

## *Solo female travel – experiences and spatial practices of female travellers*

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The aim of this paper is to examine the key aspects of solo female travel highlighted in previous scientific research, with a particular focus on the motivations of solo female travellers, the relationship between gender and space, limitations and safety concerns, and strategies for mitigating risks. The analysis draws on relevant academic literature from the fields of tourism, gender studies, and feminist geography. Although motivations for solo travel are often linked to personal development, empowerment, and the desire to explore new places, female travellers face numerous spatial and social constraints. In response to these challenges, they develop various coping strategies aimed at resisting fear and gender stereotypes. However, there is a noticeable lack of research focused on analysing the perception of tourist destinations as either desirable and safe or undesirable and unsafe for solo female travellers, as well as on identifying the key factors that shape these perceptions. For a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it is important to include sociodemographic data, along with the spatial context, which opens up opportunities for

further research from geographical perspectives. Future studies may contribute to shaping a tourism offer that better meets the needs and ensures the safety of solo female travellers.

**Keywords:** solo female travel, literature review, gender, spatial constraints, adaptation strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Solo travellers have become an increasingly important segment of the tourism market in recent times, with a particularly noticeable rise in the number of women travelling alone (Ghadban et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2019). Improved access to education and income opportunities, more free time and disposable income, along with the promotion of global travel and the rise of individualism, influenced the growing presence of women in the tourism industry (Bryson, 1994; Wilson & Little, 2005). The increase in female travellers over the past few decades can also be attributed to rising marriage and motherhood age, declining birth rates, and more frequent divorces (Junek et al., 2006; Laesser et al., 2009). These demographic and social changes opened up new possibilities for women's leisure and travel (Kim & Beck, 2009).

In the 1970s, the concept of selective forms of tourism gained significance, including the search for more “authentic” and non-traditional travel experiences. This shift led to a decline in package tours and a rise in the number individual travel (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2006; Ejupi & Medaric, 2022; Rabotić, 2013). In the contemporary globalized tourism market, tourists are described as individualistic, flexible, spontaneous, unpredictable, and environmentally conscious (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Solo travellers often seek a more relaxed, risky, and adventurous experience (Mani & Jose, 2020), and data suggest that women today travel alone more frequently than men. According to Road Scholar<sup>1</sup>, up to 30% of their tour participants travel solo, with women making up 85% of this group (Road Scholar, 2024). Similarly, Condor Ferries<sup>2</sup> reports that women outnumber men in solo travel at a ratio of 67% to 37% (Condor Ferries, 2025). Additionally, 73% of travel agents state that women are more likely to travel solo than men (Condor Ferries, 2025).

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<sup>1</sup> Road Scholar is a U.S. based nonprofit organization headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, that specializes in educational travel programs primarily designed for older adults. The organization offers a variety of travel experiences, including solo trips, women-only adventures, grandparent-grandchild family trips, and more.

<sup>2</sup> Condor Ferries was a provider of passenger and freight ferry services between the United Kingdom, Guernsey, Jersey, and France. As of March 2025, operations specifically related to Guernsey were taken over by Brittany Ferries. The operator collected annual statistical reports on solo female travel and compiled them into a comprehensive yearly report.

Gibson et al. (2013) noted that tourism is a socio-cultural phenomenon, meaning that travellers' experiences are shaped by various cultural factors, with gender being one of the most significant. For a long time, gender largely defined the ability to embark on solo journeys. Female travellers were, and to some extents still are, constrained by roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). However, solo travel provides women with physical and mental space to resist gender role stereotypes and reconstruct their identity (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022).

Women's solo travel is defined as travel where women arrive at a destination alone, without being part of a package tour, group, or guided trip (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). Some definitions emphasize the voluntary absence of company (without family, partners, or friends) (Mani & Jose, 2020) or the inability to find travel companions (Yang, 2020). Female solo travellers choose this type of travel for various reasons and motivations, but all definitions share key aspects: independent travel planning, travelling alone, and spending time solo (entirely or partially) during the journey (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Mani & Jose, 2020; Yang, 2020).

The increasing trend of women's solo travel has spurred numerous studies on the topic since the late 1990s. Most of these scientific studies have focused on travellers from developed countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Weatherby & Vidon, 2018; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008). However, in recent years, there has been a rise in research covering women from Asia (Nguyen & Hsu, 2022; Osman et al., 2020; Seow & Brown, 2020; Teng et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2018a; Yang et al., 2018b) and particularly from Muslim countries (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) (Hosseini et al., 2021; Nikjoo et al., 2021; Nikjoo et al., 2023; Seyfi et al., 2020; Siddiqui & Bano, 2023).

From the perspective of feminist geography, solo female travel has been primarily explored by Wilson and Little (2005, 2008) and Yang et al. (2018a, 2019). Wilson and Little (2005, 2008) analyse how solo female travellers experience the "geography of fear" in public spaces, which are often perceived as unsafe for women, and examine the constraints female travellers face, including safety concerns, societal perceptions, and gender norms. Yang et al. (2018a, 2019), using feminist geographic perspectives, demonstrated how the intersection of gender, culture, class, and other social factors shapes the ways in which Asian solo female travellers construct their identities and navigate gendered spaces and perceived risks. Benjamin and Schwab (2023), through a feminist

lens, compare their own solo travel experiences within systems designed primarily for men. Conversely, some authors, such as Heimtun and Abelsen (2013), only briefly reference the theoretical aspects of feminist geography, focusing primarily on which types of solo travel are more desirable among different genders.

Although the topic of solo female travel is increasingly addressed in international research, there remains a significant lack of scientific work on this subject in Croatia. Specifically, there are no scientific articles, dissertations, or books in the Croatian language that systematically address this topic. In the media space, a large number of articles and features can be found (according to a Google search, more than 50,000) dealing with topics such as recommendations of destinations suitable for solo female travellers, safety travel tips, travelogues, and offers from travel agencies specialized in so-called “women only” trips. However, academic research in the fields of geography or gender studies focusing on this issue is still lacking in Croatia.

The aim of this paper is to examine the key aspects of solo female travel highlighted in previous scholarly literature. Based on a review of relevant sources, this paper specifically addresses four topics: 1) the motivations of solo female travelers; 2) the relationship between gender and space 3) travel constraints and perceptions of safety, and 4) risk management strategies during solo travel, which are closely tied to the perception of safe spaces and places. This topic has mostly been explored from the perspectives of tourism, gender studies, and feminist geography. The analysis draws on relevant academic literature from these fields, and the conclusions of the paper are based on that set of materials. To a lesser extent, certain professional sources and literature were also studied (e.g., tourist guides for solo female travellers).

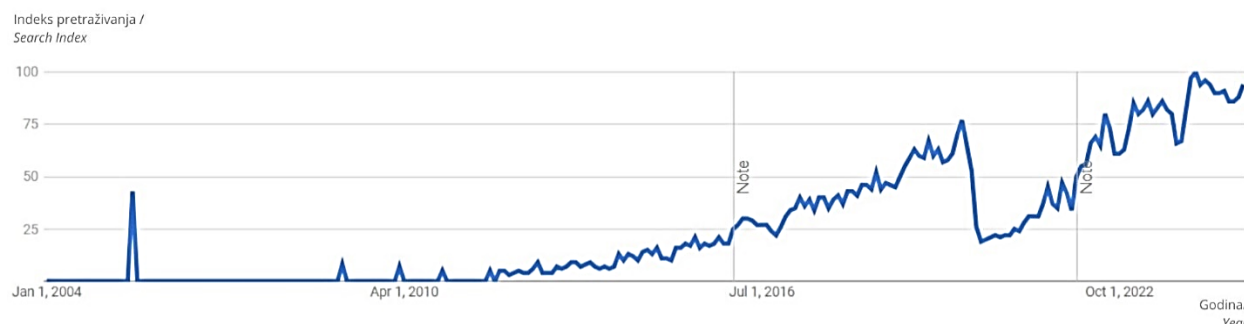
## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S SOLO TRAVEL**

Women have historically been largely restricted in planning and embarking on solo travel. The earliest known female travellers were pilgrims who journeyed to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. For instance, records indicate that Helena made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 327 AD, while the first documented female travelogue is attributed to the nun Egeria, a Roman citizen who travelled alone in 383 AD (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Although the 16th and 17th centuries were marked by global exploration, travel, and colonial conquests, these activities were predominantly considered male domains. Despite this, some women also travelled and made explorations independently during this period and continued to do so in the 18th and 19th centuries (Wilson & Little, 2005). These travellers were mainly well-educated and wealthy women. However, despite their social status, such journeys were deemed inappropriate, particularly for distinguished ladies (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). Nevertheless, from the late 19th century onward, social and political changes enabled greater participation of women in modern travel. Compared to previous generations, social conventions regarding women's roles and behaviours significantly changed in much of the Western world (Wilson & Little, 2005). Particularly massive social transformations took place after the World War II, and resulted in structural conditions for women (Yang et al., 2020).

The contemporary female travel market therefore began to emerge primarily in the West in the 1970s (Frohlick, 2013). Despite lower incomes and higher unemployment rates compared to men, U.S. women in the 1970s already had a higher share of international travel (52%) than men (48%) (Zrnc, 1974). Women with higher education and income levels demonstrated a greater tendency to travel, with the number of women travelling abroad surpassing men in all age groups except 25 - 34, likely due to family obligations (Zrnc, 1974). The share of women in this market niche continued to grow in the 1980s and 1990s, spreading to Asian countries, especially Japan and China, and from the 21st century onwards to Asia in general (Yang et al., 2017). Recent research shows that women represent half of the contemporary travel market, and it is projected that their participation in tourism will continue to grow, and this growth will be especially remarkable in the Asia, with an estimation of a 400% increment by 2030 (Yang et al., 2017; Su & Wu, 2020). Collins and Tisdell (2002) emphasized that the demand for solo travel is influenced by

numerous demographic and socioeconomic factors such as ethnic identity, nationality, age, family size, gender, marital status, religion, income, occupation, and education.

Using Google Trends, it is possible to observe the trend in the number of searches for the term “solo female travel” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Google Trends tool analyses how many times a given term was searched on the Google search engine within a specified time period (in this case, all searches for the term on the search engine from 2004 to 2024 were analysed). Interest in the term shows long-term growth, with minimal attention until 2010, when a sharp increase began, likely driven by social media and women's empowerment (Fig. 1). In 2017, Google searches for this term increased by 52% compared to the previous year, and in the four years before the COVID-19 pandemic, searches grew sixfold. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant drop in interest in 2020, but the post-pandemic recovery (2021–2024) led to record popularity. This indicates a growing interest in solo female travel.



**Slika 1.** Interes i pretraživanje pojma solo female travel na internetskoj tražilici Google od 2004. do 2024. godine\*

**Figure 1** Interest and search trends for the term “solo female travel” on the Google search engine from 2004 to 2024\*

Source: Google Trends, 2025.

\* The numbers represent global search interest over a given time period. A value of 100 indicates the highest popularity for the term. A value of 50 means the term's popularity is half of the peak value. A result of 0 means there was not enough data for the term.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted international travel and altered tourism dynamics in 2020 and 2021, the solo travel market had a potential to recover more quickly compared to other segments of the tourism sector (Teng et al., 2023). Due to the need for physical distancing and reduced social interactions, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the appeal of solo travel (Otegui-Carles et al., 2022).

## MOTIVATIONS OF SOLO FEMALE TRAVELLERS

Broadly speaking, there are two main categories of reasons why women choose to travel solo: (a) due to a lack of travel companions and (b) by personal choice (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001; Yang, 2020). A study conducted in 2022 on a global sample of 4,000 women who had previously travelled solo found that as many as 54% of them did not have a travel companion (Statista, 2024a). Conversely, many women choose to go on a solo trip even though they had someone they could travel with. Motivations, based on the analysis of relevant literature, are summarized in Table 1 through thematic categories formed on the basis of the most frequently represented motives in previous research. For example, Ejupi and Medaric (2022) highlight three dimensions of motivations for solo travel: psychological (desire for adventure, escape from routine, self-confidence, etc.), cultural (sightseeing, visiting museums, exploring local culture, etc.), and personal (visiting family and friends, meeting new people, learning new skills, personal development, etc.). Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006) further identify four key motivations for solo female travel: experience, escape from routine, relaxation, and socialization. Pereira and Silva (2018) expand these categories to eight motivational dimensions, including escaping daily obligations, self-identity and development, challenge, connection with others, learning, adventure, new life perspectives, and autonomy.

Solo female travellers seek self-discovery, education, cultural experiences, freedom from household constraints and obligations, stress recovery, and the development of independence during their journeys (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2006; Hassan & Damir, 2022). Teng et al. (2023) also state that intrinsic values are key motivational factors for women's solo travel, with escape/relaxation being the dominant contributor. Solo travellers often wish to break free from routine, seeking new cultural contexts beyond their usual environment (Pereira & Silva, 2018).

Solo travel further provides a deeply personal experience that offers opportunities for introspection and growth. Most female travellers associate solo travel with a sense of personal development and education (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). For many women, overcoming potential travel obstacles and facing whatever challenges arise along the way contributes to a sense of confidence that remains even after returning home (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Lagier et al., 2021). Wilson and Harris (2006), in their research on women's solo travel and leisure, described solo travel as a meaningful journey. A meaningful journey is considered an experience in which

individuals seek or find an increased sense of confidence and empowerment. It involves reflecting on one's life opportunities and perspectives, as well as reconsidering relationships with society and those around them (Wilson & Harris, 2006). In their study, women described their travel experiences as transformative, deeply significant, and empowering. Mani and Jose (2020) also highlight the transformative dimension that solo travel can provide for women. Through independent exploration of the unknown, women develop courage, independence, and mental sharpness. These experiences encourage them to observe, listen, be present in the moment, and feel inspired (Mani & Jose, 2020).

The significance of solo travel is also reflected in the recognition received from family, friends, and colleagues. This recognition, along with the new challenges faced during their travels, significantly contributes to a sense of empowerment in both personal and professional spheres of life (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Furthermore, the benefits of solo travel arise from meaningful social and cultural interactions with other travellers and hosts, prompting individuals to reconsider their own values on both a personal and societal level (Wilson & Harris, 2006). All these perspectives highlight the importance of solo travel as a means of personal development, discovering resourcefulness, building self-confidence, and fostering independence.

**Tablica 1.** Glavne kategorije motivacija za samostalna putovanja žena na temelju analize literature  
**Table 1** Main categories of motivations for solo female travel based on literature review

Motivation Category	Specific Reasons/Motivations
Personal Growth	introspection, personal development, self-identity, empowerment, confidence, independence, testing personal limits, developing courage and resourcefulness
Escape and Relaxation	escape from routine and daily obligations, stress recovery, freedom from household constraints
Cultural and Social Experience	meeting new people, sightseeing, experiencing different cultures, visiting family and friends
Practical Reasons	lack of travel companions, difficulties coordinating with others (time, budget), practical circumstances

Source: Chiang & Jogaratnam (2006); Ejupi & Medaric (2022); Hassan & Damir (2022); Jordan & Gibson (2005); Lagier et al. (2021); Mani & Jose (2020); Pereira & Silva (2018); Statista (2024a); Teng et al. (2023); Wilson & Harris (2006); Yang (2020).

The analysis of motivations indicates that women's solo travel goes beyond the mere lack of a travel companion and represents a significant aspect of personal growth, independence, and life

transformation. Key factors include introspection, the development of courage, and testing personal limits, as well as practical reasons such as the flexibility to plan trips without the need to coordinate with others. Additionally, solo travel allows women to fully immerse themselves in new cultural and social experiences, further enriching their perspectives and strengthening their connection to the global community. Regardless of the initial reason for travel, research shows that the experiences women gain from these journeys often lead to a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings, increased self-confidence, and a stronger sense of freedom and empowerment.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER AND SPACE**

Solo female travel is an interesting topic from a geographical perspective, particularly within the framework of feminist geography, which has developed under the influence of poststructuralist theoretical approaches. Poststructuralism challenges traditional geographical knowledge and emphasizes the concept of situated knowledge, which suggests that knowledge is always limited, specific, partial, and dependent on origin (Šakaja, 2015). According to feminist geography most existing geographical knowledge was shaped from the perspective of a white, heterosexual, middle-class Western man, while the knowledge and experiences of women were largely overlooked (Šakaja, 2015). This direction within geography emerged during the 1980s with the establishment of the Women and Geography Study Group, with the aim to examine the geographical aspects of gender differentiation and to promote the feminist perspective in research and education (Mohammad, 2016).

During solo travels, women navigate unfamiliar spaces and diverse cultural contexts, removed from the safety of known environments, which inevitably raises concerns about personal security. As early as the late 1980s, Valentine described the spatial-temporal constraints on women's mobility with the concept of the geography of women's fear (Valentine, 1989). This perspective is highly applicable to the study of solo female travel, as the geography of fear manifests in various ways, including personal fear and the concerns of close acquaintances (Wilson & Little, 2008). Numerous studies by feminist geographers and other researchers highlighted clear gender differences in how men and women use and experience public space (Aitchison, 1999; Carr, 1998, 2001; Curson & Kitts, 2000; Domosh et al., 2001; Mehta, 1999; Mowl & Towner,

1995; Pain, 1991; Rose, 1993; Koskela, 1997; Massey, 1994). Women experience significantly greater restrictions in movement and public space usage due to the fear of potential violent or sexual assault (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Bialeschki & Chapel, 1999; Listerborn, 2016; Pain, 1991). Although women's fear of crime is often greater than the actual risk, it is proportional to their perceived risk, which is shaped by society, the education system, and the media (Reid & Konrad, 2004). Fear is, to some extent, a social construct influenced by media, films, and fiction, reinforcing the gendered identity of women as vulnerable individuals. The perception of fear and security is highly subjective, depending on individual experiences, with no clear boundaries between "safe" and "unsafe" places (Pain, 1991). This sense of fear affects women's participation in leisure activities, as they are more likely than men to avoid situations or locations perceived as unsafe (Bialeschki & Chapel, 1999). Women travelling alone are particularly vulnerable to threats of physical assault, sexual harassment, and unwanted attention, which can limit their choice of destinations and hinder social interactions while travelling (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013). Many public spaces and tourist sites are coded as "male" and designed for men's movement and enjoyment, which, in certain socio-cultural contexts, leads to the exclusion and isolation of women (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000).

Expanding on geographer Gill Valentine's concept of the geography of women's fear, Wilson and Little (2008) introduce the concept of the "geography of women's travel fear," reflecting the perception that solo travel is unsafe and, in certain times and in certain places, inappropriate. Independent female travellers stand out from social norms, making them more visible and vulnerable, with many experiencing fear primarily based on the anticipation of male violence and harassment (Wilson & Little, 2008). As a result, solo female travellers perceive, experience, and navigate tourism spaces differently than male travellers. Tourism spaces are predominantly shaped by the experiences of male tourists from developed Western countries, making them inherently gendered and racialised (Yang et al., 2018b). In regions where women's social status differs significantly from that in Western countries, such as the Middle East, women are even more vigilant due to significantly higher levels of male attention (Junek et al., 2006). Research has shown that female travellers identified certain places within destinations that should be avoided to minimize the risk of unwanted stares, catcalling, or attacks as much as possible (Wilson & Little, 2008). High-risk areas include narrow, dark, and dead-end streets, parks, public

transportation stations, underground parking garages, and certain types of accommodation (Bialeschki & Chapel, 1999; England & Simon, 2010; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2023; Koskela & Pain, 2000; Valentine, 1989; Wang & Wu, 2020; Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2018a). Most female travellers, however, emphasize that the sense of danger increases during evening and nighttime when moving through a destination. So, rather than avoiding solo travel altogether, female travellers adapt by modifying their spatial behaviours and appearance to reduce perceived risks (Yang et al., 2018a).

Furthermore, under the influence of information they receive from various sources, particularly through different media (social networks, blogs, news, etc.), female travellers create their own mental maps that define which spaces and countries they consider safe and which they perceive as unsafe for solo travel. A crucial element in planning a solo trip is the choice of destination. The perception or “image” of a place plays a key role in shaping human behaviour in space, influencing decisions about destination selection, travel routes, and how to get there (Kaba, 2021). Solo female travellers are often restricted in their choice of destinations and access to certain countries due to fear of negative perceptions directed at women travelling alone in those regions (Wilson & Little, 2005). Extremely negative perceptions of certain places can limit access to those destinations and contribute to keeping such geographical areas unknown or hidden from women, such as the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia perceived as unsafe (Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang et al., 2018a). Additionally, some spaces are socially coded as “male spaces,” such as Africa (Ngwira et al., 2020), which discourages solo female travellers or makes it more challenging for women who decide to travel to such places. However, it should be emphasized that the perception of space itself largely depends on the perspective from which it is observed, meaning that perceptions of the safety of certain destinations vary among different groups of solo female travellers. For example, Europe was identified as a safe destination in a study based on the perspectives of European solo female travellers (Wilson & Little, 2008). However, in other studies conducted from the perspective of Asian solo female travellers, Europe was highlighted as a risky destination (Yang et al., 2018a; Yang et al., 2018b). The reason for this is the perception that Asian women in Europe are often racially stereotyped as sexually available or sex workers.

Popular guides and media aimed at solo female travellers are increasingly offering recommendations for destinations considered safe and suitable for solo travel. For example, in the

book *Fly Solo* (Rodriguez Williamson, 2007), the most recommended destinations are located in Europe, followed by North America, Asia, and Central and South America, while the Middle East (except for Dubai) and Africa are entirely excluded. The book *Go Your Own Way* (Conlon et al., 2007) offers a broader geographical scope, including Asia and Africa, while more recent guides such as *The Solo Travel Handbook* (Reid, 2017) associate destinations with thematic interests (e.g., Vietnam with gastronomy or Bali with introspection), thus increasingly incorporating regions such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Nevertheless, the guides still emphasize places perceived as relatively safe and more liberal, such as Dubai and Jordan (Kittrell, 2021).

Despite this, academic research that systematically analyses the perception and selection of specific destinations among solo female travellers remains limited. Most studies focus on broader themes such as safety, social norms, and the subjective perception of space within tourist destinations (Douglas & Barrett, 2020; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; Yang et al., 2018a). Only a few works, such as those by Wilson and Little (2008) and Yang et al. (2018a), explore in more depth the cultural differences and personal experiences that influence safety perceptions and destination choice. Their findings show that Western female travellers often avoid destinations such as the Middle East, South America, Africa, Turkey, and Morocco due to cultural norms, perceptions of male dominance, and fear of violence, while Asian travellers additionally point to Europe, India, and the Middle East as undesirable regions due to sexual stereotypes, political instability, and patriarchal norms (Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2018a). The absence of systematic and detailed analyses of destination choices and differences in perception among solo female travellers based on their sociodemographic characteristics, as well as the lack of understanding of the reasons behind these patterns, represent a research gap in the existing literature.

## **CONSTRAINTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY DURING SOLO TRAVEL**

Women who choose to travel solo face various constraints both before and during their journey. Before travelling, some women experience fear stemming from their own internal assessments of solo travel safety and the concerns of close ones. Family and friends often express worry and surprise at a woman's desire to travel alone, reflecting the belief that such travel is unsafe for women (Valentine, 1989; Wilson & Little, 2008). Family support is frequently lacking,

sometimes leading to conflicts with parents (in the case of younger travellers) or the withholding of travel plans, and in some cases, even the abandonment of the trip (Mani & Jose, 2020). Furthermore, family obligations can present obstacles for some women who may feel guilty about leaving their children and partners behind, which may lead them to abandon their travel plans (Seagrave, 2016). However, it is important to note that solo travel can also have positive effects on family relationships. Women often become overwhelmed by multiple roles (mother, wife, daughter), which can restrict their self-expression. Solo travel provides an opportunity for temporary relief from these roles and reconnection with oneself (Seagrave, 2016), leading to greater personal satisfaction that can positively impact family dynamics.

Despite the fact that solo travel is a voluntary challenge for women, perceived and real risks can negatively affect their experience (Karagöz et al., 2021). Risk perception may be influenced by individual characteristics, such as personality traits, cultural background, and prior travel experience (Carballo et al., 2022). However, actual risks also exist, and media reports of sexual assaults and murders of women further heighten travellers' awareness of potential negative experiences on solo trips (Yang et al., 2018a).

Wilson and Little (2005) conducted an extensive study on the constraints of solo travel from the perspective of feminist geography and categorized them into four groups: sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial (Table 2). The first category includes sociocultural constraints arising from the social and cultural contexts in which women live and the challenges they face during solo travel. These constraints involve the influence of societal expectations, women's roles and responsibilities, others' perceptions of their travel, and unwanted attention (mostly from men) while travelling alone. Closely related to the sociocultural aspect, the second category focuses on personal and internal constraints stemming from self-perception, beliefs, and emotions, including self-doubt, fear, vulnerability, and loneliness. The third type of constraint involves practical difficulties and challenges faced by solo female travellers, such as a lack of time and money, limited local knowledge at the destination, and the stress and fatigue associated with solo travel. The fourth category, particularly relevant for geographers, includes factors that limit women's freedom of movement in certain spaces, such as restrictions in destination choice and limited mobility within the tourist location itself (Wilson & Little, 2005). Among all these categories, their

research found that the sociocultural context was the dominant limiting factor for women's choices, opportunities, and experiences in solo travel.

**Tablica 2.** Ograničenja prije putovanja i tijekom putovanja koja utječu na samostalna putovanja žena

**Table 2** Constraints before and during travel affecting solo female travellers

Subcategory	Constraints Before Travel	Constraints During Travel
Sociocultural	Social expectations Roles and responsibilities Other's perceptions	Host attitudes Unwanted attention
Personal	Doubts and fears	Fear and vulnerability Loneliness
Practical	Lack of time and money	Lack of local knowledge Travelling with others (solo travellers) Stress and fatigue
Spatial	Limited destination choice	Restricted movement Conspicuousness

Source: Wilson & Little (2005, p. 162)

As numerous other studies have shown, personal safety emerges as a key limiting factor for undertaking solo travel (Ghadban et al., 2023; Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang, 2020). Women most often express concerns about potential sexual harassment, catcalling, uncomfortable stares, stalking, and theft (Karagöz et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2018b). Fear and the threat of violence against women are deeply ingrained in culture, becoming a “fact of life” that most girls and women are socialized into from an early age. Through various patterns of socialization, women are taught to avoid certain places when alone, to be cautious of strangers and nighttime travel, and to stay within the safe confines of home or its immediate surroundings (Wilson & Little, 2008). According to a Statista (2024) study on solo travel, female travellers primarily avoided travelling alone due to concerns about their personal safety, as cited by 69% of surveyed women. Higher costs and fear of getting lost were the second most frequently mentioned barriers (65% and 50%) (Statista, 2024b). However, research has shown that most female travellers consciously accept the risks, with some even normalizing certain levels of street harassment, interpreting it as a common occurrence in specific situations. Some women have chosen to perceive catcalling as a compliment

(Yang et al., 2018b), using this interpretation as a coping mechanism in environments where women are perceived as available simply because they are travelling alone.

Given that concerns about personal safety, especially fear of sexual harassment, are the primary challenges for solo female travellers (Yang, 2020), safety tips are included in almost all travel guides aimed at solo female travellers (Reid, 2017; Eubanks, 2019; Seagrave, 2016). Many travel guide authors have explored women's safety issues, with most offering practical advice on appropriate behaviour, emphasizing that women should remain vigilant. Fear of safety risks is further highlighted in a study by Douglas and Barrett (2020), which compared articles aimed at solo female vs. male travellers. Articles targeting female travellers frequently addressed safety concerns or the presence of restrictive gender norms in certain destinations, whereas articles aimed at male travellers focused more on romantic and flirtatious interactions (Douglas & Barrett, 2020). Warnings about potential risks were significantly more pronounced in articles for women than in those for men, reinforcing the perception that solo female travellers face greater limitations. Nearly all articles written for women included at least one negative experience to anticipate, compared to only half of those targeting male travellers (Douglas & Barrett, 2020).

These pre-travel concerns and in-trip experiences shape women's overall satisfaction with solo travel. However, despite gender-specific challenges and constraints, female travellers develop strategies to navigate different spaces and situations, enabling them to achieve their travel goals and explore destinations independently.

## **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING RISKS WHILE TRAVELLING SOLO**

Most women are aware of potential risks while travelling, as travel guides and social media heavily emphasize safety tips for solo female travellers to help them avoid perceived “dangers” primarily associated with men (Yang et al., 2018b). To better adapt to their surroundings and reduce the likelihood of various forms of harassment (unwanted stares, whistles, catcalling, assault), women employ different risk-mitigation strategies. The strategies found in the analysed scientific studies were categorized and summarized in Table 3. The main strategies used by solo female travellers are various ways of adapting to situations and cultural contexts of the places they navigate in order to divert attention from their female bodies (Wilson & Little, 2008; Wilson et al., 2009). One of the most common approaches is dressing in accordance with local culture and

aligning behaviour with local (female) norms. For example, a study by Kaba (2021) found that covering the body appropriately was the most frequently used strategy among solo female travellers in Turkey. These travellers were aware of cultural dress codes, particularly in conservative parts of the country, and tried to comply to blend in and avoid unwanted attention (Kaba, 2021). Another common risk-management strategy involves constant awareness of one's surroundings and avoiding areas perceived or traditionally considered unsafe, which, as noted earlier, often depends on the time of day. Certain spaces (e.g., deserted alleys, parks, underground train stations, isolated areas) and venues (e.g., bars) are particularly avoided in the evening or at night (Kaba, 2021; Koskela, 1997; Wilson & Little, 2008; Wilson et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2018a; Zhang et al., 2022). Risk reduction also includes sticking to central and busier areas, especially when moving around in the evening. Another strategy that female travellers use to reduce their sense of insecurity is surrounding themselves with local women and children, for example, by being near them on public transportation (Douglas & Barrett, 2020).

To deter unwanted male attention, some solo travellers wear a real or fake wedding ring or carry a photo of a real or imaginary husband, a practice even supported by some government websites offering safety advice for women (Kaba, 2021). Other tactics include ignoring catcalls, avoiding direct eye contact, and using distractions such as books or mobile phones to avoid making eye contact with others (Douglas & Barrett, 2020).

Hiring a local guide and connecting with other travellers is another risk-management strategy for solo travel (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2006). Keeping friends and family informed about daily plans and sharing location data also enhances personal safety (Seagrave, 2016). Many women rely on their past experiences to navigate unfamiliar environments, reducing the feeling of vulnerability (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2006). One of the most common pieces of advice solo female travellers share with others is to trust their intuition, use common sense, be aware of their behaviour, and avoid unnecessary risks (Kaba, 2021; Wilson et al., 2009).

**Tablica 3.** Glavne strategije nošenja s rizicima na samostalnom putovanju

**Table 3** Main strategies for managing risks while travelling solo

Strategy Category	Strategies
<b>Preparation and planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing close contacts about the destination and sharing travel plans and locations with them</li> <li>• Exploring the destination with a local guide</li> <li>• Connecting with other travellers</li> <li>• Applying past experiences to navigate unfamiliar places and people</li> <li>• Creating mental maps of spaces</li> <li>• Limiting destination choices based on perceived safety</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptation of spatial and temporal practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding unsafe places (narrow alleys, underground parking garages, public transport stations, parks, etc.)</li> <li>• Avoiding certain venues at night (e.g., cafés)</li> <li>• Staying in busier and central locations</li> <li>• Avoiding movement in the evening and at night</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptation to cultural context and gender norms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dressing in accordance with local culture</li> <li>• Aligning behaviour with local (female) norms</li> <li>• Surrounding oneself with women and children in public spaces</li> <li>• Wearing a real or fake wedding ring</li> <li>• Using photos of a real or imaginary husband</li> <li>• Avoiding interactions with men</li> <li>• Ignoring catcalling or unsolicited comments</li> <li>• Avoiding eye contact with strangers</li> </ul>

Sources: according to Cockburn-Wooten et. al. (2006); Douglas & Barrett (2020); Kaba (2021); Seagrave (2016); Valentine (1989); Wilson & Little (2008); Wilson et. al. (2009); Yang et. al. (2018a, 2018b)

The analysis of the strategies used by solo female travellers reflects a high level of awareness of potential risks, as well as an active adaptation to situations in order to ensure safety and a sense of control. Preparation, planning, and adaptation to cultural, gender, and spatial-temporal norms help women reduce vulnerability and increase self-confidence during their travels. Although these strategies are often based on prevention and avoiding risky situations, they also highlight resourcefulness, resilience, and the ability of women to manage their own experiences in a way that allows them freedom in exploring new spaces and enjoyment while travelling.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Solo female travel represents a growing segment of the tourism market, driven by significant changes in social norms and gender relations, increasing economic independence among women, the rise of single-person households, and shifts in lifestyle choices (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2005). For a deeper understanding of women's solo travel, it is essential to include demographic and socioeconomic data such as age, education, employment, income level, marital status, ethnicity, and other. Although this topic has rarely been studied from the perspective of geographic disciplines like demography or economic geography, it would be beneficial to incorporate these aspects in future research, as well. Analysing changes in demographic structures can help identify factors that encourage women to travel solo and explain differences in their behaviour and risk perceptions.

The analysis of relevant literature in this study focused on four important aspects of solo travel. Firstly, research indicates that motivations for solo travel are multifaceted, ranging from the need for self-empowerment, personal growth, and confidence development to escaping daily routines and responsibilities, as well as the desire to explore new cultures, people, and traditions (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Ejupi & Medaric, 2022; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Lagier et al., 2021; Pereira & Silva, 2018).

The other three key aspects emphasized in this paper - gender and space, constraints and the perceptions of safety, and the behavioural strategies of solo female travellers - are closely interconnected. Analysing previous research on the topic indicates that women face various challenges when travelling alone, with unwanted male attention being the most significant concern for most. In response, solo female travellers adjust their spatial practices and appearance (Kaba, 2021; Wilson & Little, 2008; Wilson et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2018a; Zhang et al., 2022). The geographical aspect of travel planning plays a crucial role in this context, as adaptation for most solo female travellers begins with the selection of tourist destinations. Certain destinations and regions of the world (such as Africa, the Middle East, and Muslim-majority countries in general) are often coded as undesirable for solo female travel. Furthermore, once at their destination, female travellers tend to align their appearance and behaviour with local female norms (e.g., adopting culturally appropriate clothing styles) and further restrict their spatial-temporal practices. Specific locations often evoke discomfort and fear among female travellers, leading them to avoid these

places and adjust their travel routes accordingly. In particular, these areas are commonly avoided in the evening and nighttime when the likelihood of attracting unwanted attention is higher. As previous studies show, such precautionary measures ultimately limit solo female travellers' spatial experiences and affect their overall satisfaction with their travels (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008). However, by employing these strategies, solo female travellers have found ways to overcome fear and embark on independent journeys, demonstrating that the benefits of solo travel outweigh the potential obstacles they face simply because they are women. In this regard, Jordan and Gibson (2005) described tourism as an area where women can practice resilience against gender stereotypes.

Nevertheless, women who choose to travel solo must carefully plan where they will go, taking into account various criteria, among which safety is the most important. However, despite the numerous guidebooks, online articles, and media features suggesting that certain countries or regions are more popular among solo female travellers, systematic and comparable scientific data are lacking. There are secondary sources such as data from travel agencies (e.g., Condor Ferries, Road Scholar) and results from global surveys (e.g., Statista), but these sources mostly focus on the general profile of solo female travellers or growth trends, without detailed breakdowns by countries or regions. In existing scholarly literature, from a spatial perspective, more attention has been given to identifying unsafe places within destinations that female travellers perceive as problematic and that influence their spatial practices. However, there is a lack of systematic analysis addressing the attractiveness and safety aspects of destinations in a broader spatial context, at the level of entire destinations, regions, or countries. This observed gap opens opportunities for future research, particularly from a geographical perspective, which could, through spatial analysis of safety factors in travel, contribute to a better understanding of the topic. Collecting and analysing such data would enable deeper insight into the spatial patterns and preferences of solo female travellers, thereby laying the groundwork for the development of more effective safety policies and a more diverse tourism offer tailored to the specific needs and interests of women who travel alone.

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L.S.B.: literature review, conceptualization, writing—final version, supervision.

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