighten feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and distress, which, in turn, may disrupt your sleep, diminish your appetite, sap your motivation, and take away the joy of activities you typically enjoy.

A study, published in the Health Communication journal, found that 16.5 percent of respondents from a survey of 1,100 people showed signs of “severely problematic” news consumption, leading to greater levels of stress, anxiety and poor health.

An August 2024 study published in Computers in Human Behavior Reports suggests that doomscrolling evokes greater levels of existential anxiety.

According to Nuffield Health’s 2024 “Healthier Nation Index,” the rising use of social media and the habit of doomscrolling may negatively impact the mental health and productivity of Gen-Z workers.

## Doomscrolling done right

**While doomscrolling may come at a price, which is often our own mental well-being, it’s not nearly as expensive as ignorance.**

ANICA BUSHRA RAHMAAN

With social media becoming a much-needed addition to our daily lives, the term, “doomscrolling” – the practice of spending excessive time consuming negative information or content that makes one feel sad, anxious, or angry through social media – has gained popularity. This is concerning, mostly due to the negative implications of doomscrolling which include mental fatigue, reduced sleep, and an overall degradation of your well-being.

However, with so much going on across the world – from wars to a general sense of feeling unsafe when stepping outside our houses – can we really afford to not stay updated with what’s happening around us? Even if staying up-to-date with these occurrences takes a toll on our mental health, can we turn a blind eye to it when the world is burning? What’s our minor inconvenience, in a bubble of privilege, to the suffering of Palestine, Syria, Congo, and so many other places and people?

When thought about through the state of the world, doomscrolling becomes a necessary alternative. However, we can take steps to make the process less overwhelming while being responsible in our quest to be educated.

**Knowing when to pay attention and when to ignore**

It is important to recognise which things are worth your attention and which are not when doomscrolling. Some individuals will continue to instigate chaos simply to remain a part of the conversation while others are content in their cocoon of delusion devoid of accountability.

While we cannot fully prevent it, we can, at least, curtail it by refusing to engage with their content. It will definitely be a difficult feat because unsolicited opinions are available in abundance.

**Ignoring the comment sections**

Social media comment sections are frequently a grey area. Of course, we are curious to know the perspective of others. The occasional comments echoing compassion and open-mindedness are validating. They instil a renewed faith in humanity, even when it is the bare minimum.

However, in several cases, comments only divulge the indulgence of ignorant people.

The sheer hatred and wilful unconsciousness

take up residence in our minds. Surrounded by consistent despair, our mind continues to cling to the whispers of the same tune.

**Turning to print media for your daily dose of information**

While no one can understate the notable role of social media and, in turn, doomscrolling, we cannot deny that social media, fraught with misinformation, distractions, and often surface-level information, is not without problems. Print media, thereby, can fill in the blanks, through its nuanced and verified information. Even when it was predicted to become obsolete, print media has stood the test of time due to its validity and well-presented thorough content.

Moreover, acquiring information through this channel enables users to grasp the full picture of a particular story. Through this, instead of resorting to instantaneous panic, they can actually gauge the extent of their reaction. In order to hold onto our sanity, media literacy is essential.

This isn’t to say that print media can serve as an alternative to doomscrolling, but rather a complement. Besides, given its nature, print media offers limited information at a time, unlike social media or online forums where you’re constantly bombarded with new information every hour, a lot of which is often unverified and panic-inducing.

In the modern era, life is a constant battle between clinging to a shred of

hope for the world we live in and trying to be a well-informed, functional person. Therefore, partake in doomscrolling if you must, but do so responsibly.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

