

Lefebvrean analysis of women lived experiences of the quality of residential spaces Milad Complex, Golshahr, Zanjan

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Abstract

Residential environments, as essential elements of urban settings, offer insights into the anthropological aspects of space through the interaction between objects and individuals. Women, who are constant participants in these environments, are both influenced by their surroundings and actively contribute to shaping them. This study delves into women's firsthand experiences regarding the quality of residential spaces, drawing on Lefebvre's theoretical framework. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the social and environmental realities that women face in these spaces, as informed by Lefebvre's dialectical discourse. Recognizing the importance of women's presence in space and the impact of spatial quality on their daily lives, this research seeks to explore how quality influences women's experiences and emotional perceptions in residential environments. The study utilized a qualitative research approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with 30 women from diverse social backgrounds. The findings indicate that women's behaviors within perceived spaces and spatial representations are significantly influenced by their adaptation to environmental conditions. Despite facing challenges in spatial perception and representations, women highlight security and place attachment (lived space) as crucial aspects of their spatial existence. This research underscores that residential spaces not only serve as physical dwellings but also play a role in shaping women's social and emotional experiences. Positive spatial experiences enable women to effectively fulfill their social roles and enhance their overall well-being.

Keywords

Space, Quality of Space, Space production, Women's Lived, Experience Lefebvre

1 - Introduction

In "The Production of Space," Lefebvre examines the central role of the body in his spatial theory, delving into various philosophical perspectives. However, the significance of the body in his spatial politics is often overlooked (Wu, 2024). This article reconsiders Lefebvre's exploration by examining whose body is central to his theory and the implications of prioritizing minority bodies. By focusing on the theme of difference in Lefebvre's work, we can reveal the political potential of diverse embodiments frequently disregarded in his philosophy (Fu, 2025). Recent studies in feminist geography have underscored the importance of space in shaping women's lived experiences. These studies aim to uncover the interconnectedness of space and gender relations (Tuncer, 2014; Soleimani et al., 2019; Khaliji and Ghalehtemouri, 2024). Space, beyond being a geometric structure with tangible boundaries, also encompasses non-physical qualities (Ustay, 2020) that directly impact women's actions. Consequently, women's lived experiences are shaped by the qualitative structure of space and gender relations (Tuncer, 2014). Space, the central concept of this study, is a dynamic phenomenon (Tanrıvermiş & Güneş, 2023) where objectivity and subjectivity intertwine. Space can embody environmental characteristics while serving as a platform for sensory perceptions (Raymond et al., 2017). While physical boundaries initially define spatial perceptions, contemporary understandings of space quality are rooted in perception, experience, and elements like the body and movement (Ghalehtemouri et al., 2021; Tayebeh et al., 2023; Meshkini et al., 2024). According to Merleau-Ponty (2005), the human body plays a crucial role in the perception of space. The concept of space is centered around life and everyday experiences, where objects and subjects are unified, giving meaning to what is observed and sensed in space (Özçakı, 2017; Movahed et al., 2024). Passione (2003) notes that the perception of space is a personal interpretation of objects and reflects the individual's subjective perceptions (Ho and Tung Au, 2020), as defined by Woodward (2009) through the consideration of "living bodies" and "lived experiences."

These interpretations can provide insight into how the body responds to specific situations and its relationship with the environment (Ross, 2016). Phenomenological studies on the quality of space and its impact on women's experiences often explore intergenerational or gender inequality-related experiences. Understanding inequality within the social structure of space is essential for generating meaningful experiences. Ritzer (1996) highlights the importance of awareness in understanding inequality, emphasizing that it is a social issue rather than an individual one (Panahi, 2020; Amini et al., 2024). For women, spatial, social, economic, political, and ideological discourses and practices intersect and influence their daily lives (Kaçar & Kervankiran, 2024). According to Cacciari (2009), the city is a space where men are seen as the creators, and even with the modern transformation of cities rooted in French values, women still do not have full citizenship (Ghasemi et al., 2019). This results in space being predominantly influenced by a male perspective. The persistence of male-centric design and planning has led to the creation of spaces of poor quality (Ebrahimi et al., 2023), limiting female presence. Kern (2010) argues that during the bourgeois cultural revolution, women were marginalized, and urban experiences for women only saw marginal improvements. Patriarchal control plays a significant role in the spatial limitations faced by women, as spaces often prioritize men's needs and desires (Hançer, 2021). While women may occupy spaces more than men, offering them potential liberation and advantages in education, job opportunities, and cultural access, these spaces still reflect unequal power dynamics, gender segregation, and limitations. Spaces tend to uphold "masculine" norms, impacting women's daily experiences negatively (Hudson & Rönnbl, 2008). Butler (1990) suggests that women's perspectives on space have the power to challenge and disrupt what is considered natural and ordinary. Harvey (2014a, 2016) emphasizes the importance of women's perspectives in breaking down differences. Over centuries, the woman-space duality has been associated with negative connotations due to women historically being in the background compared to men (Aktaş, 2017).

The impact of spatial quality on women's perceptions can be explored through the intersection of urban geography and women's studies (Moghadam and Rafieian, 2019; Gargiulo et al., 2020; Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021; Fike and Mattis, 2024; Amini et al., 2024; Mukwidigwi and Naidu, 2025). This exploration may involve identifying access needs and challenges, assessing feelings of security, and examining the connection between spatial quality and well-being. It also includes designing spaces that meet women's essential needs and conducting phenomenological studies of their lived experiences. This study is rooted in the phenomenology of lived experiences, with the main objective being to deeply understand women's experiences from their own viewpoints. To achieve this, we will analyze women's emotions and daily experiences using a phenomenological approach, incorporating Lefebvrean concepts to investigate how they evaluate the quality of residential environments in terms of representation.

2 - Theoretical Background

In the realm of women's daily lives and spatiality, Lefebvre (Kaçar & Kervankiran, 2024) stands out as a prominent theorist. Lefebvre (2015) posits that women's experiences unfold within a patriarchal spatial structure that perpetuates social hierarchies. Bourdieu, as referenced by Harvey (2014b), suggests that this structure allows social groups to shape their identities and organize themselves based on their understanding of the world (Arslan, 2023). The interplay of planned processes lived experiences, physical space production, and social space reproduction offers a dialectical framework for women in the spatial planning of residential areas. Merrifield (2006) delineates these processes through the lenses of physical space (nature), mental space (abstract notions of space), and social space (human interaction). Lefebvre (1991a) introduces the dialectic of space, highlighting three interconnected dimensions: perceived space (representation of space), conceived space (spatial functions), and lived space (Cihanger Ribeiro, 2019; Delaisse, 2021). This triad represents an intricate interplay and dialectical intersection of spatial actions, where each component interacts synergistically with the others. Perceived space, or spatial action,

forms the first facet of Lefebvre's theoretical triangle, encompassing functions and competencies (Ndimande, 2024).

Lefebvre's theoretical triangle includes the first side, which is space or spatial action. This side involves functions and competences that help individuals effectively participate in spatial events. According to Michalovich (2019), in perceived space, individuals mentally visualize the space. Lefebvre believes this visualization includes knowing how to use different spaces, like navigating a space or finding shortcuts in traffic, in a way that is satisfying for the individual (Cécile Delaisse et al., 2020). Therefore, creating a quality environment for women involves considering all tangible and intangible factors related to living in residential areas, including physical and non-physical aspects (Hung, 2021).

The spatial representation can reveal discourses from powerful stakeholders, planners, designers, and social and ideological elites in the conceptual space. This space contains the hegemonic ideology, which includes scientific and technocratic discourse (Cécile Delaisse et al., 2020). Lefebvre's second side emphasizes social places allocated to women, where quality indicates the importance of designing and constructing spaces to meet women's specific needs (Rahbari and Sharepour, 2015; Eranil and Gürel, 2022). These environments serve as structures for living and experiencing, shaping women's cognitive evaluations of their surrounding residential environment, behavioral contexts, and emotional responses to these spaces (Bonaiuto & Fornara, 2017). The quality of the residential environment is a reflection of architectural features and social-functional planning, which encompass access to welfare services, recreational areas, transportation routes, green spaces, hygiene, maintenance, care, and safety (Bonaiuto et al., 2015). Tsai Hsu highlights that key factors influencing the quality of residential environments for women are structural health (e.g., lighting, privacy, management, and building facades) and the availability of environmental facilities (Hung, 2021).

Kinkaid views the interaction between perceived and conceived spaces as a transformative process that results in the creation of space, which serves as a framework for the tangible representational space of everyday life (Ndimande, 2024). Everyday life, also known as living space, holds the highest potential for qualitative perception. Lefebvre regards everyday life as essential for facilitating the interaction between individuals and physical space (Cihanger Ribeiro, 2019). Stewart (2007) defines everyday life as a complex and ambiguous concept that should be understood as a concrete reality. This reality is characterized by common occurrences and various ways of impacting and being impacted, giving everyday life a dynamic quality with ongoing interactions and settings (Ray Prasanta, 2024). Lefebvre's theory on the patterns of everyday life not only advanced spatial studies in urban planning but also enhanced our comprehension of dialectical space (Söylemez & Koramaz, 2024).

When evaluating the quality of living spaces from a female perspective, it is essential to consider the content, context, and experiential significance of the environment (Kemp, 2011). Feminist geographer Gillian Rose emphasizes the importance of examining the everyday details of women's lives to understand the connections between women and their surroundings. Quality, as defined by Gök and Filiz (2021), is viewed as adherence to specific requirements. The suitability of an environment for women is determined by various qualitative factors that impact women's perceptions of both physical and emotional space (Adams, 2014). Lefebvre's concern, as highlighted by Merrifield (2000), is the preference for conceptual space over lived space. While conceptual space may offer liberation, it can also be oppressive. Therefore, Lefebvre stresses the significance of lived and perceived spaces, which are fundamentally conceptual in nature (Ndimande, 2024).

3 - Practical Background

Phenomenological studies examine the qualitative aspects of space by emphasizing the depth and richness of women lived experiences. In a study, Arsalan (2023) explores women's daily experiences in an unequal spatial structure and finds that women's lived experiences are

a continuum of systems of relationships that organize everyday actions and social spaces in the geography of everyday life. In fact, women experience similar daily practices in different spatial contexts; therefore, social interactions change through daily practices according to the inherent dynamics of space and can be different from each other or the same.

In a study by Negiz et al. (2024), the differences and similarities in women lived experiences were explored. It was discovered that women share common subjective experiences of space quality, regardless of its physical development, with the validity of space being determined by time (day or night). Neşeli and Nahya's (2024) study, "City of Living Women," revealed that women perceive night and day spaces differently due to gender norms influencing their everyday spatial experiences. Mohamadi-Johnson and Miles (2014) used Lefebvre's spatial tripartite to analyze Arab Muslim women's experiences in New York, challenging stereotypes about Muslim women through their spatial context. Ross (2016) evaluated women's narratives of living in space to assess space quality and women's perceptions based on lived experiences. Tuncer (2014) interpreted women's space experiences to understand gendered spatial perceptions and social conflicts in urban environments. Kern's book "The Feminist City, Claiming Space in a Man-Made World" (2020) explores women's spatial research in cities, emphasizing the importance of understanding societal structures for creating feminine spaces. Meshkini and Beiki (2022) suggest that a proper understanding of societal structures and strategic planning can lead to the creation of quality spaces for women. This research aims to model lived experiences for spatial design for women, integrating Lefebvre's space production theory with practical spatial planning strategies to challenge existing discourses on space and gender and offer new perspectives on designing spaces for women.

4 - Materials and methods

4.1 - Data Collection and Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to investigate how spatial quality influences women's daily lives and lived experiences in the Milad Residential Complex, Golshahr, Zanjan. The research was grounded in Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space—which provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing women's interactions with and perceptions of their environment.

4.2 - Data Collection

To gather empirical data, thirty structured interviews were conducted with women residents of the Milad Complex. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to capture a diversity of experiences based on age, occupation, family status, and length of residence. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes and was designed to explore participants' perceptions of spatial quality, safety, mobility, accessibility to services, emotional attachment to place, and overall satisfaction with the environment. To ensure a rich and multifaceted understanding of the spatial realities of women, multiple data collection techniques were employed:

4.3 - Semi-Structured Interviews:

Thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with women living in the Milad Complex. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling** to ensure diversity in age, occupation (e.g., housewives, working women, students), marital status, and length of residence. The interviews focused on participants' daily routines, mobility, feelings of safety, accessibility to services, and their emotional attachment to the environment. Interview durations ranged from 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed with participants' consent.

4.4 - Field Observations:

Direct observation was used to document **women's use of space**, patterns of movement, and environmental conditions (e.g., lighting, public facilities, spatial barriers). Observations were made at various times of day and night to understand temporal dynamics of spatial use.

4.5 - Photographic Documentation:

Photographs taken during fieldwork served both as **visual data** and **analytical tools**. They were used to capture specific aspects of spatial design, infrastructure deficiencies, security features, and symbolic elements relevant to women's experiences (e.g., kiosks, parks, unlit streets). These images supported the spatial narratives collected during interviews and helped contextualize participants lived realities.

4.6 - Analytical Framework

The collected qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding using Lefebvre's triadic spatial model:

Spatial Practice (Perceived Space):

Analysis focused on the daily routines, mobility patterns, and logistical challenges women face in navigating the built environment.

Representations of Space (Conceived Space):

The study examined how women interpret planning decisions, infrastructural elements, and symbolic meanings embedded in the environment.

Representational Space (Lived Space):

Emotional responses, feelings of safety or alienation, and narratives of place attachment were used to reveal how space is experienced subjectively and socially.

Narrative accounts were combined with photographs and observation notes to create a spatially detailed understanding of gendered experiences. Interpretations were based on the participants' voices while also critically examining Lefebvrean concepts. Each theme was supported by direct quotes from participants and relevant visual data. The goal was to bridge the gap between subjective perceptions and objective spatial conditions.

Ethical Considerations

All participants gave informed consent, and anonymity was preserved throughout the study. Sensitive experiences, particularly those related to harassment or insecurity, were approached with confidentiality and ethical care (Table 1 and Table 2).

Lefebvre's Concept	Analytical Focus
Spatial Practice	Mobility patterns, daily routines, infrastructural usage
Representations of Space	Planning symbols, accessibility, absence of services
Representational Space	Emotional attachment, fear, safety, gendered use of space

Table 1. Lefebvre's Spatial Triad and Analytical Focus

Lefort's Trilogy	Spatial Structure	Spatial benefits
Perceived space (praxis of space)	Man-made structures refer to the physical dimension of tangible space, representing the objective and perceptible aspect of physical space (Farabi Asl et al., 2022).	Access to residential areas, buildings, streets, transportation vehicles such as buses, taxis, and private cars, and other engineered structures.
Imagined space (Spatial representations)	Lefebvre (1991b) describes our understanding of the physical world through scientific abstractions and abstract symbols used to define space. These spaces are rational constructs created and put into practice by urban managers and planners. Cécile Delaisse A-C et al., (2021)	Advantages of urban areas include access to various services such as communication, sports, education, and shopping centers. Additionally, urban spaces offer green areas like parks, but may also have unfinished structures, unsafe shortcuts, dirt roads, walking paths, and sidewalks, all connected by main streets.
Lived space (representational space)	The body is the foundation of existence and experience in a human being. Lived space transforms into an experience once it is perceived.	Ensuring security and fostering a sense of belonging, comfort, and psychological peace are essential for creating a positive experience in a neighborhood. However, experiences such as fear, street harassment, theft, feeling chased, and unease while walking on the streets can undermine these efforts. It is important to address these issues to enhance the overall quality of life in the community. Additionally, factors like interest in the area, the desire to stay or leave, respect for the neighborhood, and nighttime safety play a significant role in shaping residents' perceptions and experiences.

Table 2. Objectification of Lefebvre's Triadic Discourse in Residential Environments

After identifying the quality components of the space following Lefebvre's discourse, interview questions were developed based on these components (Table 3).

The transcripts and recordings of the interviews with the residents were carefully gathered.

Categories	Review	Reference
Discourse of Spatial	Perception in Terms of Accessibility	
<p>Living far from the city center results in wasted time.</p> <p>Effective planning is crucial for easy access to the city center.</p> <p>Frequent trips to the city center lead to higher expenses and missed job opportunities, making owning a personal vehicle a necessity in a residential complex.</p>	<p>Studying new traffic issues and gaining a comprehensive understanding of commuting to the city center.</p>	Waghmare & et al., 2022
<p>The bus capacity fills up quickly and there are no seats to sit on.</p> <p>Waiting for the bus is boring.</p> <p>The bus is suitable for pregnant women</p> <p>The bus stop is located at appropriate distances</p> <p>The capacity of the bus is more important for housewives</p> <p>In order to speed up the journey, snaps are used.</p> <p>The means of transport are available at any time of the day or night.</p> <p>The bus is more important for housewives.</p> <p>Transportation is available at any time of the day or night.</p> <p>The only stall at the entrance to the complex meets the women's minimal needs</p> <p>The problem of the lack of supermarkets is very noticeable.</p> <p>The lack of space allocated to women manifests itself in the form of shopping malls, sports, medical, and pharmacy spaces.</p> <p>The lack of space allocated to women manifests itself in the form of shopping malls, sports, medical, and pharmacy spaces.</p> <p>The distance from the complex to the nearest park is convenient.</p> <p>The park's walking paths are suitable for women. A space is designed for breastfeeding women.</p> <p>There is a children's play area in the neighborhood park.</p> <p>There is a stroller path into the park. There is exercise equipment in the park. Women feel uncomfortable and ashamed of using exercise equipment.</p> <p>The entry of motorcyclists into the park creates discomfort and fear.</p> <p>Noise pollution and fear prevent women from being in the park. The lack of public restrooms shortens the time spent in the park</p> <p>Snaps are used to speed up travel.</p>	<p>Bus</p> <p>Unreliable service delivery and unpredictable time horizons will have a negative impact on users' regular choice of public transportation systems.</p> <p>Gaining deep insight into the behaviors and personalities of women traveling by taxi will have an impact on transportation policy and decisions.</p>	<p>Zhou & et al., 2022</p> <p>Firoozi Yeganeh & et al., (2022)</p>

	Shopping Center	
The only stall at the entrance to the complex meets the women's minimal needs. The problem of the lack of a supermarket is very noticeable.	Requirement to travel to inner city spaces 15-minute access to local shops is an essential part of the quality of residential space	Hosford & et al., (2022)
	Sports	
The lack of space allocated to women manifests itself in the form of shopping malls, sports, medical, and pharmacy spaces.	Allocation of sports spaces produces a kind of right to the city. Non-allocation of space, limitation in the provision of medicine Not widely used due to privacy	Aquino, (2022)
	Park	
The distance from the complex to the nearest park is suitable. The walking paths in the park are suitable for women. A suitable space is designed for women to breast-feed. There is a play area for children in the neighborhood park. There is a stroller path into the park. Sports equipment is installed in the park. Women feel uncomfortable and ashamed of using sports equipment. The entry of motorcyclists into the park creates discomfort and fear. Noise pollution and fear hinder women from being in the park. Lack of public restrooms shortens the time spent in the park.	Lack of neighborhood park design, optimal allocation of space for women, The need for women to travel to parks and indoor playgrounds in the city Lack of spatial designs for bridges the effects of green space on women's health have been proven. In addition, green space reduces health and gender inequalities between women and men. Creating mental distress for women Experiencing daily and nightly harassment for women Lack of human-centered design from the beginning of space production	Sillman Delaney (2022)
Discourse of Represented	Space in the Predominance of	Security
The interior of the engineering complex has acceptable. Floodlights illuminate the area at night. Women feel unsafe in crossing undeveloped spaces. Walking at night is convenient and possible for women. The path back home is anxiety-provoking for women. The impact of neighbors' prejudices and thinking "Why are you out?" determines the time spent in space for women. Women are not interested in using shortcuts. Safety for women at taxi and bus stops is challenging. Annoying looks and unnecessary honking, teasing are common harassment. Harassment and dangers in using taxis (driver speeding and passenger talking) are constant concerns for women. Experiencing daily harassment causes women to be conservative. Women tend to stay home less during the day. Women experience more harassment at night. Women tend to stay home at night.	Manufactured Environmental Security The issue of women's fear in urban spaces Another dimension is the space of everyday life and its experiences Fragile glass spaces Malicious intentions are more likely in the dark Darkness increases the criminal's fear of being followed Heavy and meaningful glances, fear of being judged by others Defenseless corridors, confidence in long paths Fear of experiencing street harassment Crime is not evenly distributed in space Location is an important factor in criminal incidents and is closely related to everyday life Women's anxiety about being talked down to by taxi drivers, additional questions, deviation from the path of physical harassment, heavy glances, constant mirror movement Conservative and worried about street harassment Escape from experience	Allyson G. Pancho (2022) Song. Guangwen & et al., (2023)

Discourse of Space Representation	Space of Lived Sense of Belonging	
The structures within the compound have acceptable security and engineering. Neighborhood interactions among women in Milad's residential environment are high. Women tend to move around. The structures within the compound have a monotonous, boring, and blocky appearance. The physical structure of the complex lacks visual appeal for women.	The sense of place is like a toolbox in understanding space and determining the tangible and intangible characteristics of a place. Structure does not create belonging, the desire to change requires heavy payments. The sense of belonging to a place is one of the most important meanings in improving the quality of urban and human living environments. This feeling is a factor in forming the relationship between residents and the environment and ultimately leads to the creation of quality spaces.	Jarrat & et al., (2019) Bild & et al., (2016)

Table 3. Qualitative components of space for women in residential environments based on Lefebvre's Tria lectic

5 - Materials and methods

5.1 - The Study area

Zanjan, the capital of Zanjan Province in northwest Iran, is located at 48 degrees 29 minutes east longitude and 36 degrees 40 minutes north latitude (Figure 1). The city's strategic location along the Tehran-Tabriz-Bazargan corridor has played a significant role in its growth and development, being within 300 kilometers of two major urban centers. In recent years, urbanization, population growth, and changing lifestyles have driven physical development in Zanjan.

The Milad Complex, part of the Golshahr Kazemi Yeh development, was constructed in the late 1980s in the fourth district of Zanjan city. Covering 400 hectares with 8,000 residential plots, the complex consists of 600 units and 10 blocks, attracting a sizable population. Factors such as its distance from the city center, unique spatial structure, social diversity, and the presence of women from various backgrounds make it an ideal case study area to explore how spatial quality impacts women's experiences in utilizing the space. Analyzing women's lived experiences in this environment can provide valuable insights into their needs and interactions with the built environment.

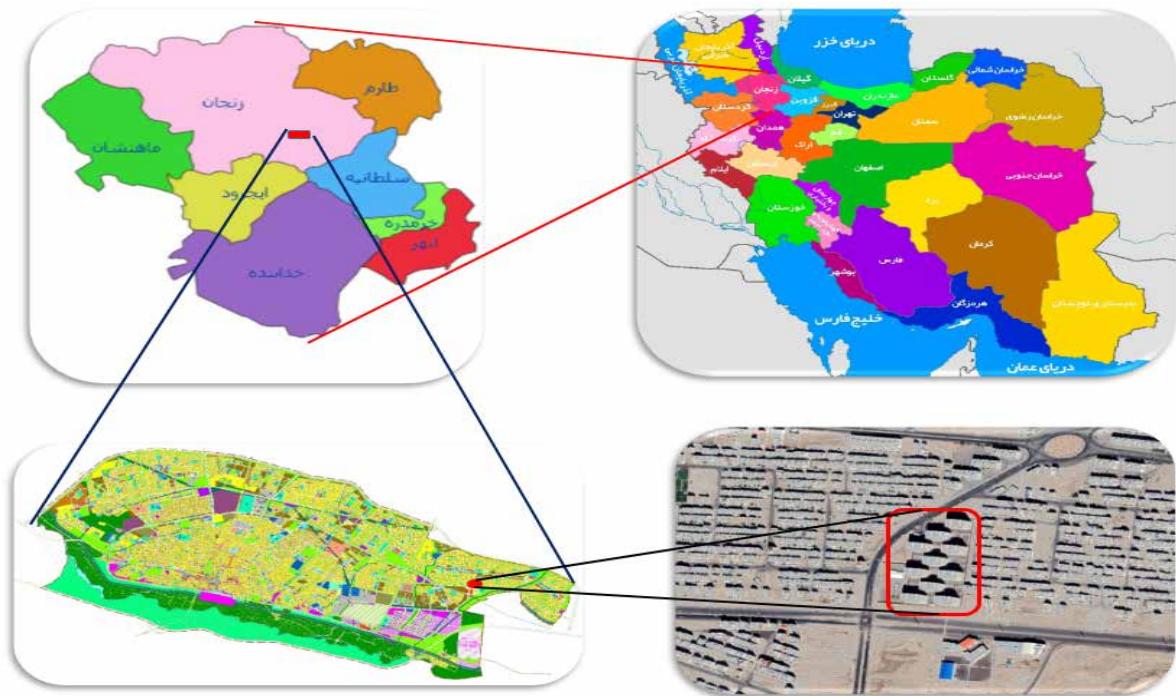


Figure 1. Geographical location of Milad Golshahr Complex, Zanjan

6 - Findings

Spatial Practices in Lefebvre's analysis, the way power influences spatial structures is crucial for understanding gender inequalities; therefore, perceptions of accessibility in Lefebvre's space of praxis vary based on individual experiences, economic factors, social relationships and interactions, time, and the degree of movement and mobility of the actors involved. As a result, these differing perceptions also produce distinct experiences. These perceptions not only affect individuals' daily lives but also impact their decision-making processes and patterns of social and economic behavior.

Mina typically begins her day with a 35-minute bus ride from Milad Complex to downtown. She ensures she leaves home early to secure a seat, often waiting at a stop just one stop away from her apartment.

The Milad Complex offers a diverse range of experiences for women, with some finding comfort in the space while others may feel uneasy. Housewives and working women residing in the complex have varying perspectives on navigating their environment.

Narges, a housewife, shops in the city center twice a week, driving her own car. She appreciates living away from downtown traffic and noise. In contrast, Fatemeh, a working woman who recently moved to the complex, must commute daily to work. She is frustrated by the increased car expenses resulting from the longer commute. Zohreh had a negative experience with spatial accessibility as she had to quit her job shortly after moving to the area due to the distance from her workplace.

6.1 - Spatial representations

Space representation encompasses public perceptions of space, incorporating symbols and social meanings. This representation is heavily shaped by cultural and social discourses. The concept of “accessibility” can be used to explore how space is utilized. By examining the social space and the factors that impact it, we can understand how women are influenced by social relationships in terms of the quality of their environment.

Maryam, a middle-aged woman, shared, "We've been residents here for quite some time, even before the area

developed. Although many changes have taken place, we still lack a supermarket or grocery store."

The kiosk at the entrance of the residential complex is the sole purchasing option, but it often fails to cater to women's needs. The absence of a proper shopping center restricts women's choices and drives them away from the complex, despite their preferences (Figure 2).



Figure 2. kiosk is the only women's shopping center

Women in this area, particularly mothers, face greater challenges in their daily lives due to the absence of medical facilities and pharmacies, which is more significant than the absence of a supermarket.

Vahideh shared a scary night when her three-year-old had a fever, and she had no doctor nearby. "My husband was away, and it was really dark and frightening. I had to wait until morning to go outside (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Golshahr neighborhood park is the only walking and leisure path for women

Residents must travel a considerable distance to reach the nearest neighborhood park, Golshahr. Despite lacking amenities like restrooms, children's play equipment, shops, and designs tailored for women, this park is the only available space for women to walk and exercise. Their time in the park is often marred by encounters with reckless bikers who speed through the area.

Marzieh, a resident, enjoys walking in the park and usually returns by 8 PM when she's alone. Mojgan appreciates Golshahr Park for its size and beauty, and her family often spends summer evenings there. However, she highlighted a major issue: "The park lacks a restroom, so we often have to either take the kids home and return or leave early." Zahra, a young mother with two children, shared, "I always search for a spot in the park away from motorcycles. Every afternoon, noisy motorbikes race through the park, so I try to find a quiet place. I come here seeking some peace." (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Motorcyclists' harassment in Golshahr neighborhood park

Women might face types of spatial structures that impact their access to different spaces. Night and day challenges, quiet and dark streets, and being far from shops and health services most significantly affect women's daily lives.

Another resident said she usually walks in the park and gets back by 8 PM if she's by herself.

7 - Representational space

In the third aspect of Lefebvre's analysis, the living space represents the embodiment of women's experiences. What women gain from this environment significantly shapes their perceptions of the available space. The quality of this area plays a crucial role in shaping their experiences. The most important aspect of quality here is the sense of belonging and safety. As mentioned in the previous two components, due to being far from the city center, women constantly have to rely on public transportation, facing challenges from buses, taxis, rideshare apps, or their own cars. Therefore, their most sensitive lived experiences are produced in this realm, which alone—without considering the other two components—can determine their subjective quality of the environment.

Rogueh expressed frustration with the bus service in the Milad Complex, noting, "Even though the buses are not great, I still try to use them. This means I have to leave home at least an hour early." But when she's not alone, she sometimes uses rideshare apps like Snapp. Sara talked about her experiences with taxis, saying that drivers often asked unnecessary questions or adjusted their mirrors in a way that made her feel unsafe. She feels comfortable using rideshare during the day but avoids going out at night.

The quality of space for women is always linked to their sense of safety and security, and even the philosophy of day and night space security has different interpretations for women.

Soraya shared a frightening experience when a driver asked her personal questions on the way home. She texted her dad to wait for her, and as soon as she got

out of the car, he confronted the driver, who then sped away.

Women's experiences of harassment and street troubles teach them that being present in public spaces carries its own philosophy, and their presence can sometimes come at a high cost. Consequently, many women place a temporal value on their engagement with these environments to safeguard themselves from negative experiences. Most of the women give time credit to using space to avoid unpleasant experiences.

Like Fatima, a middle-aged woman who set aside specific times for outdoor activities and would not allow her teenage daughter to leave the house even in the most urgent circumstances.

A type of social experience among women arises from their interactions with neighbors and those nearby. This context is often filled with judgments, heavy stares, and whispers. Essentially, the living environment becomes a text reflecting others' reactions to women's behaviors: what a woman wears, the colors she chooses, where she's going, where she came from, why she's out now, and what she's doing out at this hour—all become hot topics of discussion for others.

Somayeh, a 32-year-old woman, shared her experience with her neighbor's intense stares: "I had just moved into the apartment complex, and one night when I came home late, I saw my neighbor looking out the window. I couldn't understand why she was still awake at that hour. She gave me a surprised, heavy look that made me feel uneasy, as if her thoughts were weighing down on me. But then, when she realized I was a nurse, her expression changed completely. From that moment on, she greeted me with a warm smile full of respect."

A common thread among interviewees is their fear of moving through these spaces. Alison G. Pancho (2022) highlights women's fear in urban settings as a crucial aspect of their daily lives and experiences. The feeling of being followed and concerns about street harassment, especially at night, are major factors that discourage women from going out and encourage them to stay home, as malicious intent tends to increase in the dark.

Mehre, a student, specifically points to these street harassments when discussing her presence in public spaces:

Although I expect to encounter fewer street harassments during the day, when I am standing at a bus stop, usually where there is no place to sit, it often happens that someone drives by and honks their horn, causing me stress. It often happens that on the way home I feel like someone is following me, this worry forces me to prefer busy routes to get home. "When you take shortcuts, it's like shadows are following you."

Space creates place in order to produce experience. And the quality of the built place shapes the lived experiences of the inhabitants. When the structure does not create belonging, there is no sense of belonging to the place, that is, an emotional attachment to the place.

Referring to the Farzaneh, matchstick-like shape of the complex, which reflects a dull and lifeless monotony, Farzaneh expresses satisfaction with the structural quality of the building, but finds it worrying to go out at night due to the lack of sufficient lighting to use the outdoor space, saying, "I prefer to stay home as soon as it gets dark."

A group of women found living in the complex satisfying over time and as they got used to the environment, while residents like Zahra said, "If I had enough money, I would definitely move to another place closer to the city center (Figure 5)."



Figure 5. Sense of place is a valuable tool for comprehending space.

Women's daily experiences are influenced by the spatial constraints of their environment. This study, similar to Arsalan's (2023) research, sheds light on the social dynamics that shape the lives of women in the Milad residential area. Time emerges as a crucial factor in shaping women's experiences. Across various time periods and locations, women's daily routines yield similar outcomes, as observed in Niggz's (2024) study. Residents tend to avoid certain spaces during specific hours, with nighttime being perceived as predominantly male-dominated. Shortcuts are seen as risky pathways, and abandoned areas are considered off-limits for women in the Milad residential neighborhood.

Analyzing the stories of women living in this setting, akin to Tuncer's (2014) research, highlights how their actions and interactions in their living spaces reflect their subjective views on spatial quality. It is evident that improving spatial quality is crucial for enhancing women's experiences in these social contexts, enabling them to comprehend and fulfill their social roles more effectively.

The sociological reality of women in the Milad residential environment, in line with Lefebvre's Marxist approach, reflects a form of social production. The environment has successfully manifested a tangible continuum of physical space (Poincaré, 1986) as a social construct. However, the lived experience and the emergence of intangible forms of subjectivity that influence quality within this space are still fragile. The study suggests that women's behavioral patterns in perceived space and spatial representations are heavily influenced by adaptation to environmental conditions. The distance from urban centers is identified as a significant issue, highlighting the need for appropriate planning and utilization of existing potentials to enhance spatial quality.

8 - Conclusion

Most interview participants had similar views on their journeys downtown. They emphasized the importance of managing their time efficiently, whether they used public transportation, personal cars, or taxis. While they appreciated the quality of bus services, they also

prioritized maintaining a sense of femininity while waiting for buses or traveling on them. When it comes to spatial access, women showed flexibility in dealing with both the presence and absence of space. The lack of certain amenities shifted their focus from security and peace of mind. For instance, in a neighborhood park, the absence of a stroller path was seen as less significant than the intrusion of motorcyclists.

The results show that living space is the most influential factor in determining women's behavior patterns. This aspect of Lefebvre's triad is crucial in shaping women's spatial presence. Women's daily experiences are closely linked to their sense of place and security. It is clear that mental security is more important than the physical quality of structures for women, as they prioritize their mental experience of space. Time is also a significant factor in how women engage with and use the Milad residential space.

Based on the findings of this study, we suggest several ways to enhance the quality of residential spaces and improve women's experiences. These recommendations aim to address common issues found in many studies, such as ensuring safe and comfortable spaces, adequate lighting, enhancing accessibility through transportation system improvements, creating green spaces, and incorporating aesthetic designs. Our practical suggestions in this study include:

Planning perceived spaces to facilitate greater social interactions among women.

Drawing inspiration from projects that prioritize women's perceptions in lived spaces along with successful spatial representations.

Designing spaces based on the analysis of women's behavioral patterns.

Involving women in the stages of space production through surveys.

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