

Staying on top of crime

IT used to be unsafe to carry oversized, designer handbags, wear flashy gold jewellery and walk to the shops late at night.

Today, it seems that it's just as dangerous to carry a paper bag, put on costume jewellery, or sometimes, even just drive to work.

Although people may be more careful with their belongings, thieves and crooks are more valiant and ruthless these days. Hence, women must be mindful of the factors that put them in danger before stepping out of the house.

Venovox security and investigation chief operating officer Rebecca C. said there were several factors contributing to the rise in crimes against women in the country, one of which was the lax attitude of security companies.

"Women are the easiest target for quick cash or valuables by means of snatching or extortion.

"Also, women are more independent now and they're part of a wider social circle. This means, many working women are out shopping more and having frequent late night outings — spending a great amount of time behind the wheel, making them ideal targets.

"The security industry, too, is to blame as it's marred by foreigners, guards with criminal records and

SAFETY: Recent news reports of violent crimes against women have heightened their sense of fear and dread. Security experts believe that some victims may be unwittingly putting themselves at greater risk by scrambling for their car keys in cluttered handbags or updating their Facebook status while crossing the street. Audrey Vijaindren learns the best ways to deter robbers

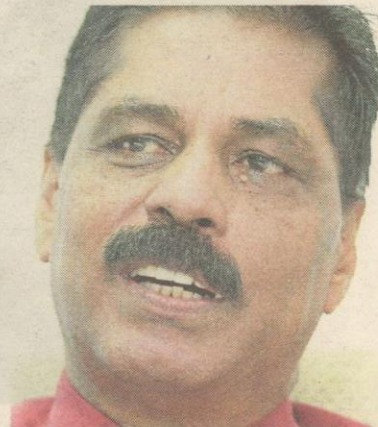
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Venovox security and investigation chief operating officer **Rebecca C.** says you're **unlikely to be attacked if you walk with your head held high and eyes alert**



Ex-policeman **Abdul Rahim Johari** says when a policeman orders you to **pull over at a secluded area, always ask for his authorisation card**



Metro Security Services general manager **S. Selvam** believes that women drivers should **never try to be Good Samaritans** as it's **not worth it these days**



those with criminal records and those above the age of 55. It doesn't help that buildings also have poor lighting and camera surveillance systems that don't work.

"Nevertheless, this should not serve as an excuse for the authorities to take the matter lightly."

She said it was imperative for women to take extra precaution.

"Many times, women forget where they've parked their cars, especially in shopping malls or office buildings. As a result, they wander around, exposing themselves to unnecessary danger. Instead, women should walk straight to their vehicle using the shortest route possible as soon as they exit the mall.

"Also, they must keep their remote and key in hand, and lock the car the moment they step into the vehicle. They shouldn't depend on the car's in-built auto lock system, which only takes effect when the

brake pedal is engaged or when the car moves past 20kph.

"Many women are also easily distracted by their smartphones — checking emails, updating social networking sites, replying SMSes and even playing games.

"You may not be a target the first time, but if you visit the same place many times, such as your bank, favourite shopping mall, restaurant or fitness centre, your attackers will start noticing a pattern. They'll realise that your attention is on your gadgets and not your surroundings.

"Women also tend to ignore their surroundings while driving; they feel safe in a box with four wheels on the road. Usually, they don't even notice if someone is trailing them in a car or motorcycle for 10 minutes.

"Most women won't even turn to see the drivers in the cars on their left or right, while waiting at traffic lights. They're worried that the other person may get the impression that they're checking them out. It is possible to look curiously without smiling and sending the wrong message.

"Although it's impossible to predict misfortune, it's best to be prepared," Rebecca said.

"You can deter an attacker by being aware of your surroundings at all times. You're unlikely to be attacked if you're walking with your head held high and eyes alert.

"Although self-defence and martial arts classes will unlikely be of any help if one is caught by surprise, it can serve as a tool to strengthen the body, keep the mind alert and build stamina."

Possessing gadgets like stun guns could cause more harm than good, she added.

"Besides the fact that most of these gadgets are illegal, it can also be used against you by the attacker. It's better to have something practical like a big, yellow whistle attached to your designer handbag, even if it means you're not as fashionable as the next girl.

"It serves as a deterrent and will be easily reachable in an emergency. If all else fails, shout for attention and create a scene. That usually throws an attacker off his game."

What do you think?

Send your views to

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Beware of these road scams

1 Motorcycle or car knocks into your vehicle on purpose, or the driver claims that you knocked into their vehicle. Once you get out of your vehicle to inspect the damage, they rob you or get away with your vehicle.

2 Spraying a chemical substance on your car tyre which causes it to smoke up after you drive away. When you get down to check, they rob you, steal your car, or do both.

3 Placing flyers on your car's back wiper to get you to stop at the side of the road. When you get down to remove it, they snatch your valuables.

4 Puncturing your car tyre so you're forced to stop and ask for help. Of course, they are the first ones in sight.

5 You are driving down the road and all of a sudden, someone in the car next to you waves frantically for you to pull over — signalling that there's something wrong with your car. Once you pull over and get down from your car, you're robbed.

6 The most common one is knocking on your car window asking for directions to an address written on a piece of paper. When you wind your screen down or open your car door, they hold you at knife-point.

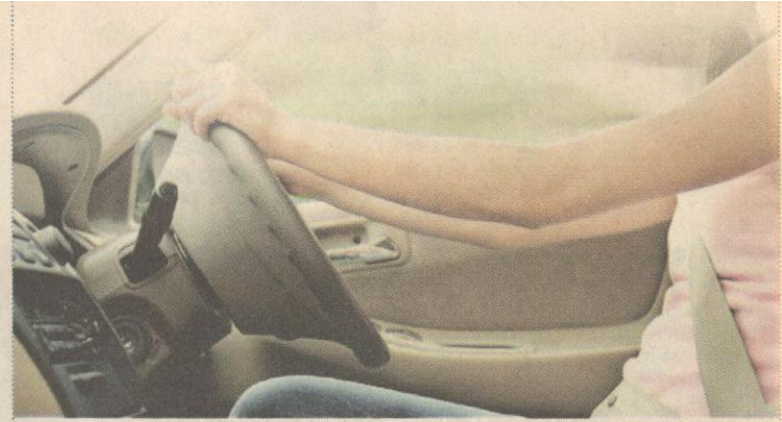
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Road and car safety tips for women

- Get building security to escort you to your car if you suspect someone's following you or when you're entering a poorly lit car park with no one around.
- To prevent snatch thieves at traffic lights and junctions from reaching for your handbag, get security tint windows which won't shatter.
- Always keep your handbag under your own seat, not at the back or under the passenger's seat.
- If you suspect something amiss while walking to your car, it won't hurt to press the alarm function on your car remote to alert security personnel.
- Never sling your handbag over your shoulder; always clutch it close to your chest.
- Always walk in the opposite direction of traffic so you can see who's approaching.
- Don't be a Good Samaritan; it's not worth it these days. Unless you know the person, don't stop your car or open the door to entertain strangers.
- When getting into parking areas and lifts, make sure there are other people around.
- If you fight an attacker who's trying to steal your valuables, you're risking your life. Let them have the things they may be willing to kill for.
- Don't withdraw large sums of money from automated teller machines and always keep an eye out on who's behind and beside you. Usually, a crook's movements will be suspicious; they're likely to be looking around anxiously and seem unsettled.
- Always have a charged phone with you at all times, in case you need to contact someone if your car breaks down or notice that someone is tailing you.
- During sales and promotions in shopping outlets, assign someone from your group of friends to watch your handbag. It's during these times that crooks lurk around.
- If someone knocks on your car window, just screen down half an inch if you must, this will prevent acid attacks or being held at knife point.
- If someone knocks on your window to ask for directions in a secluded area, just say you don't know the place and drive off. It's better to be safe than sorry.
- Some motorbikes knock cars on purpose to get the driver to pull over. Don't stop unless it's in a busy area, otherwise drive to the nearest police station or a crowded petrol station.
- If someone approaches your car claiming to be a police officer, ask for identification. The same goes for Road Transport Department officers. If they're in plainclothes and you're not sure they are who they say they are, just drive off.
- If there's an invalid or someone who seems to have been involved in an accident trying to flag down your car, don't stop out of pity. It may be a trap so just drive on. There are many capable male drivers or group travelers who can help.
- Be aware that there are also women crooks with children and bags at the side of highways asking for transport. Don't fall prey!
- In case of an accident in a secluded area, check to see who is in the other car. If there are two men in the other car, just drive to the nearest police station or flash your car lights and honk to get the attention of any patrol car in the area.
- For single women who are waiting for their boyfriends, don't hang around secluded areas. Make sure you're in brightly lit places, especially after 11pm.



Source: ex-policeman Abdul Rahim Johari and Metro Security Services general manager S. Selvam

Martial arts practitioner and fitness centre manager Phoebe Lim tells how to fight back

Question: How effective is martial arts in fending off would-be attackers?

Answer: Martial arts practitioners have a better sense of awareness of their surroundings. They're usually alert and suspicious. These traits will definitely influence their actions and reaction time when caught in unfavourable situations.

Practising martial arts helps women think ahead by assessing the situation and planning their next best move instead of faltering in their steps.

However, if a weapon is involved, little can be said about fighting back

as most criminals now do not hesitate to hurt their victims first before robbing them.

Question: Should the study of martial arts be made compulsory for schoolchildren?

Answer: Yes, definitely. I think it's good to start them young as martial arts is not something you can pick out of the shelf in a supermarket.

Practice needs time and character builds confidence. Most criminals prey on the weak and vulnerable. Looking tougher forces a criminal to think twice about approaching a potential victim.

Question: When attacked or approached by an assailant, what's the best thing for a woman to do?

Answer: The best approach would be to delay the demands of the assailant and at the same time look for a way out.

If it's just one assailant, the best advice I learned from my master was to fight back by hurting the assailant where it hurts most. That will buy you some time to run to safety.

If they're demanding any of your belongings, just let them have it. But if what they want is your physical body, by all means please fight back.

It's been reported that rapists tend

to lose interest if a victim is hard to control.

Question: What are some of the most effective moves in fending off attackers?

Answer: The golden rule is to kick them where it hurts most, such as the groin, rib cage, throat, nose and jaw. If a woman manages to grab hold of an assailant's finger, swing it wildly and strongly. A broken finger will slow him down.

Another strategy is to attract attention by shouting at the top of your lungs and straight into your attacker's face.

Psychologically, shouting empowers you, telling your attacker that you will not give in to his demands easily.

Also, don't allow your attacker to force you into a car, alley or house — diminishing all chances of you getting immediate help.

Practise good balancing skills to avoid being knocked down easily, and keep a self-defence weapon with you at all times, be it a pepper spray or panic alarm device.

Most importantly, be aware of your surroundings, do tell a close friend or family member of your whereabouts and never take shortcuts.