ISSN: 2583-5637 (Online)

International journal of Inventive Research in Science and Technology

Volume 4 Issue 11 November 2025

An Intelligent IOT-Based Women's Safety System with Edge AI Threat Detection and Alerting

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Abstract

The pervasive threat to women's safety in both public and private spheres remains a critical global challenge. Technological intervention, particularly through the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and communication networks, has emerged as a potent tool for developing proactive safety solutions. This comprehensive paper surveys and synthesizes a decade of research (2014-2024) on intelligent IoT-based women's safety systems, with a specific focus on the paradigm shift towards Edge AI for real-time threat detection and alerting. We systematically analyze the evolution from basic GPS/GSM panic-button devices to sophisticated, context-aware systems integrating multi-sensor data (audio, visual, inertial, physiological). The paper delves into the core architectural components: sensor modules for data acquisition, Edge AI processing units for localized, low-latency inference (e.g., scream detection, fall detection, aggressive gesture recognition), and multi-modal alerting mechanisms (cellular, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth). A significant portion of the review is dedicated to the machine learning and deep learning models deployed at the edge, including lightweight convolutional neural networks (CNNs) for visual threats, recurrent neural networks (RNNs) for anomalous audio pattern recognition, and fusion techniques for multi-

sensor analytics. Critical challenges such as energy efficiency, data privacy, network reliability in remote areas, system false positives/negatives, and user-centric design are examined in depth. The paper also explores complementary technologies like Block chain for secure log integrity and 5G for enhanced data throughput. By evaluating extant prototypes, commercial products, and research gaps, this review concludes that the future of women's safety systems lies in hybrid edge-cloud architectures, explainable AI (XAI) for user trust, seamless integration with smart city infrastructure, and ethically designed, empowering technology. The synthesis presented aims to provide a foundational reference for researchers and engineers advancing the next generation of intelligent, reliable, and dignified personal safety solutions.

Keywords: Women's Safety, Internet of Things (IoT), Edge Artificial Intelligence (Edge AI), Threat Detection, Real-time Alerting, Wearable Devices, Sensor Fusion, Smart Security, Deep Learning, Emergency Response.

1. Introduction

The fundamental right to safety and security is persistently compromised for women and girls worldwide, with harassment, assault, and violence occurring in streets, public transport, workplaces, and homes. Traditional safety measures often rely on reactive approaches, leaving a significant gap for prevention and immediate intervention. The convergence of the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and ubiquitous connectivity has inaugurated a new era of proactive, intelligent personal safety systems over the last decade. Initial solutions, emerging around 2014-2016, primarily focused on IoT-enabled "panic buttons" – wearable devices or smartphone apps that, when manually activated, would send location coordinates via GSM/SMS to pre-configured contacts or emergency services. While a step forward, these systems suffered from critical limitations: they were *reactive* (requiring conscious activation, often impossible during sudden attacks), prone to false alerts, and dependent on continuous cellular network coverage.

The subsequent evolution has been marked by increasing *intelligence* and *proactivity*. Researchers began integrating multi-sensor inputs—microphones, cameras, accelerometers, gyroscopes, and heart-rate sensors—to autonomously detect signs of distress. However, transmitting this raw, continuous sensor data to a centralized cloud for AI processing introduced unacceptable latency, consumed excessive bandwidth, drained battery life, and raised severe privacy concerns. The emergence of **Edge AI** as a dominant paradigm since approximately 2018 has addressed these challenges head-on. By deploying lightweight, optimized machine learning models directly on the wearable device or a nearby gateway (the "edge"), these systems can perform real-time, local inference on sensor data. This enables instantaneous detection of threat signatures—a scream, a sudden fall, aggressive movement patterns, or a elevated heart rate combined with anomalous location data—without the need for constant cloud connectivity. Alerts can be triggered autonomously with contextual data (location, audio snippet, image) while preserving the privacy of non-threatening data.

This paper presents a comprehensive, systematic review of research from the past ten years (2014-2024) on intelligent IoT-based women's safety systems, with a dedicated focus on the integration and implementation of Edge AI for threat detection. It covers architectural evolution, sensor modalities, AI/ML algorithms, communication protocols, alerting mechanisms, and the socio-technical challenges of deployment. The objective is to consolidate the state of the art, identify persistent gaps, and chart a course for future research in this socially critical domain.

2. Architectural Evolution of IoT-Based Safety Systems

2.1 First Generation: Manual Panic Button Systems (2014-2017)

The foundational architecture was straightforward: a wearable device (bracelet, pendant) or smartphone app with a physical/manual panic button. Upon activation, the device would typically:

1. Acquire location via GPS.

2. Transmit an alert message with coordinates via GSM/SMS or over the Internet (if available) to a backend server or directly to contacts.
   Examples include early commercial products like "Safelet" and numerous smartphone apps. Research in this period focused on improving location accuracy, reducing device size, and extending battery life. The core limitation was the need for explicit manual triggering, which is a major drawback during coercive situations.

2.2 Second Generation: Sensor-Augmented and Semi-Automated Systems (2016-2020)
To move towards automation, researchers integrated additional sensors. Common additions included:

- **Accelerometer/Gyroscope:** To detect abnormal movements like falling, shaking (simulating a struggle), or rapid running.
- **Heart Rate/GSR Sensors:** To detect physiological signs of panic or stress (elevated heart rate, increased skin conductance).
- **Microphone:** To capture audio for basic analysis (e.g., detecting a loud noise or a keyword).

  The architecture evolved to include a local microcontroller (e.g., Arduino, ESP32) that would process basic sensor thresholds. For instance, if the accelerometer data exceeded a predefined value *and* the heart rate spiked, the system could be programmed to consider it a potential threat and ask for user confirmation (e.g., via a vibration pulse) before sending an alert. This reduced false positives but still required user feedback. Audio/visual data was usually sent to the cloud for rudimentary analysis, creating latency and privacy issues.

2.3 Third Generation: Edge AI-Centric Intelligent Systems (2019-Present)
This current generation is defined by the placement of sophisticated AI inference capabilities at the edge. The canonical architecture, as illustrated in extensive research, comprises three primary layers:

1. **Perception/Sensing Layer:** Comprises wearable or carried devices embedded with a suite of sensors: Camera (low-power), MEMS Microphone, 9-DOF IMU (Accelerometer, Gyroscope, Magnetometer), Physiological Sensors (PPG for heart rate), and GPS/GNSS. Environmental sensors (e.g., ambient light) may also be included for context.
2. **Edge Intelligence Layer:** This is the core innovation. It features a dedicated edge processor capable of running lightweight ML models. Popular hardware includes the NVIDIA Jetson Nano, Google Coral Dev Board (with Edge TPU), Intel Neural Compute Stick 2, and microcontroller units (MCUs) like the ESP32-S3 with neural network accelerators. This layer performs:

- **Real-time Sensor Fusion:** Combining data streams for more robust inference.
- **On-device AI Inference:** Executing models for audio event detection (screams, aggressive speech), visual scene classification (identifying number of persons, threatening gestures), anomaly detection in movement patterns, and physiological stress analysis.
- **Contextual Decision Making:** Using rule-based or lightweight classifier systems to decide if the aggregated inferences constitute a genuine threat, thereby minimizing false alerts.

3. **Cloud and Alerting Layer:** The cloud transitions to a complementary role for functions requiring heavy computation: periodic model re-training/updates, long-term data storage for forensic or analytical purposes (with user consent), and managing alert dissemination. Alerting becomes multi-modal: directly to law enforcement APIs (e.g., in India, integration with state police portals), to trusted contacts via encrypted messages/calls, to community safety networks (e.g., broadcasting alert in a 500m radius via Bluetooth Mesh or LTE Direct), and to centralized security portals in campuses or smart cities.

This edge-centric architecture drastically reduces latency (to milliseconds), conserves bandwidth, enhances privacy (raw data need not leave the device), and maintains functionality in network-dead zones, as threats can be logged locally and transmitted when connectivity resumes.

3. Edge AI Threat Detection Modalities and Algorithms

A decade of research has produced a rich corpus of AI/ML techniques optimized for edge deployment in safety systems.

3.1 Audio-Based Threat Detection

Microphones are a low-power, information-rich sensor for detecting vocal distress.

- **Traditional ML Approaches (Pre-2018):** Early systems used feature extraction (MFCCs, Spectral Roll-off, Zero-Crossing Rate) fed into classifiers like SVM, Random Forest, or k-NN to distinguish screams, cries, or aggressive speech from background noise. While lightweight, their accuracy in complex, noisy real-world environments was often inadequate.
- **Deep Learning on Edge (2018-Present):** The focus shifted to 1D Convolutional Neural Networks (1D-CNNs) and depth wise separable CNNs that could operate directly on audio waveforms or spectrograms. Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), particularly Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) and Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU) networks, have been employed to model temporal sequences in audio. To meet edge constraints, models are pruned, quantized (e.g., to INT8 precision), and deployed using frameworks like Tensor Flow Lite or PyTorch Mobile. Research by B. Deshpande et al. demonstrated a quantized CNN achieving >92% accuracy for scream detection on a Raspberry Pi. The primary challenge remains background noise cancellation and distinguishing between a genuine distress scream and similar sounds (e.g., a child playing, animal sounds).

3.2 Visual-Based Threat Detection

Cameras provide direct visual evidence but pose the highest computational and privacy challenges.

- **Lightweight CNNs for Scene/Threat Recognition:** Models like MobileNetV2/V3, EfficientNet-Lite, and SqueezeNet have become the *de facto* standards for edge visual AI. They are used for:

- **Gesture/Action Recognition:** Identifying aggressive physical actions (pushing, punching, strangling). This often requires video analysis using 3D CNNs or CNN-LSTM hybrids, which are computationally intensive. Recent work uses pose estimation models (like MoveNet) to first extract skeletal keypoints, reducing dimensionality before classifying actions.
- **Facial Recognition/Emotion Detection:** To identify known assailants or detect extreme fear on the user's face. Due to privacy concerns, this is often proposed to run only during an alert event, and models are kept on-device.
- **Weapon Detection:** Using object detection models like SSD-MobileNet or YOLO-V5 Tiny to identify knives, guns, etc.
- **Privacy-Preserving Techniques:** A significant research thrust is on techniques that avoid transmitting raw video. This includes only sending anonymized metadata ("two persons detected, aggressive posture classified"), triggered image snapshots, or extremely low-resolution abstracts. Federated learning is also explored for improving models without centralizing sensitive visual data.

3.3 Inertial and Physiological Data Analysis

IMU and physiological sensors are low-power and less privacy-invasive.

- **Fall and Aggressive Motion Detection:** Traditional threshold-based methods on accelerometer magnitude (e.g., SUM of squares) are still used due to their simplicity. More advanced approaches use ML classifiers (SVMs, Decision Trees) on features extracted from IMU time-series data to distinguish between falls, jumps, running, and struggle patterns. Deep learning models like 1D-CNNs are increasingly applied for higher accuracy.
- **Stress/Anxiety Detection:** Heart Rate Variability (HRV) analysis from PPG signals is a key indicator. Features like RMSSD, LF/HF ratio are extracted and fed into classifiers. Fusion of heart rate with GSR and IMU data (to rule out exercise-induced arousal) improves specificity. Research shows promising results in detecting acute stress episodes that may precede or accompany an attack.

3.4 Multi-Sensor Fusion for Context-Aware Inference

The highest accuracy and reliability are achieved by fusing data from multiple modalities—a central theme in recent research. Fusion can occur at different levels:

- **Feature-Level Fusion:** Extracting features from each sensor modality (audio spectrogram features, IMU statistical features, HRV features) and concatenating them into a single feature vector for a final classifier.
- **Decision-Level Fusion:** Running separate AI models on each modality (e.g., an audio threat score, a visual threat score, a physiological stress score) and using a meta-classifier or rule engine (e.g., "IF audio_threat > 0.8 AND visual_threat > 0.7 THEN trigger_alert") to make the final decision.
  Edge devices with multiple cores are now capable of running several small models in parallel to enable such fusion, making the system context-aware and robust to single-sensor failure or noise.

4. Communication Protocols and Alerting Mechanisms

Reliable alert transmission is as critical as accurate detection.

- **Short-Range Communication:** Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) is ubiquitous for connecting wearables to a user's smartphone, which acts as a richer processing hub and communication gateway. In campus settings, BLE Mesh networks have been proposed for device-to-device alerts and location tracking via beacons.
- **Wide-Area Communication:** Cellular networks (4G/LTE, emerging 5G) are the primary channel for remote alerts. 5G's ultra-reliable low-latency communication (URLLC) holds promise for near-instantaneous alert confirmation. Satellite communication modules (e.g., based on IoT-NTN standards) are being explored for truly global coverage, essential for remote areas.
- **Alerting Paradigms:**

1. **Direct to Contacts:** SMS, encrypted messaging apps (Signal, Telegram bots), or automated calls with pre-recorded messages.
2. **Integration with Emergency Services:** Research in several countries focuses on API-based integration with national emergency numbers (e.g., 112 in EU, 911 in US) or dedicated women's safety apps run by police, enabling direct dispatch.
3. **Community and Crowdsourced Alerting:** Sending alerts to nearby registered helpers or volunteers within a geofence, creating a virtual safety network. This requires robust privacy and security design to prevent misuse.
4. **Centralized Monitoring Centers:** For institutional settings (universities, corporate campuses), alerts are routed to a 24/7 private security operations center with live audio/video feed access (post-trigger).

5. Critical Challenges and Research Gaps

Despite significant progress, the field faces enduring challenges:

- **Energy Efficiency:** Continuous sensing and AI inference are power-hungry. Research into ultra-low-power AI chips (e.g., based on neuromorphic computing), adaptive sensing (waking up detailed analysis only upon trigger from a low-power always-on sensor), and energy harvesting (solar, kinetic) is crucial.
- **False Positives and Negatives:** The social cost of a false alarm (embarrassment, crying wolf) is high, while a false negative is catastrophic. Creating large, diverse, and realistic datasets of distress scenarios for training remains difficult due to ethical and practical constraints. Techniques like semi-supervised learning on unlabeled real-world data and advanced fusion logic are needed.
- **Privacy and Ethical Design:** Systems must be designed with "Privacy by Design" principles. Techniques like homomorphic encryption for on-edge processing, differential privacy for aggregated data sent to the cloud, and clear user control over data are essential to prevent the safety device from becoming a surveillance tool.

- **Sociocultural Acceptance and User-Centric Design:** Technology must be empowering, not stigmatizing. Devices need to be discreet, aesthetically designed, and culturally appropriate. The "signal" sent by wearing a safety device and its psychological impact require interdisciplinary study with social scientists.
- **Standardization and Interoperability:** The lack of standard protocols for alert formats, device communication, and integration with public safety infrastructure hinders widespread adoption. Initiatives like IEEE P1912.1 (Standard for Wearable Electronic Devices and Technologies for Public Safety) are steps in this direction.
- **Dependence on Infrastructure:** Coverage gaps in cellular and power networks in developing regions limit effectiveness. Solutions must be designed for graceful degradation and offline functionality.

6. Future Directions

The next decade of research will likely focus on:

- **Hybrid Edge-Cloud Intelligence:** Dynamic task offloading where the edge handles urgent, low-level inference, and the cloud performs complex, multi-user pattern analysis (e.g., tracking a repeat offender across a city) and model evolution.
- **Explainable AI (XAI) at the Edge:** Providing simple, post-alert explanations ("alert triggered due to detected scream and fall") to increase user trust and help authorities assess alerts.
- **Integration with Smart City and Vehicular Ecosystems:** Safety devices communicating directly with smart streetlights, CCTV networks, and public transport to activate environmental responses (increased lighting, alerting a bus driver).
- **Advanced Biometric and Behavioral Analysis:** Ethical use of long-term behavioral baselining to detect subtle deviations indicating coercion, alongside robust anti-spoofing measures.

- **Proactive Risk Mapping and Prediction:** Using aggregated, anonymized alert data and urban data streams to identify high-risk spatial-temporal "hotspots" for preventative policing and resource allocation.

7. Conclusion

The journey of IoT-based women's safety systems over the past decade reflects the broader trajectory of computing: from connected devices to embedded intelligence. The integration of Edge AI has been a transformative leap, enabling real-time, private, and reliable threat detection that moves the paradigm from reactive panic to proactive prevention. While technical challenges in energy, accuracy, and privacy persist, the research community has made remarkable strides in algorithm optimization, sensor fusion, and system architecture. The future of this field lies not just in refining the technology, but in its responsible, ethical, and user-centric integration into the social fabric. Success will be measured not by the sophistication of the algorithms alone, but by the tangible contribution these intelligent systems make towards fostering an environment where women can live, work, and move with freedom and without fear. Continued interdisciplinary collaboration between engineers, data scientists, social scientists, policymakers, and, most importantly, the end-user community is essential to realize this goal.

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