

Making **HOTEL** Safer for Women Travellers



Introduction

Travelling is an important and an inevitable part of the lives of many people. Over the past few years, solo travelling has been growing. Many hotel booking sites have reported an increase in the number of bookings made by solo travellers, especially women. Booking.com's first 'Solo Travel Report' spanning across five countries (UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Germany) revealed that 65 percent women are travelling on their own. Further it highlighted that American women ranked first in frequent solo travel and are most likely to take three or more trips in a given year.¹

The trends are similar in other countries including India. The travel industry in India has witnessed an increase in female solo travellers. OYO (On Your Own) Rooms, saw a 63 percent increase in bookings by women in 2019 from 2018.² Of the total bookings made by women, 19.7 percent were for solo travellers. Metro cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Mumbai emerged as the top 5 cities booked by women travellers between January 2019 and February 2020.

Women are now travelling at their own pace, breaking the norms for both work and leisure. However, women travellers are often more concerned about their personal safety compared to men. As per the Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) comfort and safety are two of the most important considerations for the female guests.³ The figure below shows the general checklist for solo women travellers for their hotel stay.



1 Retrieved from: <https://news.booking.com/do-not-disturb-more-than-half-of-american-women-travelers-are-going-solo>

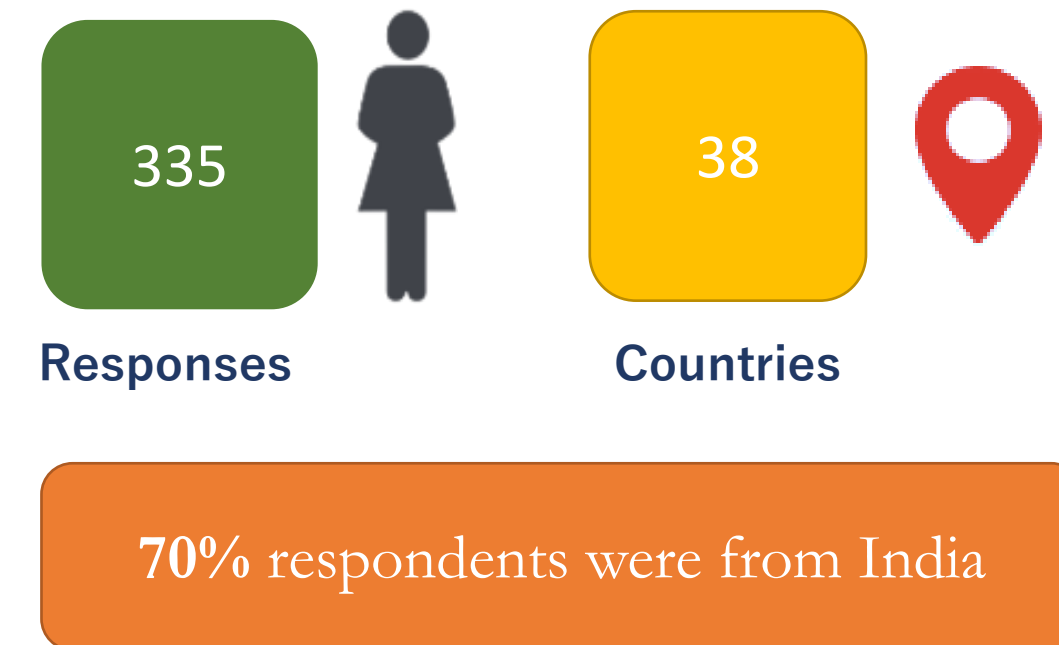
2 Retrieved from <https://www.oyorooms.com/officialoyoblog/2020/03/06/we-saw-a-63-increase-in-women-travellers-within-india-in-2019>

3 Retrieved from: <https://www.bighospitality.co.uk/Article/2013/06/17/Number-of-female-travellers-staying-alone-in-hotels-rises>

The Survey

In May 2020, an online survey was carried out by Safetipin⁴ (a social enterprise that works towards making cities safer and inclusive) to understand the key factors that shape women's perception of safety and comfort while staying alone at a hotel. The survey was open for women travellers across the world who have stayed alone in a hotel room. The participants were asked a set of questions about factors that could have an impact on their experience of safety in hotels.

The survey was divided into two sections. The questions in the first section were to understand the participant profile. Information such as age, occupation and travel patterns (purpose of travel, frequency of stay at a hotel in a given year, choice of accommodation) of the participants were collected in this section. The second section of the survey form focussed on ranking the importance of various hotel facilities that may influence woman's feeling of safety. Participants were also asked if any precautions and safety measures are taken by them for their safety.



The survey link was shared via email and on the Safetipin social media handles. A total of 384 responses were recorded, of which 335 responses were from women who have stayed alone in a hotel.

The data from these 335 responses have been analysed for this report. The responses were diverse with the majority of responses from India followed by Canada, USA, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia.

⁴ For more information about Safetipin, visit: www.safetipin.com

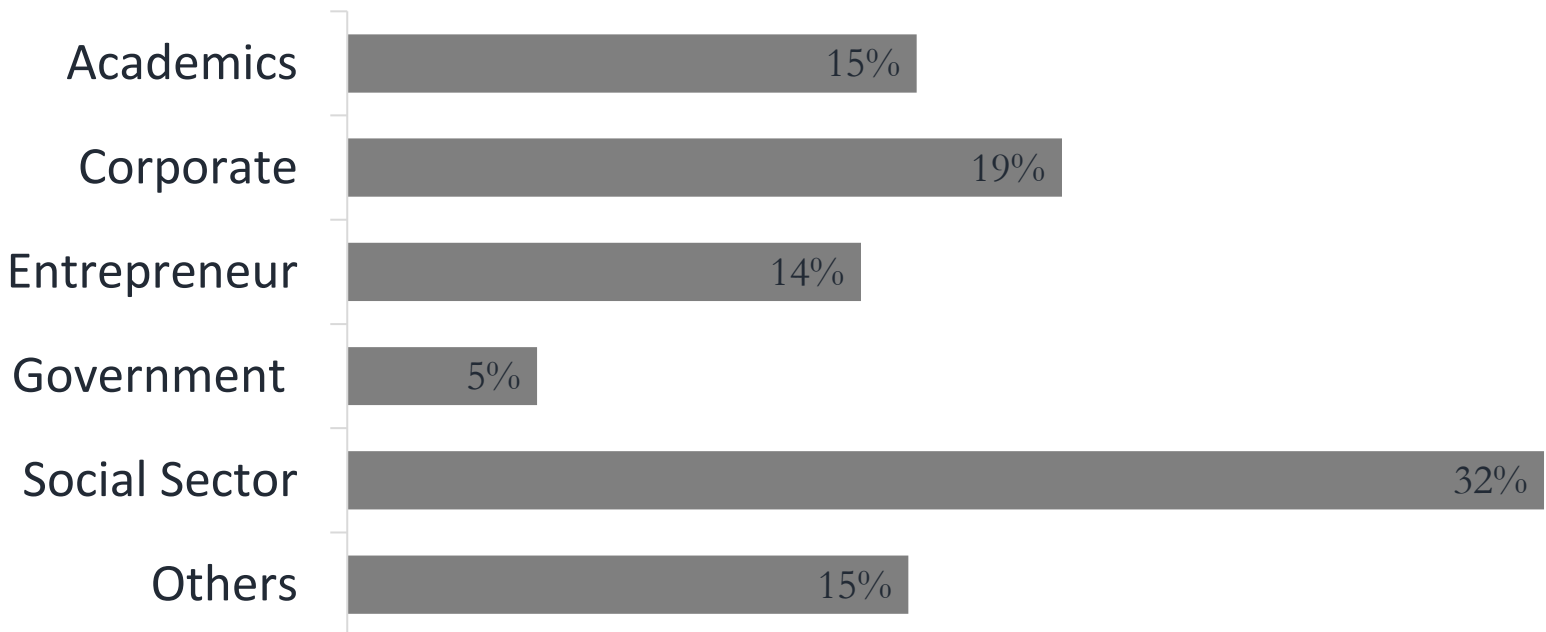
Survey Demographics

The respondents were from varied age groups between 18 to 60 years, with 26-35 years being the highest group comprising of 52 percent of the total respondents. Respondents represent the diverse field including academics, corporate and social sector. Other respondents included artists, musicians, designers, consultants. When asked about purpose of travel, 81% of women were travelling for work followed by 59% for leisure.

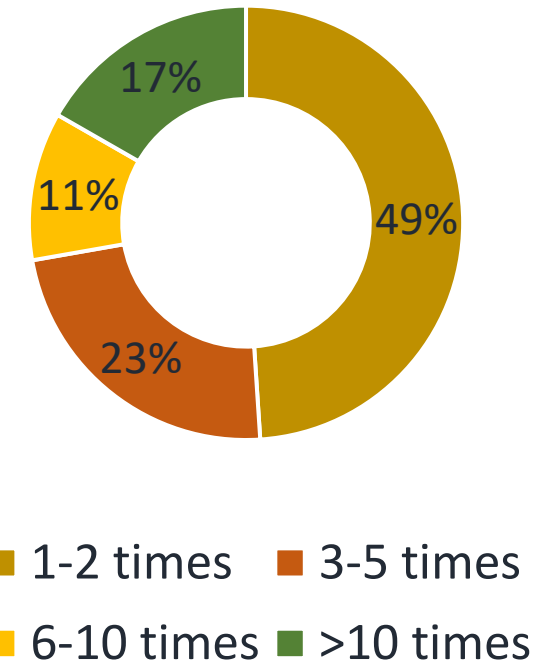
Age Group (in years)



Occupation

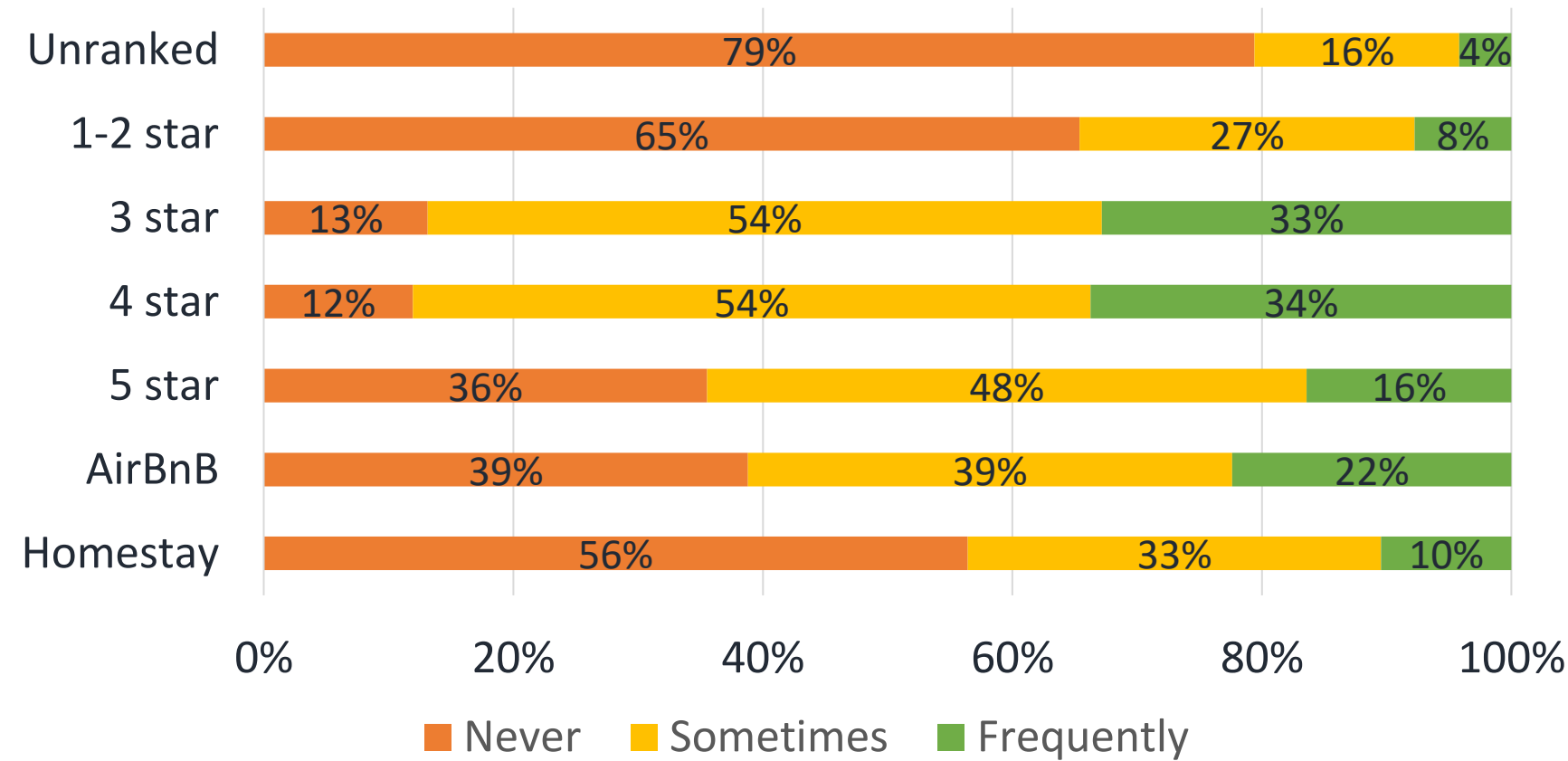


Frequency of stay



As for frequency of stay, 49% have stayed once or twice and 51% of the have stayed alone 3 or more times in a year. In terms of star rating of hotel, 3- or 4-star category hotels are preferred frequently, irrespective of age-group or frequency of travel. This is closely followed by AirBnB which is preferred by most of the respondents from 18-35 years age group.

Preference for Hotel Type

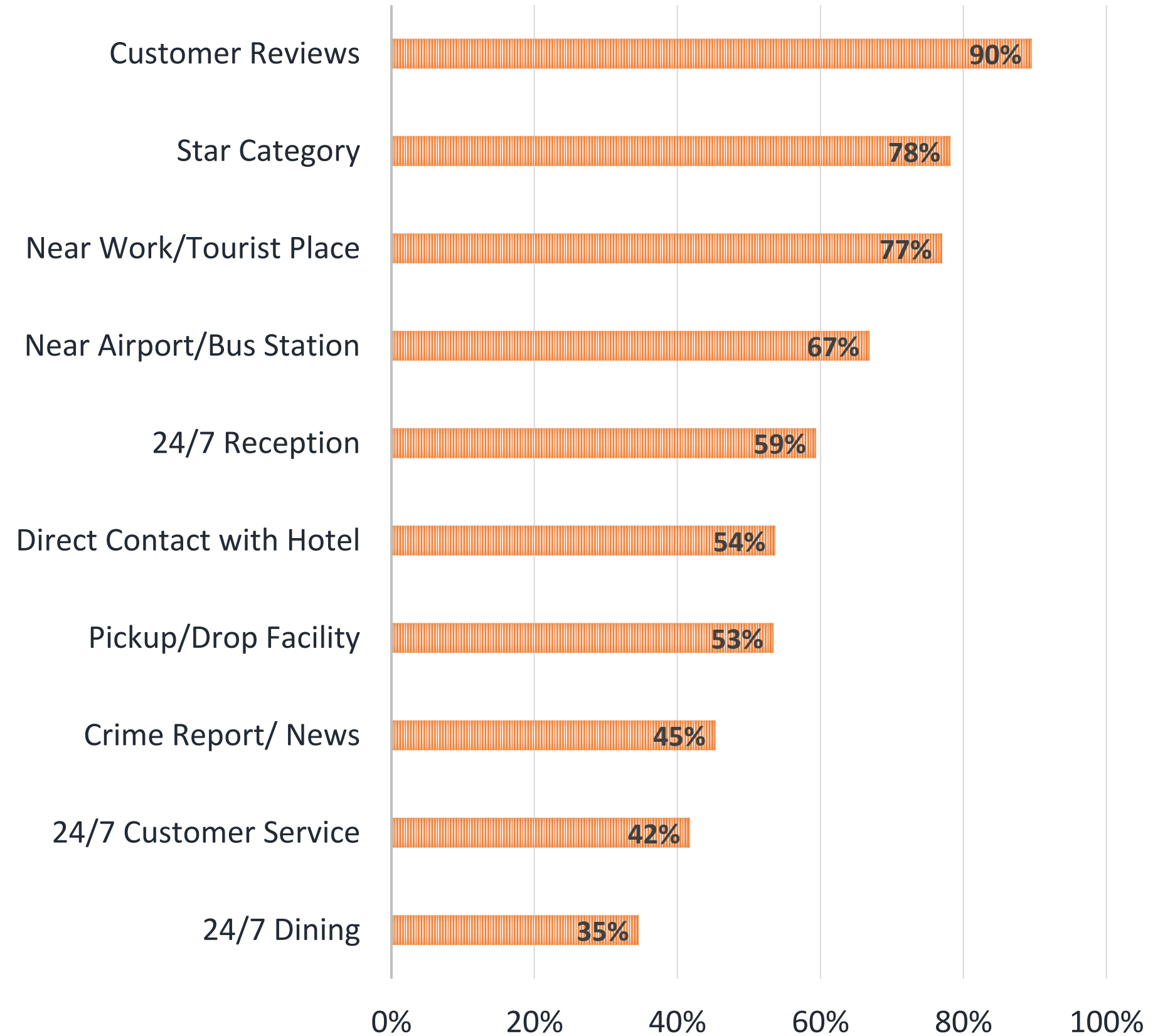


Factors that influence women's choice of hotel (while booking)

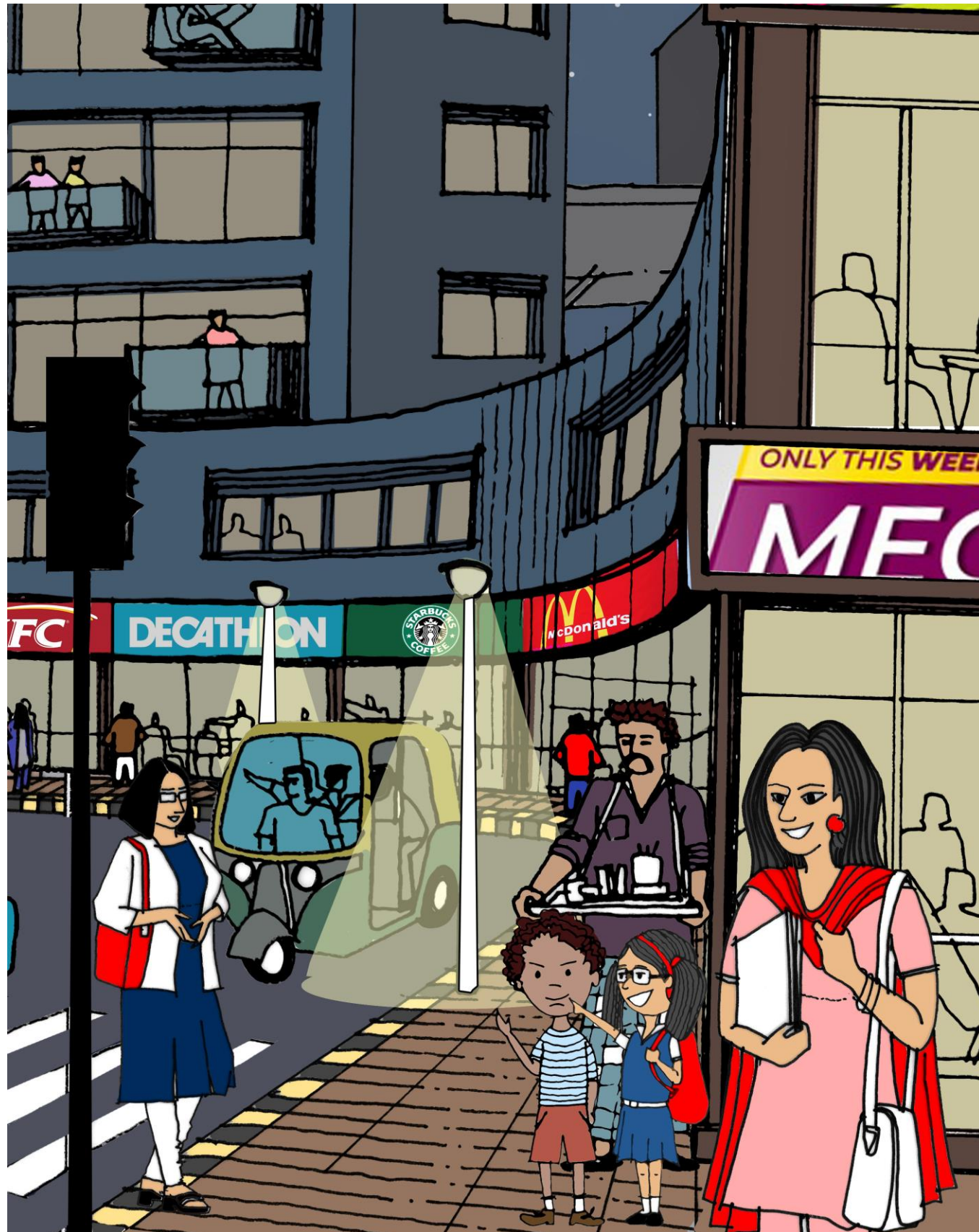
Women look at multiple factors before they book an accommodation for their solo stay. These include customer reviews, hotel facilities, location of the hotel and customer review. Respondents were asked to rate the factors on the scale of frequency (Never, Sometimes, Frequently). Graph on the right shows the percentage distribution of factors that women consider 'frequently' before booking a hotel.

Our survey highlights that majority of women opted for customer reviews (90%), star category of the hotel (78%) and proximity to the tourist/workplaces (77%) as important factors while booking a hotel. The participants' response across various age groups was also studied. It was found that while women between the age group of 18 and 45 years give more importance to customer reviews of a hotel; for women older than 45 years, booking a hotel near their workplace or tourist destinations is a primary concern.

Comparatively, 24/7 facilities of dining and 24/7 customer service of travel aggregators have been given less importance across all age groups of respondents.



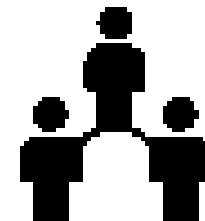
Environment around a hotel



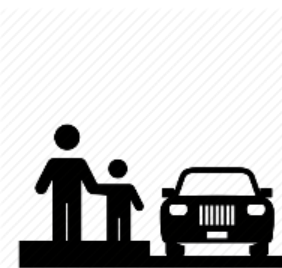
Well-lit Streets



Local
Public Transport



Presence of Shops
and People



Good Pavement

In addition to the hotel property and facilities, the surrounding environment also influences the experience of women travellers. Our survey results indicates that physical infrastructure and social activities around the hotel play an important role in making women feel safer.

80% of the participants said that well-lit streets around the hotel is the most important factor in making them feel safer. This was closely followed by 74% for availability of local transport services near the hotel and 73% for presence of shops and people on the streets. A dedicated pavement for walking was considered important by 49% of the women.

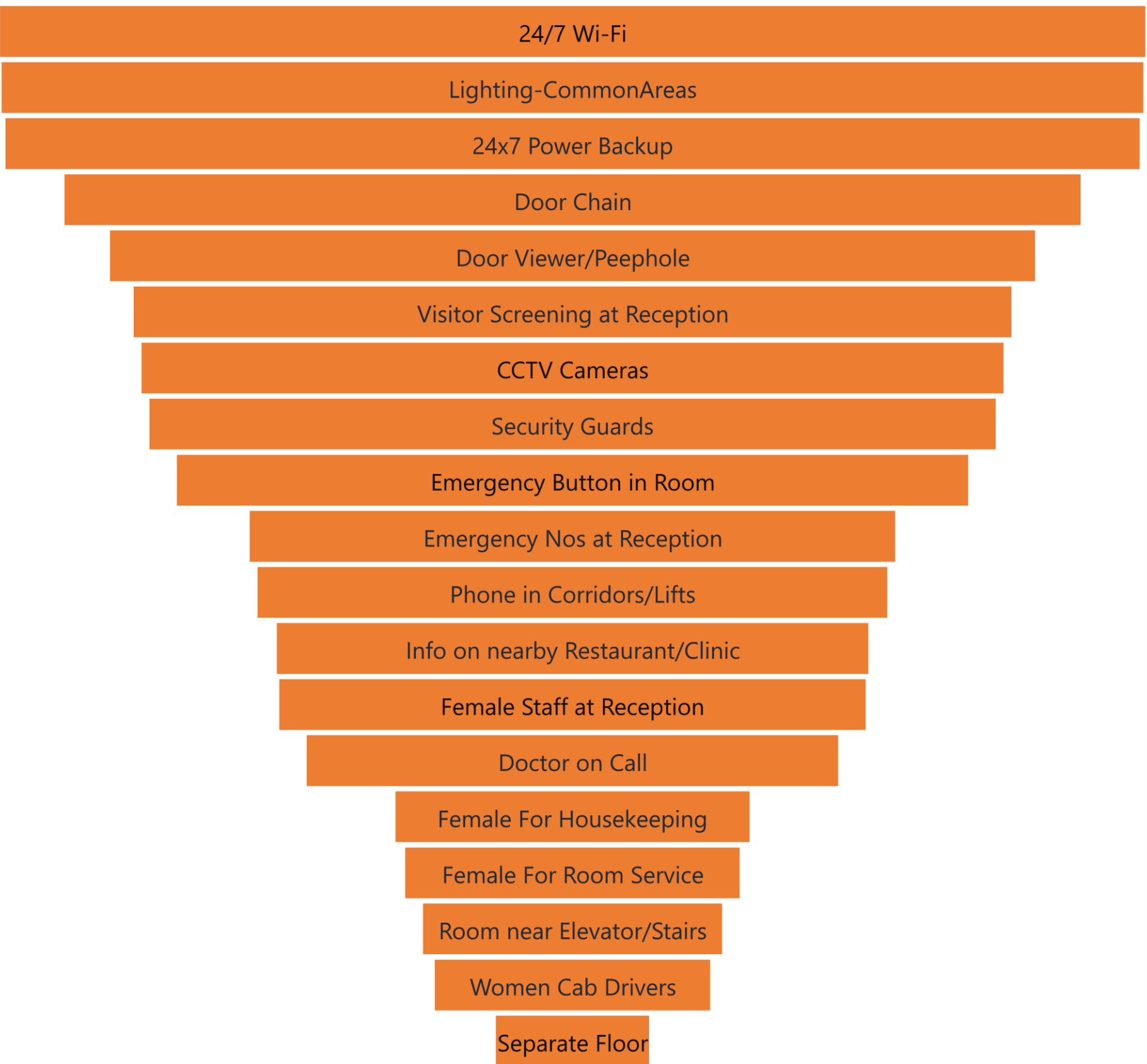
While these are public services managed by the local municipality, not directly under the control of the hotel management, the fact is that women see these factors as important to feeling safe. Being an important stakeholder in the city, the hotel management should take an active role in reporting any issues regarding to infrastructure to the local authority.

Hotel facilities that impact safety

From the time a woman checks into a hotel till her check-out, she is mindful of her surroundings. The funnel graph on the right shows different facilities in a hotel's common areas as well as hotel rooms ranked by women respondents in order of importance on their feeling of safety.

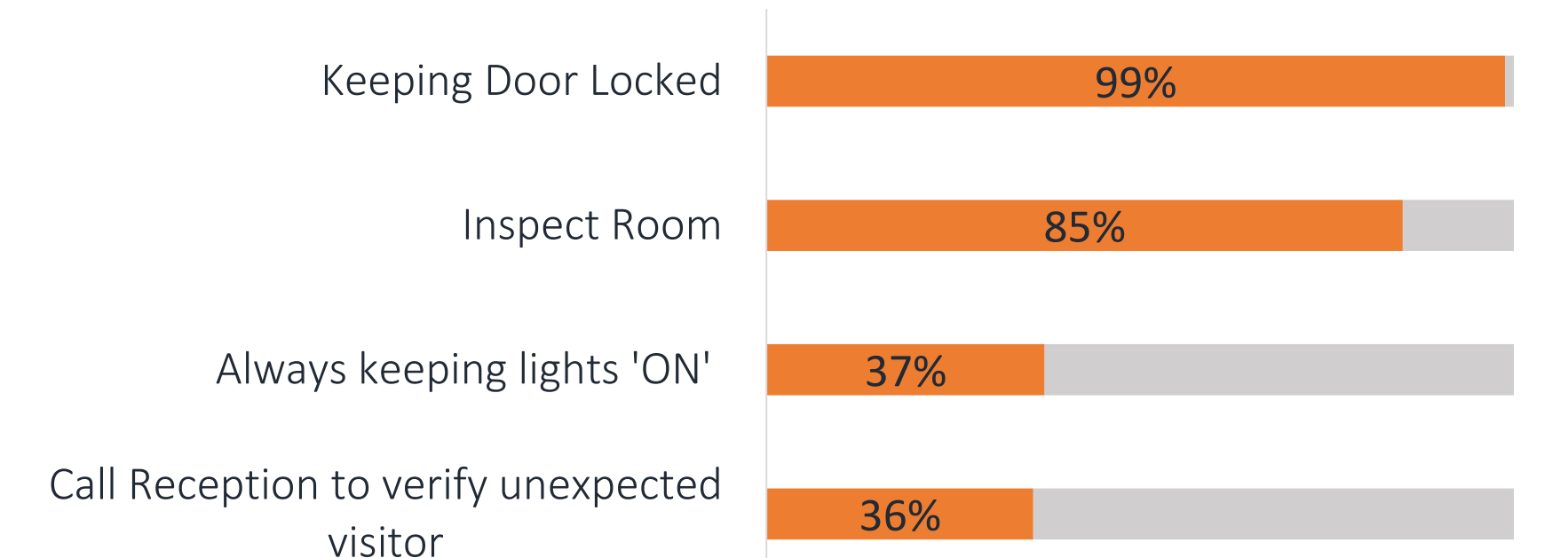
Our survey highlights that availability of 24/7 facility of Wi-Fi, power back-up and proper lighting in the hotel premises is essential for the most women. It is important to note here that facilities like power back-up, security guards and CCTV cameras were important for Indian respondents. This could be attributed to local factors like irregular power supply in some cities; CCTV camera or security guard being monitoring measures for crimes against women. A feature that was universally preferred was availability of a door chain or door viewer in a room.

Facilities like a separate floor or section for women, preference of room near the elevators or stairs, option of women cab drivers and female staff for room service and housekeeping were considered relatively less important.

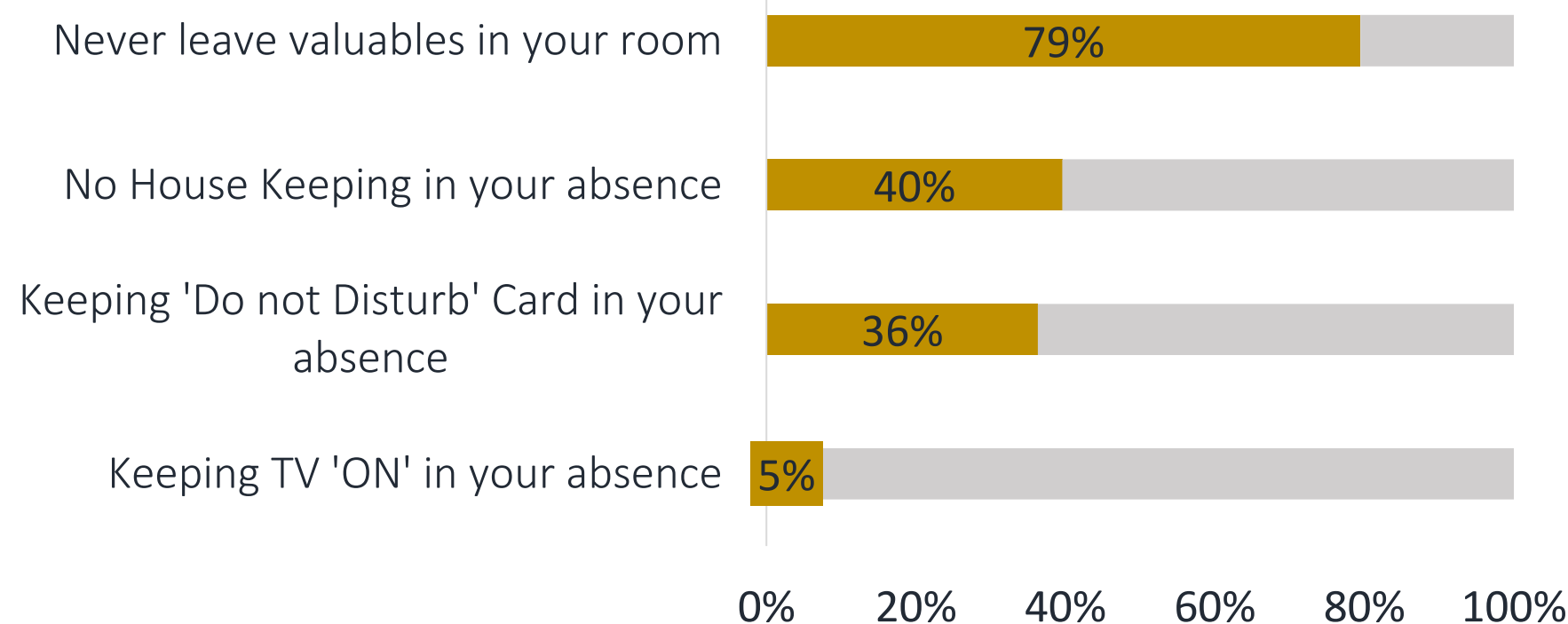


Precautions taken by women while staying at a hotel

Precautions taken inside Hotel Room



Precautions taken on leaving the room



Women take different kinds of precautions to ensure their safety in a hotel, irrespective of the hotel category. Respondents were asked to choose the precautions they take inside a hotel room and while going out of the room (from the options shown in the graph on left). 99 % of the participants in our survey said that they always keep their room door locked. This corroborates our previous finding about the importance of providing a door chain or door viewer in a hotel room. 85% participants highlighted that they always inspect the room after hotel check-in. They particularly look for hidden cameras, broken windows in the room or the bathroom. But it is pertinent to note that 64% Indian respondents did this as against only 21% of others.

When they leave the room, 79% of women never leave any valuable items inside the room. On asked about other precautions taken by them, few respondents added that they check for hotel's emergency evacuation plan/ emergency contact numbers, check reception number for response and refrain from availing room service facilities during late evening hours as a precautionary measure.

Staff protocols that make women feel safer

19% of the participants reported facing safety related issues while staying alone at a hotel. These were mostly women from 18-35 years age group. The most common issues raised by them were misconduct from hotel staff and lack of effective grievance mechanism. Few women also reported theft in their room.

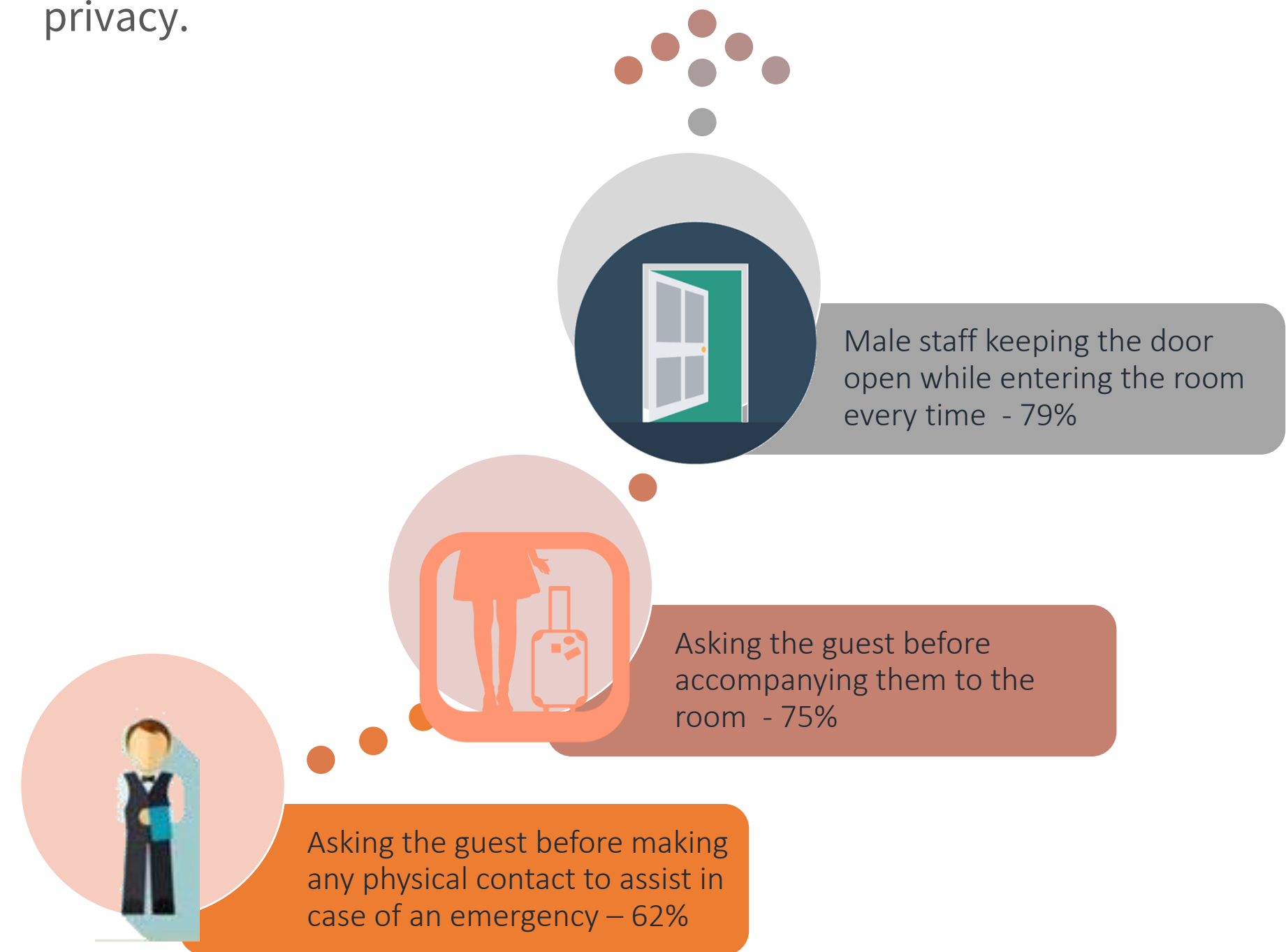
"Some one tried to open my door in the middle of the night. My room is locked from the inside so no one could come in. Called reception but they just brushed me off."

"A male waiter that had seen me around came to my room one night and asked if he could come in and hang out. I said no and closed the door. I stayed in my room the rest of the time I was there, except to eat, and did not order room service."

"Got unsolicited call from a hotel guest unknown to me. Hotel reception when told, dealt with it immediately and updated me."

"Email from a staff telling me I am very pretty and asking how long I would be in the country. Not acceptable at all."

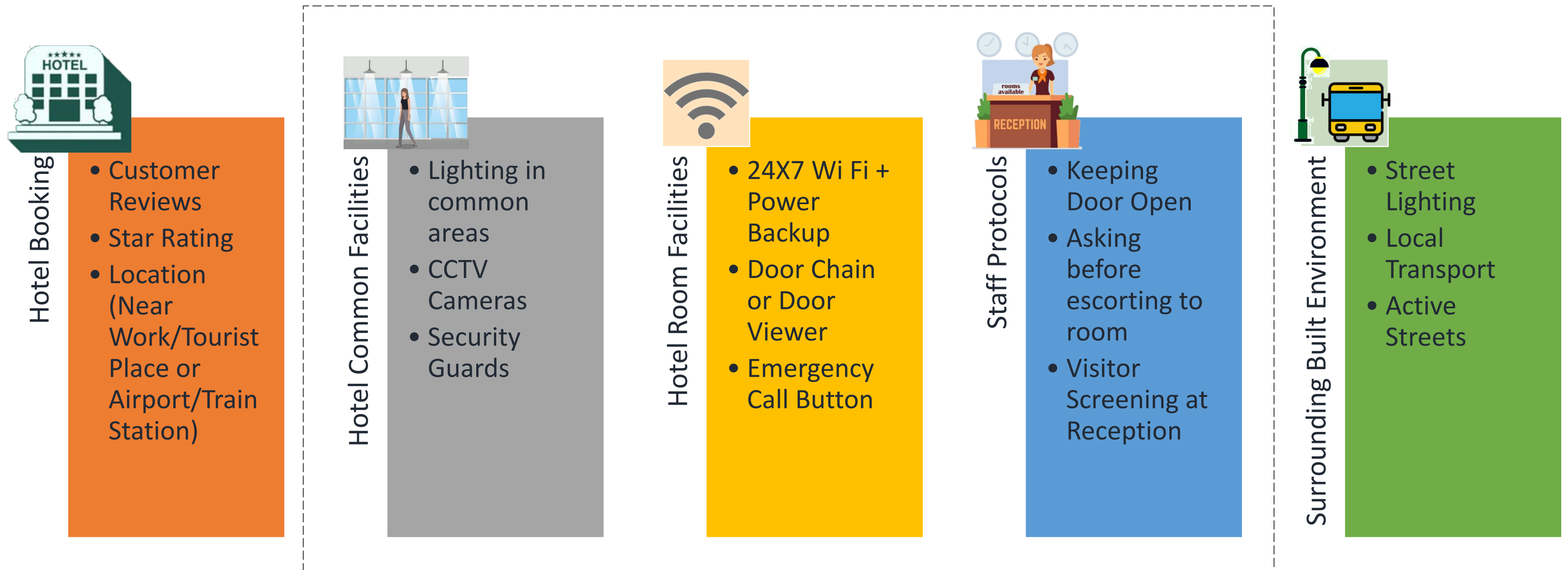
Staff attitude and hotel protocols for staff behaviour play a crucial role in influencing women' experience. Respondents highlighted that they would feel safer and comfortable if the hotel staff followed certain protocols that respect their privacy.



Factors that affect women's experience

This survey looked at the importance all the factors ranging from city services to the hotel room's facilities from a woman's perspective. The figure below shows 5 categories that impact a woman's overall experience of safety and the top 3 features ranked as 'most important' in each category.

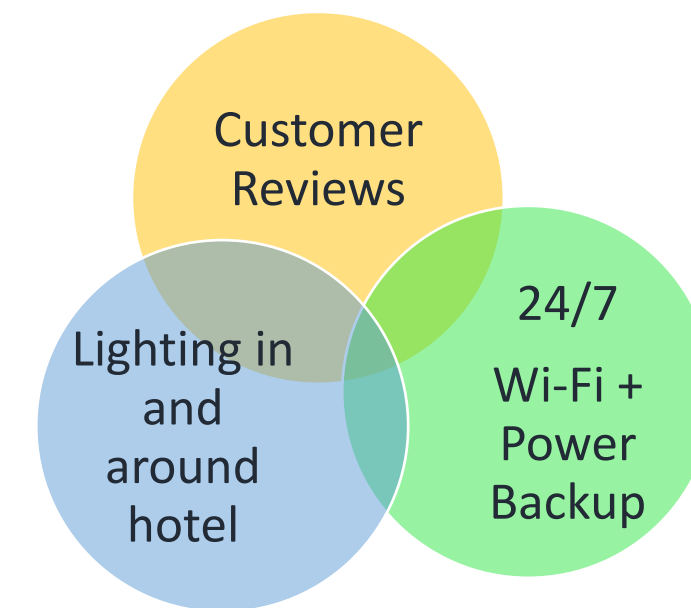
It should be noted here that 'Hotel Booking' and 'Surrounding Built Environment' are not within hotel's direct control. The remaining three sets of factors can be improved by hotels to address safety concerns of women.



Overall Findings

The survey findings suggest that women travellers across the world are concerned about their safety. Across different age groups and cities, women feel safer when the surrounding environment has functional streetlights, good pavements, presence of shops and local public transport within reach. Women are always mindful of their surroundings when it comes to their personal safety, even inside a hotel room. However, when it comes to taking precautions inside a hotel room, more Indian women travellers opt to inspect the room than women from other countries.

In terms of staff conduct, most of the respondents highlighted the need for staff protocol measures, especially for male staff. This includes male staff keeping the door open while entering the room for any purpose and asking the guest before accompanying them to the room with their luggage. Since staff conduct is key factor in influencing a guest's experience, hotels should prioritize gender sensitization training for all their staff and maintain proper protocols to redress any grievance from women travellers.



Overall, customer reviews of the hotel (90%), lighting in common areas (87%), availability of 24/7 Wi-Fi (87%), 24/7 power backup (86%) and presence of well-lit streets around the hotel (80%) emerged as the five most important factors that women travellers consider while staying alone at a hotel.

Only a few women gave importance to facilities like separate floor/section for women guests (12%), availability of female cab drivers (21%), preference of room near the elevator/stairs (23%), availability of female staff for room service (25%) and housekeeping (27%). This indicates that preferential or segregation facilities has limited influence on women's feeling of safety.

Way Forward

The travel trends in the past few years have shown a consistent rise in the number of solo female travellers. The trend is visible in both metro cities and in destination tourist towns where women choose to go for leisure and recreation. Women from all walks of life; media/entertainment, academics/research, travel bloggers or the social and corporate sector, are travelling for both work and leisure. For women to actively participate and enjoy their right to a city, it is essential that they are at ease while navigating through public spaces.

Though the current Covid-19 pandemic has brought travel to a halt, this will not be the case forever. In the process of re-opening cities, people will need an environment where they can move and interact safely. As cities resume economic activities, hotels would have additional responsibilities of providing safety services for their guests.

Feeling safe is an important concern for women travellers, especially when they are staying alone. Our survey highlights the importance of various factors both inside and around the hotel that significantly influence women's feeling of safety.

Based on this survey, Safetipin will build a set of indicators to guide hotels to create a safe and comfortable environment for solo female travellers. Prioritizing and improving services that impact women's feeling of safety would not only enhance the overall experience for female guests, but also increase the likelihood of more women customers.



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