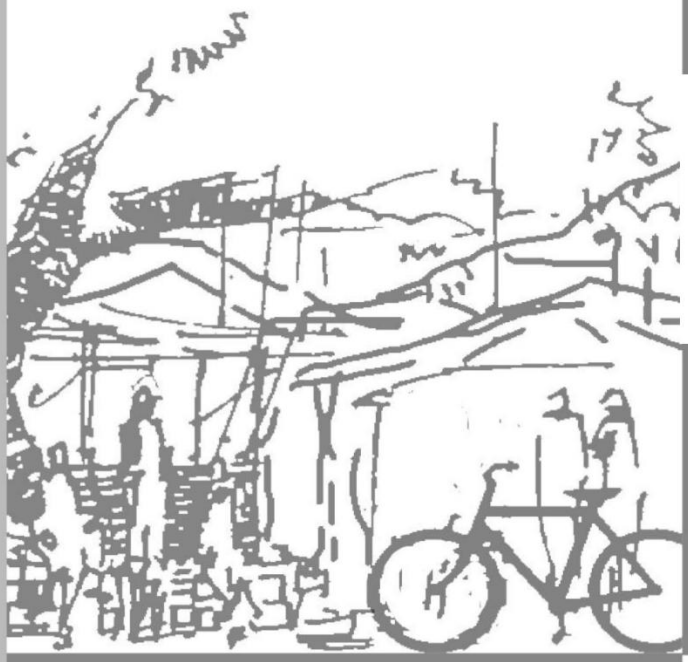
Safe Mobility for Women
Case of Guwahati



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Centre for Urban Equity (CUE)

About Centre for Urban Equity (CUE)
CUE was established at CEPT University in 2009, evolving from the Urban Poverty Alleviation (UPA) Cell established in 2008. CUE advocates a human-centred and equitable urban development paradigm. CUE undertakes research and advocacy; conducts training and capacity-building; imparts education; and networks with stakeholders on various aspects of human settlements with a focus on urban equity.

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About North East Network (NEN)
NEN is a women's rights organization established in 1995 during the mobilisation process for the Beijing conference on women. Ever since its inception, the organization has been raising issues related to women's human rights particularly within the developmental and political context of the North East region of India. NEN believes that the enjoyment of human rights of women is possible only with state obligations towards ending gender based discrimination and disparities. NEN has been in the forefront of organizations in the region working to change the developmental discourse from a rights perspective and has demanded women's inclusion in all political and other decision making levels.

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Abstract

This study investigates the nature of women's mobility in the context of Guwahati, the only nearly metropolitan city in north-east India. Given the dispersed nature of settlements and low levels of vehicular ownership in Guwahati, women are already presented with immense challenges in accessing public space. This research argues that the absence of reliable public transport services along with lack of enabling infrastructure and other behavioural issues has led to women being exposed to risk while travelling in the city. Not only does this lead to conflicts, but it also deprives them from accessing public space and the many opportunities it provides.

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1. Introduction

Women's safety in cities has become an important political agenda in India today across political, class, caste and religious divides. The issue has been picked up by the manifestos of the political parties in the elections held in 2014 and 2015. Women's political participation, in particular of the young educated ones have increased, as displayed through the images of women on the streets campaigning during 2015 Delhi assembly elections. Delhi also witnessed massive public mobilisation around the issue of brutal rape and then death of a young woman in a private transport bus in December 2012 that forced the national government to appoint Justice Verma Committee to amend the legislation. Sexual harassment at the work place legislation has also been passed and women have been making use of the legislation to seek justice in such instances. All organisations and institutions (private or public), irrespective of their size, have to mandatorily put in place a Sexual Harassment Committee with at least two members from outside the organisation on them. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2005. Issue of women's safety and rights have assumed great importance in India, particularly in the cities, and assumed a form of a new social movement outside the limited confines of women's movement. The rights movement has gathered momentum to demand by women, among other rights, to equal right to free movement within cities as equal citizens, best illustrated by the campaign slogan 'right to loiter' (Phadke et al 2009).

An important aspect of 'right to free movement' within city is linked to right to safe mobility within a city. The latter has a strong link with the public transport systems and their planning in the city. As compared to men, fewer proportions of women traversing the city tend to use private transport. Women of all income and social class tend to use public transport or its replacement para-transit more than the men. More of them walk as compared to the men of their social class. Low-income women generally walk to access work and various services. To access public transport or para-transit, walking is necessary. Walking is through streets and other public places, which have to be safe. The public or para-transit too has to be safe. If the transport is not safe, women tend to not travel limiting their choices in life.

The safety component has various aspects. The widely prevalent understanding of safety for women in transit pertains to sexual harassment. Women experience sexual harassment while walking on streets or from public places if there is no safe walking infrastructure such as footpaths, well-lit streets and public spaces, peopled streets and public spaces and public security presence. Lack of such infrastructure creates risks from traffic accidents and muggings/ thefts.

The sexual harassment experiences also emanate from the public/ para transit service providers as women are driven by unknown people. The risk of sexual harassment by service providers can become fatal, as it did, for the young woman gang-raped in a moving bus in Delhi in 2012. A Bangalore IT professional was raped by a taxi driver who ferried IT company employees while a Delhi professional was assaulted by the driver of Uber taxi in 2014. In public/ para transit, the risk of sexual harassment is also from the co-passengers. Theft is also a risk faced by women in public/ para transit. Lastly, the city has to be safe from crime and violence for the city to be safe for women.

This paper on safe mobility with special focus on women is at the conjunction of three areas; safety and violence in cities, transport systems and planning in the cities and gender studies.

The issues around safety and violence in cities in the Indian context have not been discussed in this article, as we discuss these elsewhere. It presents the survey findings from Guwahati city in the context of safety in general and while in transit in the city, in the context of transport options for women and overall environment of gender equity in the city. Women's right to the city can be claimed when they are able to move freely in the city, either for the purpose of going from one place to another (mobility) or for the simple right to loiter without encumbrances emanating from culture and economic spheres. Phadke et al (2009) have argued that freedom is "expanding women's access to public space ... (and) also … transforming women's relationship with the city and re-envisioning citizenship in more inclusive terms" (pp. 185). One crucial aspect of empowerment of women is increased mobility and accessibility to opportunities in life. In case of low-income households, women's empowerment is key to their coming out of poverty.

Lack of safety for women, both perceived and experienced, significantly undermines their 'Right to the city', that is, right to move freely around the city, access and use public spaces and services and to make choices about residence, place of work and even leisure (Department of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi et al 2010). While, transport opens up these choices, lack of safety reduces these choices even if there is transport availability. However, there is a lack of a comprehensive framework for understanding what leads to making cities unsafe for women and hence what would lead to improving women's safety. In particular, it is important to understand the issues around urban planning, designing and governance that would improve women's safety in the city along with all other measures. Women's safety is an all-encompassing concept. Women's safety, in essence means, "reduction in gender-based violence (or violence against women), including women's fear of crime. This includes, first of all, creating safe public spaces, where women can move freely. …… Women's safety also includes freedom from poverty, and ensuring that women have safe access to water and sanitation services, as well as other public infrastructure and amenities. Freedom from abuse, domestic violence and sexual harassment at the workplace are also essential ingredients of women's safety. Finally, a sense of self-worth, along with financial security and independence, are also seen as integral to women's safety." (UN-HABITAT, WICI et al 2008: 2). When UN-HABITAT in partnership with the Huairou Commission and Women and Cities International on issues of women's safety undertook a survey of 200 organisations working on women's issues in 2008, 19 per cent reported working on women's safety in public places including on public transport, besides working on other issues (Department of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi, et al 2011: 1).

1.1. Women and Transport

Everyday mobility is fundamental for livelihoods, family life and community life. Hanson (2010) argues that gender shapes mobility and mobility shapes gender and that there are large number of studies that describe how gender shapes mobility. Mobility also shapes gender as mobility provides opportunities, as discussed giving example of Willard. Mobility also influences social justice through enhancing capabilities (Beyazit 2011). Currie and Stanley (2008) argue that public transport in particular, creates social capital. Harvey (1973), for the first time pointed out that transport facilities were essential for reaching out to other services, and more importantly, the job market. In the context of social justice, Sen (1985) defined for the first time Capability Approach, which then got expanded to include notions of quality of life, opportunities, functioning, alternatives and freedoms for individuals (Nussbaum and Sen

1993, Sen 1999). While, notion of basic capabilities, emerging from Maslow's basic needs concept, is tied to policies for poverty alleviation, expansion of the notion of capabilities by Sen and others have brought in ideas of functioning, freedom, choice, values and opportunities (Sen 1999).

Mobility forms an important aspect of '*A Woman's Quest for Freedom*', desired by Willard in a book she wrote in 1895 titled *A Wheel within a Wheel* (Hanson 2010: 5). Willard saw bicycle as a symbol of mobility and freedom, because it not only allowed for long distance travel on her own, but also a sense of exhilarating feeling of confidence and accomplishment (she was trying to learn riding a bicycle at an age of 53), a sense of expanded possibilities, aspirations and personal growth, and also riddance from wearing 'womanly dresses' (Hanson 2010: 6). Interestingly "Willard saw women's physical prowess on the bicycle as a challenge to male dominance, a means of improving on prevailing norms of masculinity and an impetus for transforming gender relations." Willard writes: "We contended that whatever diminishes the superiority in men makes them more manly, brotherly, and pleasant to have about …… The old fables, myths, and follies associated with the idea of woman's incompetence to handle bat and oar, bridle and rein, and at last the cross-bar of the bicycle, are passing into contempt in presence of the nimbleness, agility, and skill of 'that boy's sister'." (Willard 1895: 40-1, quoted in Hanson 2010: 6). The situations have changed since then in women's overall empowerment and mobility across the world, the sentiments expressed by Willard still remain in varying forms across different cultures and levels of economic development.

Women are overwhelmingly and in some contexts solely responsible for domestic/ household work, as they are primary care givers (Root et al 2000). They have multiple roles within a household as producers (workers), reproducers (giving birth and nurturing children and in general undertaking household maintenance tasks) and also community organisers (Moser 1993) in certain contexts. They therefore tend to juggle home and off-home, paid and unpaid work responsibilities and their activities tend to get tied to household (Turner and Fouracre 1995). This creates situations wherein women tend to get tied to particular localities for work. They tend to make shorter trips than men, in particular related to work (Hanson 2010; Anand and Tiwari 2006 for Delhi) and value safe local streets (Hanson 2010; Duchène 2011).

Women also have different modal choice. Women tend to use less car and more public transport (Polk 2003; Srinivasan 2008; Srinivasan and Rogers 2005; Mahadevia et al 2012; Anand and Tiwari 2006) in case it is available and longer distances have to be travelled. Public transport as a mode is more unreliable, inconvenient and inflexible than private vehicles (Root et al 2000, Hanson and Pratt 1990). In situations where public transport is not available or inadequate, as in case of many cities in the developing world, women use para-transit / Intermediate Public Transport (IPT) more than men (Venter et al 2007 for Durban, Salon and Gulyani 2010 for Nairobi). For short distances larger proportion of them than men tend to travel on foot, in particularly the developing countries (Mahadevia et al 2012 for Ahmedabad; Srinivasan 2008 for Chennai, Srinivasan and Rogers 2005 for Chennai). They therefore end up spending more time in travelling and hence facing a situation of time-poverty (Anand and Tiwari 2006). Or they tend to find work at locations that require them to travel short distance. If work is not available within walking distance they drop out of the labour market. Lastly, if the public transit is not available or there is a fear of violence of harassment, which is very much a contextual situation, they are forced to curtail their travel (Wekerley 2005).

2. Transport and Women's Safety Discourse and Efforts in India

Women tend to depend more on mass transit than men and hence are more concerned than men about security issues. Sexual harassment in daily commute is now recognised as a problem to be addressed, through transportation planning and design. Towards that Gender Safety Audits, mostly led by women's organisations have been undertaken. We present findings from some of them in this section. Jagori, a woman's organisation, has developed tools for the same and which are being used by most studies presented below.

Jagori has carried out multiple safety audits in Delhi since 2005. Their studies point to the fact that an overwhelming majority of women and girls who live and work in the city fear violence in public spaces on a daily basis. Some groups of women are more vulnerable than others, e.g. street vendors, BPO or call centre workers and journalists. Some areas, such as unlit or secluded spaces, are perceived as more dangerous, although most women note that they could be harassed at virtually any time of the day or night. The 2006 study of Jagori found the same type of harassments as discussed above. But, important finding was that 74 per cent stated that violence took place in broad day light and 50 per cent stated roads and 39 per cent stated that the public transport were the most unsafe places followed by markets (22 per cent) (Department of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi et al 2010: 5).

Jagori assisted SAKHI, a Women's Resource Centre in Kerala, Safe City Campaign in Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode Cities of Kerala during 2009-11 (SAKHI et al 2011). In the study, the women shared their personal experiences of sexual harassment, locations prone to harassment, time of incident and description of the perpetrator. They also identified factors that made them feel safe and unsafe. Their strategies of addressing were also discussed in the survey.

Jagaori helped Parichiti, an NGO in Kolkata to carry of women's safety audits in Dhakuria, Bagha Jatin and Ballygunge Stations in Kolkata in 2012 with largely poor and semi-skilled women domestic workers travelling in local trains (Parichiti and Jagori 2012). These women are the most marginalised among all social groups. Parichiti felt that if the needs of the marginalized are addressed, then the needs of the general women will also be addressed. A campaign for a safer Kolkata was started by looking at the concerns of the most marginalized.

North-East Network (NEN) (2013) had conducted a survey of 1,045 women in Guwahati to look at their safety in public places after the incident of molestation of a young girl in full public view in the centre of Guwahati in 2012. Interviews were carried out with women waiting at bus stops for their children or going to school/college or office; women on streets/ markets/ malls and other public places; women in slums; and street hawkers/ vendors.

In Thiruvananthapuram (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011), all surveyed women feared violence in public places. Only 34 per cent women interviewed in Thiruvananthapuram felt safe in public places. In Delhi, Jagori (2010) study found that parks and isolated areas, like subways or deserted streets were considered particularly unsafe places where women feared being robbed or raped. By and large, most FGD participants reported feeling safer in their own area, in familiar surroundings. They felt safest and most comfortable near their own homes (e.g. the neighbourhood parks or market places) because of their familiarity with the place which, they felt, would enable them to handle any problem that arose there. Conversely,

participants reported feeling more vulnerable in new, unfamiliar spaces. In Guwahati, sexual harassment occurred on roadside (49 per cent), using public transport (39 per cent), in market places (39 per cent) and while waiting for public transport (28 per cent) (NEN 2013: 4).

In Kozhikode, lack of lighting, toilets and safe transportation left women more vulnerable to gender-based violence. The factors which contributed to this unsafe feeling as pointed out by women and common witnesses were crowded public transport and bus stops. Another main factor pointed out was the nuisances of drunkards in public spaces. In addition, in both the cities, lack of clean and safe public toilets for women in public spaces such as markets, cinema theatres, parks and commercial spaces limited women's access to these areas. Some women articulated that they were uncomfortable in using public toilets because the toilets for men were very adjacent or the doors were opposite to theirs. The lack of regular and familiar people, shops and vendors creates a feeling of insecurity for women when using public spaces (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011). Similar findings emerged from Guwahati (NEN 2013).

Jagori (2010) study found that the perception was that if public parks were being used to play cards by a group of men, it would generally be avoided by others, especially women and girls. Similarly, if a group of men took to hanging around an area, the area would be perceived as being hostile to women. Contrary to this, spaces that are generally filled with a multiplicity of users and have a variety of ongoing activities through the day were reported to be more comfortable for women and also easily accessible.

Interestingly, the FGD participants in Delhi (Jagori 2010) and survey participants in Guwahati (NEN 2013) pointed out that they felt unsafe in both deserted and crowded spaces. They claimed that there was greater fear of assault or rape and in deserted spaces, while men took advantage of the crowd to sexually harass women in crowded spaces. Almost all participants felt that the public in general, does not support women facing harassment.

In Thiruvananthapuram, seeing men dealing with or consuming alcohol or drugs gave a feeling of lack of comfort and safety. Around 68 per cent women respondents said so. Thus not only liquor shops situated in public spaces but also consumers made women uncomfortable. Women did not feel comfortable to stay for long durations at major bus stops as they feared harassment. They would get into the first bus, even if it meant they had to take longer routes. Many of the respondents felt that middle-aged men were more problematic than youngsteINR The link between other safety issues ranged from inadequate lighting, high walls on both side of roads and abysmal state of public toilets. These also emerged as an important factor in determining the safety of a space and women's access to these areas (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011).

One experience common to all women in Delhi (Jagori 2010) was related to public transport; accessing the same is seen as fraught with discomfort and danger. This danger is associated with the threat of harassment or even rape in deserted areas. Public transport – buses in particular – was listed among the most unsafe places for women where sexual harassment seems to have become a regular feature. The bus is the most commonly used form of public transport in the city, which also includes metro rail, auto rickshaws, cycle rickshaws and taxis. Middle and upper class women are, to an extent, able to filter their experiences because of the options available to them. For instance, many upper class women can avoid buses if they can afford to travel in cars or taxis. Many women pointed out that the metro system,

which was earlier perceived to be safe, now posed the same problem as buses due to crowding. In the Kerala study (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011) those who commuted by bus felt higher vulnerabilities than those who owned and used a car.

In Thiruvananthapuram, women faced maximum harassment while using public transport, bus stops and roadsides. In Kozhikode, 71 per cent women faced sexual harassment while waiting for public transport. In both cities, women rarely went to theatres and parks alone. And in the case of public toilets, women were reluctant to use it due to its lack of cleanness and safety. There were also other areas reported where either women avoided going to or went accompanied with a friend or family member. These areas were beaches, festivals, hospital compounds and ticket counters in Kerala cities (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011). In Delhi, 40 per cent stated that roadside was the most unsafe place, followed by using public transport (31 per cent), waiting for public transport (10 per cent), and market place (17 per cent) (Jagori 2010: 25).

In both cities in Kerala (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011), those living in a slum or resettlement area faced very different challenges to safe movement than those living in a middle class residential area. In the same middle class area, the concerns of safety of the women who are residents and those who provide services are very different and even opposing. In these settlements, the problem of safety emanated from the fact that these areas did not have private toilets and public toilets were in a poor state forcing women to use open fields, exposing them to the danger of sexual assault (Jagori 2010). In Guwahati, being a woman meant the constant risk of sexual harassment, but also being from another state/ region or country or belonging to a certain race/ caste / religion too invited harassment (NEN 2013).

In Delhi (2010), the vulnerabilities of homeless women and children are exacerbated by the fear of sexual assault. The dearth of basic amenities, such as clean and safe public toilets added to their difficulties. Women in particular are exposed to risks at many levels. With no infrastructure support from the government and harassment by police they feel isolated in the city and often fall into the hands of pimps and dealers. Despite the fact that there are shelters for the homeless, the very location of these is a detracting factor and plays an important role in determining their usage. Women are not willing to go to locations that may seem secluded or that do not fall within a reasonable distance of the spaces they need to access on a daily basis. Also, they prefer to inhabit crowded public spaces such as temples, railway or bus stations where they can find safety in the midst of a large number of people.

In both the cities in Kerala, sexual harassment was pointed out as the main safety problem (by 98 per cent in Thiruvananthapuram and 99 per cent in Kozhikode). This was followed by robbery (by 51 per cent in Thiruvananthapuram and 60 per cent in Kozhikode). Verbal and visual abuse is the most common form of sexual harassments, as reported by 80 per cent women respondents in Thiruvananthapuram and 86 per cent in Kozhikode. This is followed by physical harassment, as reported by 60 per cent women in Thiruvananthapuram and 65 per cent in Kozhikode. Only 26 per cent women reported stalking and 21 per cent flashing (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011).

In Delhi, 44 per cent women reported verbal harassment, 13 per cent physical harassment (such as touching, feeling, etc.), 16 per cent visual harassment (such as staring, leering), 15 per cent reported stalking and 45 per cent stating no harassment (Jagori 2010: 24). In

Guwahati, 73 per cent women faced sexual harassment/ violence, which included sexual harassment, eve teasing, stalking, touching, flashing & staring in public spaces (57 per cent), safety concerns in public transport (39 per cent), unsafe just for being a woman (72 per cent) (NEN 2013: 6). Fifty six per cent women stated that they were being stalked, 36 per cent faced visual harassment, 31 per cent were touched/ groped, 17 per cent were stalked, 8 per cent faced flashing and 5 per cent had experienced violent physical attack (NEN 2013: 6) While 13 per cent respondents in Guwahati said that incidents of sexual harassment and / violence occurred during day time, 40 per cent of them experienced harassment/ violence during day time as well as after dark, and young girls in the age 18-25 years were more prone to such harassment/ violence at both the times (NEN 2013: 8). The experience in the one year of reference period for many of them was multiple times.

Lack of effective / visible police (53.5 per cent) was felt as a problem in cities of Kerala (SAKHI, UN Women and Jagori 2011). In Delhi, the factors that made women feel unsafe were: the lack of effective or visible police or civil guards (49 per cent), men dealing with or taking alcohol/ drugs (45 per cent), crowded public transport, bus-stops and stations (35 per cent), poor lighting (28 per cent), lack of respect for women by men (25 per cent), lack of vendors or stalls or people in the area (5 per cent) and other factors (Jagori 2010: 26). In Delhi, women reported that even presence of people on the streets did not help as no one intervened to help.

The feeling of lack of safety in Delhi for those who walked or walked to take public transport, was enhanced by the fact that the pavements were unusable for a variety of reasons – from being dug up and encroached upon to being poorly maintained. In addition, the pavements were often misused as urinals by men, which made access to these sidewalks extremely uncomfortable for women.

In Delhi women stated that they had to take care of their own safety by avoiding going to certain public spaces completely (22 per cent), avoiding going out alone at all times (33 per cent), avoiding public transport (10 per cent) (this was an option for those who could access private transport), avoiding crowded (31 per cent) and secluded places (30 per cent), avoiding certain types of clothes (21 per cent) and others (Jagori 2010: 28). In Kerala cities, women coped with their sense of insecurity by avoiding going out after dark and avoiding secluded spaces. In Guwahati, they coped by avoiding going out alone after dark (59 per cent), never going alone outside home (37 per cent), avoiding secluded places (35 per cent), avoiding wearing certain types of clothes (28 per cent), avoiding certain public places completely (21 per cent), avoiding crowded places (19 per cent) and avoiding public transport (8 per cent). Ten per cent respondents in Guwahati also stated that they carried items to protect themselves such as safety pins, pepper spray, knife, etc. (NEN 2013: 10).

The Prachiti study (Prachiti and Jagori 2012) in Kolkata found that train stations lacked basic facilities that created hardships for women commuters in particular. The sampled women reported that they faced harassment in the ‘general’ compartment when (if at all) they used them and their co-passengers did not intervene to help. As a result, women had to suffer in silence. Women’s compartments were safe and their provision helps, but, that also questions the basic tenets of freedom under which women should be able to travel in any compartment they wish to and not be confined to just one compartment. Also, in the suburban trains of Kolkata, only two compartments are reserved for women while the remaining eight could be used by both men and women. The study found that there was a need to increase the number

and frequency of trains so that there would be no overcrowding and consequent harassment of women. The study also found that the lack of basic infrastructure at the stations contributed towards making travelling seem unsafe and uncomfortable. An important issue was the lack of lights in two of the three surveyed stations. Women did not feel safe using overbridges and commuters crossed platforms across the railway tracks, which is fraught with danger. Women complained of non-availability of toilets in the train and poor toilets at the stations. They felt uncomfortable with men smoking in the compartments. There were also robberies, such as snatching of valuables, especially in the dark. Women workers found hawkers in the train and on the platform useful as they hardly found any time to shop. The surveyed women left for work early in the morning, at about 8 am and returned late in the evening and hence were at work for practically the whole day.

The safety audits and Focussed Group Discussion (FGDs) in Delhi by Jagori during 2006 have come up with recommendations to make public spaces safe. Key among them were (Department of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi et al 2010: 6):

- Good/ adequate street lighting
- Proper maintenance of public spaces
- Clean, safe and adequate toilets for both men and women – male public toilets should be redesigned so that they don't open out on the street
- Well-designed bus stops – with voice announcements.
- Better and safe public transport
- 'Walkable' and disabled-friendly pavements
- Installing more public phone booths (some open round-the-clock)
- Opening eateries (open round-the-clock) and allowing street vendors, which will increase use of space and create "Eyes on the street"
- Curtailing open drug dealing and its consumption
- Concerted efforts to sensitize people on the issue
- Change of attitude of both men and women towards sexual harassment
- Sensitized and responsive redressal mechanism - Police have a very important role to play

Social attitudes, lack of support from the police and a weak justice system resulted in women coping with harassment on their own and not reporting to either police or family. Reporting to family invited fear of curtailment of their already limited freedom of movement by the family. Phadke et al (2009) state that even in one of the most liberal as well as women-friendly city such as Mumbai, social and cultural milieu curtail women's freedom to loiter in public spaces. "Narrative of respectability for women is woven around the urban, young, middle class, educated, able-bodied, Hindu, upper caste, heterosexual, married or marriageable, and one who are the bearer of all moral and cultural values that define family, community and nation" (Phadke et al 2009: 186). Thus, women's moving out in public spaces has to appear as purposeful, going to work, carrying purchases or children, going from one place to another. It is never sitting in a park by oneself, standing at a street corner and smoking or simply watching the world go by and so on. Even if they do so, they have to be 'decently' dressed – it is often stated that women themselves invite harassment/ rape due to their 'inviting' dressing – or carrying markers of respectability such as *mangalsutr*a, etc and controlled body language. These beliefs are also internalized by women themselves.

The Mumbai study conducted by Shilpa Phadke and others under a project at Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research (PUKAR) covered women from all class and social

groups, including middle-class women. The study discusses the possible risks women face in relation to public space (pp. 1511-12):

"(1) The risk of potential physical assault when women do access public space. This includes the risk to life, the physical and psychological trauma of injury. (These are risks shared by men.)

(2) The risk to "reputation" of accessing public space against a normative order that defines women's proper place as being in the private spaces of the home. This includes the risks of loss of matrimonial opportunity and a questioning of sexual virtue.

(3) The risk of being blamed for being in public space at all if a woman is assaulted, particularly sexually assaulted, in public space. This includes the risk of the improbability of getting justice except in a few cases.

(4) The risk, should women choose not to access public space more than minimally, of loss of opportunity to engage city spaces and the loss of the experience of public spaces. It also includes the risk of accepting the gendered status hierarchies of access to public space and in doing so reinforcing them."

Women and safety discourse is largely constructed around the issue of sexual assault or harassment and not, as for men, all types of assault, although women may be subjected to the latter as well. Women are subjected to robberies, for example snatching of valuables on the street and pick-pocketing in crowded places. In addition, they are subjected to sexual harassment/ assaults. But, the families and society has constructed the safety narrative of women around sexual assaults/ harassment, which is then considered as dangerous for her reputation. Often, the notion of safety also includes safety from sexual liaisons even if they are consensual. Society is preoccupied with notion of women's respectability as main dimension of women's safety. Phadke (2007: 1512) suggests that "women then feel compelled to produce respectability and protect the "honour" of their families even at the cost of their own safety. The insistence on sexual safety then actively contributes to not just reducing women's access to public space but also to compromise their safety when they do access public space, by focusing more on women's capacity to produce respectability rather than on their safety. The discourse of safety then does not keep women safe in the public; it effectively bars them from it."

Middle class women find low-income men hanging out in public spaces as risk. Such men are caricatured as the ones making cat-calls, singing film songs loudly, making lewd comments etc. If there are groups of young men loitering at the street corner or a tea stall, immediately, the space is marked as unsafe for women (Phadke et al 2009: 188). "The question of making streets safer for women is not an easy one, because the discourse of safety is not an inclusive one and tends to divide people into "us" and "them" tacitly sanctioning violence against "them" in order to protect "us"" (Phadke 2013: 50). The 'them' are the lower-class men while 'us' is the middle-class women.

Phadke has argued that exclusion of women from public space is critically linked to the exclusion of marginal citizens. Safety of women is seen in efforts to empty the streets of other marginal citizens seen as a threat to women. She then argues that right to public space need not be collective movement of different groups but an act that acknowledges the right of

others to the same public space. She further argues that the violence against the women in the cities needs to be seen against the backdrop of violence against the poor, Muslims, Dalits, hawkers, sex-workers, etc. When the streets are emptied of other marginal groups, it is a way of setting one marginalised group against another (Phadke et al 2011). It is unfriendly bodies, says Phadke (2013) that are feared. But, ironically, not all of the others/ marginal groups are unfriendly. Any woman knows that she is in constant contact with a rickshawallah and a chaiwalla, a dhobi and so on, who are working class males, in their day to day life and they are not unfriendly

Phadke (2013) does not negate the efforts to make spaces friendly through design and infrastructural facilities such as transport, toilets, adequate street lighting, etc. Good public transport and its 24x7 provision would go a long way in making cities friendlier. She argues that assault on Nirbhaya in a private/ chartered bus could not have happened on a public/ BEST bus as there are checks and balances in a public sector company (pp. 54). Shutting bars and restaurants early does not make the city safer, as more the number of people out on the streets, safer are the streets.

3. Transport in Guwahati

Guwahati today has four forms of public and intermediate public transport, city buses, trekkers, auto-rickshaws and tricycle rickshaws. Besides, large proportion of people also walk, in particular, those living on the hills. Wilbur Smith and Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) (2008) study of transport in the city has characterised Guwahati as a linear city, indicating that the trip lengths in this just 1 million population city would be long. In fact, for the size of the city, the average trip length of 4.14 km (pp. A-53) is long. The per capita trip rates by all modes is just 0.98 (pp. A-53), when that for this category of cities is 1.0 (pp. vii). The average trip length for this category of cities is 3.5 km (pp. vi), which is lower than that of Guwahati. The modal share is the following: two-wheelers (20 per cent), car (18 per cent), autorickshaw (12 per cent), public transport (which includes trekkers) (8 per cent), walk (21 per cent) and cycle (21 per cent) (pp. A-53). Gender break-up is not available. This report also states that the city has poor pedestrian facilities as ranked by the pedestrian themselves, the city obtaining a score of 2.1 in a 1 to 5 scale assessment (pp. A-13). Forty five per cent of the available road length is used for parking (pp. A-12), leaving little space for pedestrians and no space for cyclists.

Table 1: Mode share in Guwahati compared to overall (%)

Category	Walk	Cycle	M2W	Car	Public transport	Intermediate Public trnasport
Guwahati	21	21	20	18	8	12
Category 3* cities	32	20	24	12	9	3
National	28	11	16	13	27	6

* Population 5-10 lakhs

Source: Wilbur Smith and MoUD (2008); pp. A-53 for Guwahati and pp. v for the rest.

The Wilbur Smith and MoUD (2008) report also calculated various indexes for the select individual cities to assess the accessibility within the city and by that assess the transport performance of the city. Guwahati does not fare well in these indices. For example, the public

transport accessibility index[1] of Guwahati is 1.22 (pp. xii), which is higher than 1.05 of all the cities studied (pp. 39), indicating a higher accessibility to public transport in Guwahati. The service accessibility index[2] is 56 (pp. xii). Smaller cities, as expected have higher values of this index. In walkability index[3], Guwahati has a value of 0.39 (pp. xii), which is lower than 0.52 for all the cities together (pp. 45). London's walkability index falls in the range of 1.5 to 1.7, far higher than that in Indian cities (pp. 45). Low walkability index in Guwahati itself suggests lack of safety for all pedestrians – with women having additional burden. From the traffic point of view, Guwahati has low safety index of only 0.03 (pp. xii) due to absence of separate lanes for slow moving vehicles, who are then forced to share right of way with the fast moving vehicles. In fact, this study finds that the cities with better public transport have higher safety index (pp. 48).

The first city bus service in Guwahati was introduced in 1947, which plied from Bharalumukh to Silpukhuri (4.2 kilometres). It was only in 1961 the city bus services were extended to some other places in the city on account of establishment of Guwahati Oil Refinery, its subsidiary industries, establishment of military cantonment at Satgaon and construction of railway-cum-road bridge over Brahmaputra (Map 1). The extension of city bus services improved significantly after shifting of capital from Shillong to Guwahati in 1971 (Sharma, 2005). Presently, the city has around 1,450 buses, in which 1,200 are privately operated and 250 by the Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC). In all, seven organisations, including the ASTC, provide the city-bus system. Nearly 3 lakh residents of Guwahati use the city buses to various destinations every day (The Assam Tribune, August 26, 2011). The city bus fares range from INR 5 to INR 23.[4]

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1 Public Transport Accessibility Index is formulated as the inverse of the average distance (in km) to the nearest bus stop/railway station (suburban/metro). Higher the index, better is the public transport accessibility (pp.39)

2 Service Accessibility Index is computed as the percentage of work trips accessible within 15 minute time and 30 minute time for each city. Higher the index, better is the service accessibility.

3 A Walkability Index has been developed for evaluating performance of pedestrian infrastructure taking into consideration the following factors: (i) Availability of foot path on major corridors, and (ii) Overall facility rating by pedestrians (pp. 44). Higher the index, better is the walkability.

4 The city bus fares were last revised in Nov. 2012. The minimum fare (0-5km) for private city buses was fixed at Rs 5, followed by Rs 8 (5-9km), Rs 11 (9-13km), Rs 15 (13-17km), Rs 18 (17-21km), and Rs 21 (21-25km). The revised rates for government-run (ASTC) city buses are Rs 7 (0-3km), Rs 8 (3-5km), Rs 12 (5-9km), Rs 15 (9-13km), Rs 18 (13-17km), Rs 21 (17-21km), and Rs 23 (21-25km). The provision for concessional rates for the elderly, the physically-challenged, and students. The revised rates are: Rs 4 (0-5km), followed by Rs 7 (5-9km), Rs 9 (9-13km), Rs 12 (13-17km), and Rs 14 (17-21km), and Rs 17 (21-25km).

Picture 1: Public transport modes in Guwahati, city bus on left and trekkers on right

Photo by authors

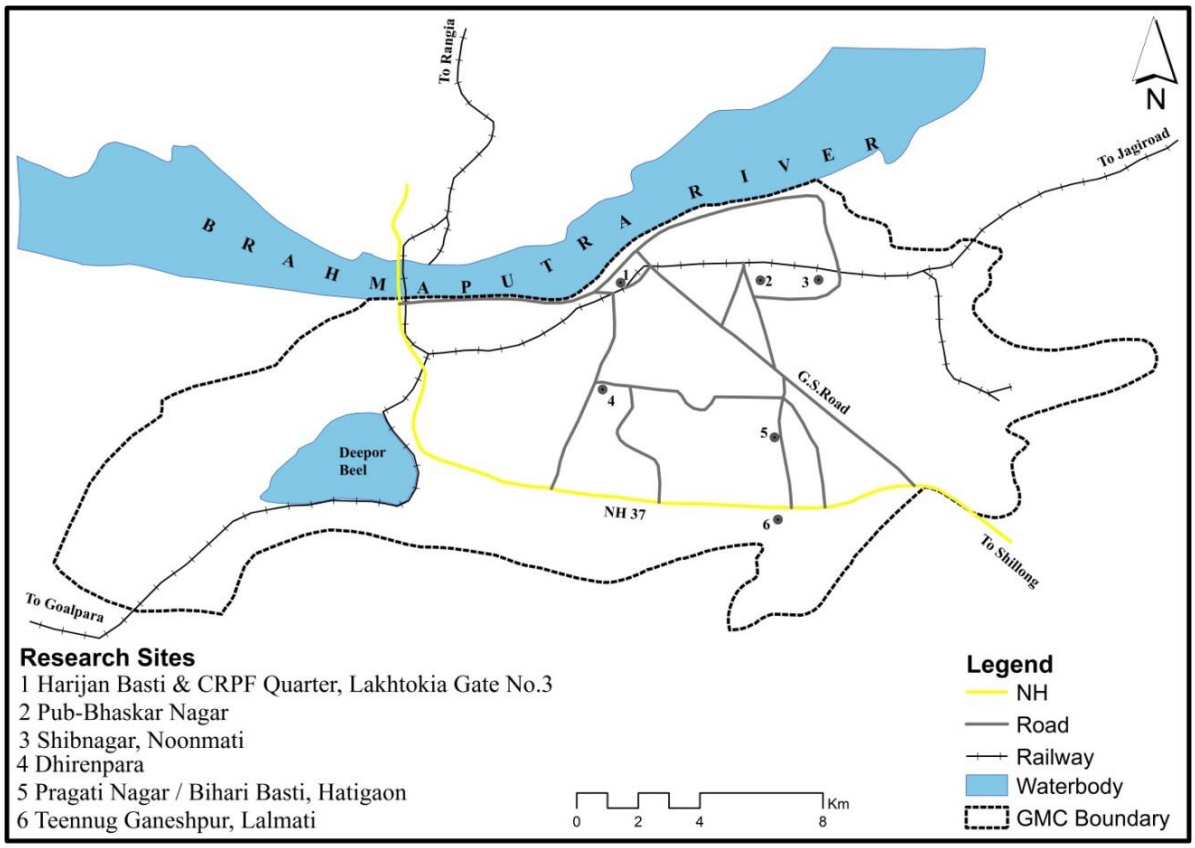
Apart from city-buses, trekkers[5], with a seating capacity of 10-12, provide public transport facilities along major roads in the city. Trekkers ply on pre-decided numbered routes and act as a *de facto* public transport system while supplementing the city-bus system. Trekkers are run by small private companies and have their own pricing system. Though these vehicles are usually overloaded with passengers and tend to go very fast often causing causalities, they are popular for fast travel. Their fares are higher than that of public buses but are still used in the absence of a reliable public transport system. Shared auto-rickshaws are limited only on few routes whereas auto-rickshaws and cycle-rickshaws are available from all major places and provide accessibility around the city and between localities. The higher reaches of hill settlements are inaccessible by motorized vehicles and people must walk to get there.

4. Study Methodology

This study focussed on safety of low-income women and female students in the city of Guwahati. This study is an extension of prior work done by North-East Network (NEN) on gender safety in Guwahati, as discussed earlier, found that 39 per cent women faced harassment while using public transport, 28 per cent felt harassment while waiting for public transport and 49 per cent felt harassed on the road side, which included walking to take public/ para-transit (NEN 2013: 4). It was decided to focus on the issue of transport, that is issues around safe mobility, and study the problems faced by low-income women in their intra-city travel for various purposes.

[5] Trekkers are four-wheeler vehicles having powerful engines. Each one can accommodate 10 passengers easily but are usually loaded with 13 or more passengers. Though they charge higher fares than buses, they are a popular mode of travel in Guwahati as they are faster than buses and run on routes where the latter are infrequent or unavailable.

Map 1: Location of selected settlements across Guwahati



Source: Map prepared by CUE

Hence, the first task was to select locales with concentration of low-income settlements. It needs to be mentioned that in a city such as Guwahati, the population composition of any locality is heterogeneous and hence all of them are inhabited by mixed economic classes. Even the informal settlements are heterogeneous with a mix of different income and social classes (Desai and Mahadevia 2014 and Desai et al 2014). Hence, to strictly confine the study to low-income groups was not possible. Also, NEN was interested in covering some middle-class women, who too face issues of security while commuting. But, to bring focus, we selected six poverty pockets across the city, in different geographic locations, namely core, intermediate part and periphery (Table 2 and Map 2). Each three geographic locations pose different challenges of mobility for women and hence by that we are able to cover all the locational issues with regards to women's mobility and safety in commuting. As the focus was on urban poor, mostly poverty pockets (except Central Reserve Police Force Quarter in Lakhtokia, adjacent to Harijan Basti) have been selected for this research. For this purpose, we visited large number of settlements to understand their social and economic composition and mobility challenges faced by women. After selection of localities, each locality was mapped in detail to document its characteristics. This was followed by conducting focussed group discussions (FGDs) in each one of them. The details of the steps followed in primary survey are discussed below:

i) Mapping of the locality: It consisted of three stages: mapping of activities, understanding the locality and conducting personal interviews.

a. Land use, activity and infrastructure mapping: Activity mapping included sketching the locality showing major roads, land use (commercial, residential, institutional, industrial, vacant land etc), infrastructure provision, and activities along the main roads. The last one included bus/ auto/ trekker stops, formal and informal shops/ street vendors, street lights, dust bins/ pile of garbage, schools, police booth, open plots/deserted spaces, playgrounds, water points, toilet complexes, drains, transformers etc. Activity mapping was carried out at two times; one in the morning (7 am to 10 am) and other at evening (5 pm to 7 pm) in order to get an idea about how safe/ unsafe the area is with activities changing over the day (morning/evening). Map 2 is an example of activity mapping (Other maps are included as Annexures). Since the study focus was on gender safety and transport, it was necessary to map the routes, timings and frequencies of public transport and para-transits (auto /trekker) in and around the locality.

Map 2: Map showing land uses, bus/trekker stand, routes, functional and functional street lights, safe and unsafe points in Pub-Bhaskar Nagar, Guwahati

b. Locality profile: This was prepared through interactions with local residents. The locality profile consisted of below information:

- History of the area: How old the area was; when and how this locality has grown; which ethnic and religious groups live there; level of services like water supply, drainage, road condition, street lighting.

- Employment status: How many women went outside for work; where and how they commute; type of work they did such as daily-wages labour in factory, construction work, domestic work, home-based work etc.
- Transport: Which mode of transport was used by women; transport nodes from where they boarded vehicles; frequency of buses, trekkers and auto-rickshaws; distances travelled and transport interchange points they had to negotiate.
- Education: Whether teenage girls went to school/ college; if yes, then how many; location of educational institutes and their mode of travel.

During preparation of the locality profile, the research was introduced to the women and girls. They were encouraged to take part in the discussions and provide support to organise FGDs. The timings and dates for conducting FGDs were decided as per the convenience of the participants.

c. Personal Interviews: In order to understand the safety issues, few personal interviews were also carried out with working/ non-working women and college-going girls at the time of preparation of locality profiles. These interviews provided diverse experiences, raised issues and provide insights into specific problems.

ii) Sampling for FGDs: The sampling was done based on locality profile. The number of FGDs in each settlement was decided based on size of the settlement, ethnic groups, number of working women and students (teenage girls), type of employment, locations of their workplaces and accessibility to transport. Few FGDs were organised only with students going to college/school, few with working women and few mixed groups where apart from students and working women, home-makers were also included (refer annexure-1).

iii) Focus Group Discussion:

The following set of participatory tools was prepared and the local research team of NEN was trained to conduct these discussions in the selected settlements.

Exhibit: Format for identifying institutions/actors that make commuting safe/ unsafe

Institution/actor	Hinders or supports	Suggestions
ASTC		
Trekker/bus driver		
Traffic Police		

Table 2: Number of focus group discussion in selected settlements

Name of the settlements	No. of FGDs
Dhirenpara (Raghunath Path, Shankar Dev Path & Masjid Ali Path)	4
Pub-Bhaskarnagar	3
Lakhtokia Teen Number Gate (Central Police Reserve Force Quarter and Harijan Basti)	2
Shibnanagar, Noonmati	4
Pragati Nagar/ Bihari Basti, Hatigaon	3
Teennug Ganeshpur, Lalmati	4
Total	**20**

In all, 20 FGDs were conducted in different localities as mentioned in Table 2.

Picture 2: Participants discussing their problems in Bhaskar Nagar

Photo by authors

5. Women Workers in Guwahati

The main sector of employment in Guwahati is tertiary sector which constitutes 63.4 per cent and 82.8 per cent of male and female workforce respectively. NSSO - 2004-05 reveals that Guwahati has a large share of regular salaried employment with 91.5 per cent females and 50.4 per cent males (Desai & et al, 2014). Here, it is important to note that regular wage employment would also include informal tertiary sector works like domestic work. Literate women are engaged in public and private jobs in government offices, educational institutions and private firms. In both organised and unorganised sector the dominant group is constituted by Assamese, but in unorganised sector backward classes, castes and scheduled tribes have higher proportion than that of organised sector (Phukan, 2003).

In Guwahati, one can broadly categorise women engaged in unorganised sector in four groups. These are: self-employed, casual workers, domestic workers and semi-skilled workers Large number of women vendors, rag pickers, owners of small hotels, tea stalls, betel nut shops etc. comes under self-employed category. Casual work includes daily wage labourers and also some lowly paid temporary workers in establishments, shops, etc. Construction workers are normally dependent on labour contractors for employment. Bengali Muslim immigrant women are find work as construction labour. Unorganised sector women

workers are the poorest with little resources, training or education. Tribal women vendors come from outside the city either with home grown vegetables/ fruits or with hill produces. Many tribal women who live in the city either work as daily-wage labourers or have secondary occupation of beer-brewing and selling. Most of the adult women domestic workers are part-time workers because as part-time maids they are able to work for 3-4 households and earn more money while attending to their own day-to-day family affairs The poverty pockets of the city are the main providers of domestic workers, especially part-time workers Among the semi-skilled women workers, weaving and tailoring are the most common profession. Workers are mostly from Assamese, Karbi and Bengali community (Phukan, 2003). Due to high rents in the city, informal workers prefer to stay in the suburbs or in hilly areas of the city whereas migrant workers who work as construction labour prefer to flock together and stay on-site or far away from the core city (Bhuyan, 2013). One can also observe squatter settlements in the core city and in the transitional areas between core and periphery. For example, poverty pockets exist along the railway line from Lakhtokia to Bhutnath. Bhaskar Nagar, another poverty pocket near Chandmari, is surrounded with dense residential and commercial land uses. In our sample, nearly one fourth of the women were found to be engaged in low earning employment such as domestic help (Table 3). As they were not full time employees, they were able to take care of their household affairs after having worked in three to four households for half of the day. Students and homemakers were the second and third-most important groups respectively that took part in discussions, both forming 19 per cent of the total sample. Few regular salaried employees in public and private institutions like *Anganwadi* teachers, ASHA workers, NRHM workers and social workers who received low wages were also part of the discussions. Self-employed women like street vendors, rag pickers and tailors (in low numbers) and daily wages workers (in good numbers) who work as construction labour were also part of the discussions.

Table 3: Occupation pattern of participants

Occupation	Numbers	Per cent
Regular-salaried public sector services	6	6.7
Regular - salaried private sector, companies, services, etc.	3	3.4
Regular - salaried - in the households, household enterprises	24	27.0
Regular - salaried in industries as workers	8	9.0
Self- employed	4	4.5
Daily wages labour	10	11.2
Students	17	19.1
Home-makers	17	19.1
Total	**89**	**100.0**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

6. General Characteristics of Women's Mobility at Research Sites

Three-fifths of women in our study stated work as the purpose of trip (Table 4), followed by one-fifth stating study as the purpose of the trip. Only 9 per cent each reported shopping and accompanying children to and from school as trip purposes. Education trips by women are for higher education. The lower level of education, up to elementary level, was fulfilled by local public and private schools and hence the school going girls just walked to the neighbourhood schools. The homemakers' trips are limited to shopping and accompanying their children to and from school. Also, the homemakers usually visited the wholesale markets for buying grocery once in a week or so. Purchasing grocery from the wholesale market reduced their expenditure on the same as compared to if purchased from the retail market. The vegetables,

fruits and other small items of daily consumption were procured from the neighbourhood, which did not require any trip[6].

Table 4: Purpose of trip of participants

Sl. no.	Purpose of trip	Numbers	Per cent
1.	Work	55	61.8
2.	Study	18	20.2
3.	Shopping	8	9.0
4.	Accompanying children to and from school	8	9.0
	Total	**89**	**100.0**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

Guwahati's figures for women's modal choice conforms with that of others Indian cities such as Delhi, Pune, Ahmedabad, Rajkot etc. where a large proportion of them have walking trips. In Guwahati, nearly half the women walk to work and for other purposes (Table 5). A majority of domestic-help workers walk to work because they can't afford to spend on commuting between the many houses they must visit in a day. Even if they were to spend INR 10 on travel daily, it would add up to INR 300 per month, a significant proportion of the INR 1,800 to INR 2,000 they save a month.

Table 5: Mode of travel used by participants

Sl. no.	Mode of travel	Numbers	Per cent
1.	Walk + Bus	15	16.9
2.	Walk + Bus + Cycle Rickshaw	2	2.2
3.	Walk	42	47.2
4.	Walk + Trekker	21	23.6
5.	Walk + Bus + Trekker	5	5.6
6.	Walk + Shared Auto Rickshaw	2	2.2
7.	Walk + Bus + Trekker + Cycle Rickshaw	1	1.1
8.	Walk + Cycle Rickshaw	1	1.1
	Total	**89**	**100.0**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

Women, who do not walk, tend to opt for a city-bus or trekker. As discussed earlier, the trekker acts as a public transport service in absence of city-buses plying on all the routes. Women prefer trekker where frequencies of buses are low and trekkers are easily available at locations such as like Khanapara-Jalukbari bye-pass and on Bharlumukh-Gharchuk route. Women in our study locations of Dhirenpara and Lalmati are frequent users of trekkers whereas those in Bhaskar Nagar, Shibanagar and Lakhtokia women often use bus service. Trekkers are less preferred, if both modes are equally available for travel because trekkers fare is higher than buses and women are forced to sit close to men commuters in the former. None of them had the option of using their own personal vehicle for travelling since our sample consisted of only low income women.

Table 6 reveals that nearly a quarter of the women travel about 21 to 40 km per week, which is about 3.5 to 7 km per day, which is very high. Another 20 per cent travel in the range of 10-20 km per week, which is in the range of 1.5 to 3.5 km per day. A little more than half the women travel more than 40 km per week, that is about 7 km per day, which is a very long travel distances in comparison to the 4.4 km average trip length in the city. Those employed

[6] In transport studies, we do not consider a walk up to 400 m as a trip.

in private regular jobs (all of them), the students (53 per cent of them), daily wage labour (60 per cent of them), the self-employed (half of them), and the public sector workers (two-thirds of them) travel longer distances of more than 40 km per week. Only the workers in industries (75 per cent of them) and the home makers (94 per cent of them travel less than 40 km a week. As argued earlier, Guwahati is a linear city and hence trip lengths are long. Even women tent to make longer trips and which increases their risk to harassment in transit.

Table 6: Occupation-wise distance travelled per week

Occupation	Distance (km)						
	<10	10-20	21-40	41-80	81-120	>120	Total
Regular-salaried public sector services	0	1	1	1	1	2	6
	(0.0)	(16.7)	(16.7)	(16.7)	(16.7)	(33.3)	(100.0)
Regular - salaried private sector, companies, services, etc.	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
	(0.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(33.3)	(33.3)	(33.3)	(100.0)
Regular - salaried - in households, household enterprises	3	7	5	5	4	0	24
	(12.5)	(29.2)	(20.8)	(20.8)	(16.7)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Regular - salaried in industries as workers	0	0	6	2	0	0	8
	(0.0)	(0.0)	(75.0)	(25.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Self employed	0	1	1	0	1	1	4
	(0.0)	(25.0)	(25.0)	(0.0)	(25.0)	(25.0)	(100.0)
Daily wages labour	0	0	4	4	1	1	10
	(0.0)	(0.0)	(40.0)	(40.0)	(10.0)	(10.0)	(100.0)
Students	0	3	5	7	0	2	17
	(0.0)	(17.6)	(29.4)	(41.2)	(0.0)	(11.8)	(100.0)
Home-makers	9	5	2	1	0	0	17
	(52.9)	(29.4)	(11.8)	(5.9)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Total	**12**	**17**	**24**	**21**	**8**	**7**	**89**
	(13.5)	**(19.1)**	**(27.0)**	**(23.6)**	**(9.0)**	**(7.9)**	**(100.0)**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014
Note: Figures in brackets are percentages.

Table 7: Occupation-wise distance covered by walk per week

Occupation	Distance (km)					
	<10	10-20	21-40	41-80	81-120	Total
Regular - salaried - in households, household enterprises	3	7	5	3	0	18
	(16.7)	(38.9)	(27.8)	(16.7)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Regular - salaried in industries as workers	0	0	5	0	0	5
	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Manual labour	0	1	1	0	1	3
	(0.0)	(33.3)	(33.3)	(0.0)	(33.3)	(100.0)
Daily wages labour	0	0	4	1	0	5
	(0.0)	(0.0)	(80.0)	(20.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Students	0	3	1	0	0	4
	(0.0)	(75.0)	(25.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Home-makers	4	3	0	0	0	7
	(57.1)	(42.9)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(100.0)
Total	**7**	**14**	**16**	**4**	**1**	**42**
	(16.7)	**(33.3)**	**(38.1)**	**(9.5)**	**(2.4)**	**(100.0)**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014
Note:
i) Figures in brackets are percentages.
ii) The women employed as regular salaried workers in private and public sector did not walk and hence excluded from this table.

If travels such distances by public transport it would not have mattered much. But Table 7 shows that out of 89 women who undertook a trip (Table 6), 42 of them (47 per cent) walked. Of the 55 women who took a trip for work, 31 (56 per cent) walked. Thus, larger proportion of women who took a trip for work walked than the home-makers and the students. Women who worked in households, for example as domestic help, 75 per cent of them (i.e. 18 of them walked to work (Table 7) and 8 among them (33 per cent) walked more than 21 km per week or 3.5 km per day. Half the women working as daily wage labourers walk to their work and most of them walked 21 to 40 km per week. The students who walked to school, travelled less than 20 km per week for the purpose. There were 4 of them who walked. Another 13 used public transport. Majority of the homemakers used public transport for shopping as well as to drop and pick their children from the school but 83 per cent of them do not travel more than 20 km per week.

Table 8: Expenses incurred by women for traveling in public transport

Expenses per week in INR	Numbers	Per cent
0	42	47.2
10–50	10	11.2
51–100	19	21.3
101–150	10	11.2
151–200	3	3.4
>200	5	5.6
Total	**89**	**100.0**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

Table 9: Time spent by women for traveling in a week

Time spent in hours per week	Numbers	Per cent
0-1	5	5.6
1.1-2	9	10.1
2.1-4	19	21.3
4-8	35	39.3
8-16	14	15.7
>16	7	7.9
Total	**89**	**100.0**

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

Nearly half the surveyed women (42 out of 89) do not use public transport for their work, their expense on public transport is nil (Table 8). It is interesting to know that 40 per cent women spend around 4 to 8 hours travelling per week (Table 9), which means that they spend almost one man-day (by considering 8 hours of working hours per day) in travelling for work/study per week whereas 16 per cent women are spending almost two man-days per week in travelling (Table 9). One fifth of women travelled only 2 to 4 km in a week. The expenses on travel are not high as 21 per cent women spend INR 51-100 and 11 per cent women spend INR 101-150 per week.

We find that women do travel long distances in the city for work or going to educational institutes. Most of them either take public transport or they walk. They are therefore forced to negotiate public spaces, such as streets and footpaths, bus-stands and markets, and they also have to negotiate public and para-transit. While walking through their localities, women pass by liquor shops, they walk on slushy roads without footpaths and hence also are at the risk of traffic accidents. The streets in Guwahati are dark due to poor state of lighting in the city. The city being in the eastern part of India, the sun sets early (India has only one standard time)

and hence it gets dark early, by about 5 pm in winter and 6.30 pm in summer. Thus, the dark evenings are long, which curtails womens' working day. The women's safety survey was carried out under the= overall situation of womens' travel behaviour and the city's geography. Travel behaviour is influenced by issues around safety but does not influence the question of safety.

7. Women's Safety in Intra-City Travel

The previous sections underlined the essentiality of public transport in the lives of low-income women in Guwahati city. It also laid out the importance of walking infrastructure in the city, which is highly lacking. A large proportion of women walk to work and for other errands or walk to public transport stops or para-transit nodes to board them. In this journey, they are exposed to harassment of various types, which we shall discuss in this section. The NEN (2011) survey shows that women faced higher incidences of sexual harassment and violence while using or waiting for public transport and on the road side while walking to their destination or to public transport/ para-transit node. Hence, it is important to note that this research does not only focus on mass transport such as buses, but also on allied infrastructure such as roads, footpaths, street lights etc. which contribute towards making commuting safe for women.

Table 10 gives the official statistics with regards to crimes against women in Guwahati city. The table indicates that such crimes have increased manifold in the last few decades. In particular, the reported incidents of molestation have nearly doubled in the 2001-11 decade whereas kidnapping and abduction of women has increased by about five times in the same period.

Table 10: Crimes committed against women in Guwahati city, 1980 - 2011

Year	Rape	Kidnapping and abduction	Molestation	Dowry death
1980	6	24	13	-
1990	33	84	36	-
2001	37	64	67	5
2011	56	306	112	10

Source: Vauquline 2001 for the years of 1980 & 1990 and CID, Assam for the year of 2001 & 2011

7.1. Sexual Harassment Faced by Women and Safety Maps

Sexual harassment such as teasing, stalking and indecent touching are very commonly experienced by college-going girls and women in Guwahati. Our discussants reported that most such incidents happen while they walk on the roads. Some comments shared by the participants were, "*Acchi lag rahi hai…dheere dheere jao"* (Looking beautiful. Walk slowly) and "*bostu xoru"* (small thing), "*dangor"* (big), referring to their breasts, *"lal pari"* (red fairy) when someone wears red dress. Sometimes men with a car or having a bike ask, *"Hi beautiful! Want to come with me?"* Sometimes there are men who solicit them (presumably for sexual favours) in return for money. Few participants also shared their experience of physical assault including men trying to grope their breasts or brushing the male organ against their bodies. Even aged women reported being subjected to lewd comments while walking on the road. A 50 years old woman from Dhienpara recalled having been subjected to a comment on the lines of:

7.1. A

> *"Burhi to agote dekhi bole bor dhuniya asil jen pao, agote pua hole uthai nilu hoi."*
>
> *Translates to: The old lady seems to have been very beautiful in her youth. Had I met her earlier, I would have picked her up.*

Participants shared that they perceived 'family' men[7] to be the biggest threat within and outside homes. Crowded markets like Fancy Bazar create an environment where women face jostling or deliberate uninvited touching. Participants from Lakhtokia, Dhirnpra and Shibnagar singled out *paan* shops as locations where men gathered in numbers and indulged in eve-teasing, often passing lewd comments at women walking down the road. Women also face difficulties in walking on footpaths which often host tea shops attracting men[8] in areas such as Fancy Bazar. However, given the slush on the roads in the monsoons, they have little alternative but to walk on the footpaths in close proximity to men, thereby increasing their vulnerability to groping and molestation.

School going students among the participants revealed that they had to tolerate everyday harassment such as teasing and whistling from boys on their way to school, sometimes even just outside their school. They would usually not share these incidents at home as their parents would often brush away their concerns, saying "they are boys, so they will tease." The students also feared curtailment of their mobility, if they reported being teased at home too often. Similarly, married working women reported incidents of harassment including being stalked all the way till home. However, they shied away from sharing their experiences of being harassed or teased at home because of fear of being blamed for the incident. In any case, they were apprehensive of the husband picking up a fight with the perpetrators, since this would put the family at great risk. Jagori's study (2009) shows that harassed women in Delhi respond by restricting their own movement and avoiding certain areas after dusk. This was found to be true of Guwahati too.

In another important case, a Bangladeshi immigrant who worked as daily wage labour claimed that questions related to her ethnicity were often used by people to harass her on the road. People would stop her in the way and randomly question her about who she was and what purpose she had to be going where she was going. She often experienced bad behaviour from co-passengers and bus conductors while using public transport in the city. She felt quite disturbed about such incidents. As Phadke (2011) notes, these immigrant labourers, domestic workers and poor women (may) have formal equality but do not have substantive equality to work, live and commute in the city as others. The common thread between the experiences narrated by the women - students, young and old Assamese women, immigrant daily wage labour – is that not only were they being subjected to physical harassment on a near daily basis, but the lasting impression of unhelpful bystanders and their inability to oppose/ report such incidents was pushing them to retreat from public spaces altogether. In a discussion at Bhaskar Nagar, women participants expressed that though there were several problems like lack of street lights, floods and, bad roads, they could still deal with them, if they did not have

[7] Married men of age between 35 to 45 years, often having kids of their own.

[8] The gendered nature of public spaces in India discourages women from using tea shops and *paan* shops in the same manner as their male counterparts.

to fear misbehaving (teasing, stalking, groping) men when they are alone on the streets. The fear of retaliatory violence that prevented them from seeking recourse (legal/police/family) had started to affect their self-confidence.

Picture 3: Encroached footpaths in Fancy Bazar area

Photo by authors

7.2. Reasons for Men's Misbehaviour

The participants felt that it had become a fashionable habit for boys to tease and harass girls. Factors like age or marital status were no longer considered as deterrents; most of the men, they said enjoyed harassing young and old women, married or unmarried. Phadke (2011) pointed out the use of *mangalsutra* and *sindoor* as symbols used by women in Mumbai to signify that they were 'already taken' and had somebody to 'guard' their bodies. However, the women's experiences in Guwahati seem to suggest that even such practices could not be used as a deterrent to physical harassment. During a personal interview with an old aged woman who is heading a women's committee in her locality has thrown some light on this issue. She said,

7.2. A

> *"Since women are nowadays advancing so much in every field, even surpassing men in some, the men probably feel that the patriarchal system of the society needs to be maintained under any circumstances and hence to balance the power equation (or rather to assert their own power) they try to dominate women in every possible way,*

one of which is crime against women... scaring the women into restricting their mobility so that they stay put in their 'traditional' place in their homes and not in the world outside."

Another woman from Bihari Basti had similar views. She said,

7.2. B

"Since the patriarchal society norms decree that the woman's place is within the four walls of the home, there might be a rising sense of insecurity among men watching women gain power in the social set up. Hence consciously or unconsciously, they try to assert their domination over women by refusing to provide a safer environment to them and thereby forcing them to stay indoors."

Clearly, this kind of violence serves the purpose of controlling women's movement and behaviour through a constant and continuous sense of insecurity (Viswanath et al, 2007). Bowman' work (1993) with sixty men who harassed women on streets reveals that men indulged in such behaviour since it "alleviated boredom, was fun and gave a feeling of camaraderie with other men". Many of them thought that their behaviour did not hurt anybody while some said that their remarks were intended as a compliment.

A few women tried to link harassment with clothing and conduct-related choices made by their friends. They felt that wearing 'skimpy' dresses or short skirts often provoke men to harass women. They also felt that if a woman were not 'characterless' nothing could happen to her[9]. Women in Shibnagar (one of the poorest slums in Guwahati) felt that it had something to do with their class too. They observed a clear bias in the bus conductor's behaviour not only between men and women, but also between them and women from well-off backgrounds. For instance, if a college girl told the conductor that she does not have enough change, he would say nothing; but if a poor woman from the slum were unable to pay one or two rupees the same conductor would vociferously abuse them. Some also felt that it was a matter of perceived physical strength. They thought that since they were perceived to be 'not as strong' as men and did not usually pursue the matter any further, men continued with their misbehaviour. Also, women thought that men were not taught to be polite and respectful towards women since childhood in general.

7.3. Womens' Response to Men's Misbehaviour

The women's response to misbehaviour by men was usually 'ignore and leave' when they were alone. But if they were in a group, the participants said they would sometimes try and retaliate. These instances though, were very few in number. Participants also shared that they had started using safety pins to deal with rogue elements making physical contact inside the buses. Some of them also kept penknives with them to face unpleasant situations. However, generally the response to misbehaving men and unpleasant situations was passive avoidance and retreat. The participants attributed the lack of active resistance to the need to conform to

[9] Opinions like these must be seen in the backdrop of the neo-cultural movement that seems to be gaining strength in parts of India. The proponents of such movements seek to 'counter' western influences in the way women dress and carry themselves, apart from art and popular culture.

See http://theindiandiaspora.com/news-details/state-news/primary-news/assam-tv-channel-does-moral-policing-triggers-uproar.htm

the ‘kind of behaviour by expected of a woman’ by the society. They did not want people to take her for a woman of ‘loose character.’ Phadke (2011) talks about women’s perceived need to ‘manufacture respectability’ to continue to use public space. They do this by avoiding any activity or response to pleasant or unpleasant situations that may be made out to be not suitable for somebody from a ‘respectable’ family. For example, women – especially if they are alone - may not observe and derive pleasure from a roadside fair or acrobat’s performance. They must have a ‘valid’ purpose to be out on the street. Loitering is not considered acceptable. Nor is it acceptable to get into fights or arguments. One of the participants said,

7.3. C

> *“I had to give up in many situations being a woman thinking of my family and siblings and behave as the typical women is supposed to behave.”*

Some studies suggest that women pretend to ignore the harasser despite being deeply affected by the harassment because they are unwilling to admit their powerlessness in the situation. Reluctant to draw attention to themselves, they try to pretend that nothing has happened. Moreover, when women take evasive action in an effort to mask feelings of invasion, anger, humiliation, and fear, they suffer a psychological beating in the form of emotion distress and feelings of disempowerment (Medea & Thompson, 1975). However, experts believe that the harasser may feel free to repeat the cycle of harassment, if he does not get an active response to his act. Therefore, ignoring the harasser may actually exacerbate the problem (Bowman, 1993).

Parents are generally unwilling to take any chances with their children’s safety. So when they perceive a threat to their children, they respond by restricting their mobility or accompanying them when they go out. A woman who accompanies her daughter to her college said,

7.3. D

> *“Every day we keep hearing so many stories of harassment and rape. How can I leave my daughter alone?”*

Each of these responses tends to generate negative outcomes. The increasing reportage of incidents of crimes against women in the vernacular and national media aggravates their concern for the safety of their children. One such incident was shared by a participant from Dhirenpara where a group of boys forcefully entered a young girl’s hostel room and murdered her for ‘daring to’ hit them with her sandals in response to harassment. The fear and insecurity that women face in accessing public spaces prevents them from being full citizens of the urban milieu. They are not seen as legitimate users of the space, except at certain times and for certain activities (Viswanath & et al, 2007). Ultimately, harassment at public spaces accomplishes ‘an informal ghettoization of women – a ghettoization to the probate sphere of hearth and home’ (Bowman, 1993). This not only restricts the physical and geographical mobility of women but also deprives her of liberty and security in public places.

7.4. Causes of Problems Faced by Women While Travelling on City Roads

The commuting problems shared by participants can be broadly divided into two categories namely, (i) urban planning, infrastructure and transport management related issues, and (ii)

behavioural issues. These could also be categorised as imposed risk and chosen risk respectively. If women have safety related issues due to poor road conditions, absence of streetlights and poor provision of public transport, these are considered imposed risks beyond their control. Infrastructure deficiencies or its complete absence is imposed by decisions and actions by planners and administrators. Safety-related issues which have nothing to do with infrastructural deficiencies or absence come under chosen risk (Phadke, 2011), However, in case of sexual harassment of women, patriarchy attributes risks to women's behaviour such as to their clothing or their making a trip by themselves at 'unsafe times.' Often, lack of infrastructure and failures of public policy on affordable and convenient transport is excused by putting the blame on women's behaviour, i.e. blaming the target for inviting harassment[10]. Further, in a situation of endemic lack of infrastructure and government interest and disposition towards considering women's safety in commuting, women cannot afford to forgo their need to travel in the city. Hence, in the absence of any choice, imposed risk becomes a chosen risk.

Anand and Tiwari (2006) identified poor design of infrastructure and personal safety of women as two prominent reasons which made women's commuting unsafe. The poor design of infrastructure includes absence of footpaths on roads, badly designed crossings, the poor location of bus stops and the high steps of public buses whereas personal safety includes sexual harassment while walking the street or travelling on a bus. Sexual harassment exacerbated by the absence of adequate lighting on streets and subways and by small, lonely paths connecting the slum with bus stop. The below table showing the intensity of various problems based on ranking and prioritisation suggested by participants after listing the problems. Though absence of street lights was prioritised as first main problem only in three FGDs but it was prioritised as second and third important factor which creates unsafe environment for women in most of the FGDs, therefore this problem appears to have the highest intensity. Sexual- harassment in form of eve-teasing, leering, stalking etc., poor road condition, flash floods etc. were other major problems. The impact of each factor on women's commuting and on their day to day life has been sequentially discussed below.

Table 11: Problems and their intensity based on 20 FGDs across the city

Driving forces	Factors	Intensity
Urban Planning/ Infrastructure/ Transport Management	Poor road condition	17
	Absence of street lights	21
	Overcrowded buses/trekkers	7
	Low frequency of buses/trekkers	8
	Huge traffic	2
	Flash floods	17
	Over charged by buses/ trekkers	2
Behavioural	Sexual- harassment (eve-teasing, leering, stalking, molestation etc.)	18
	Drunkards	11
	Misbehaviour by co-passengers, drivers or conductors	11
	Rash driving	01

Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

[10] See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/11443462/Delhi-bus-rapist-blames-his-victim-in-prison-interview.html

7.4.1. Absence of Street Lights

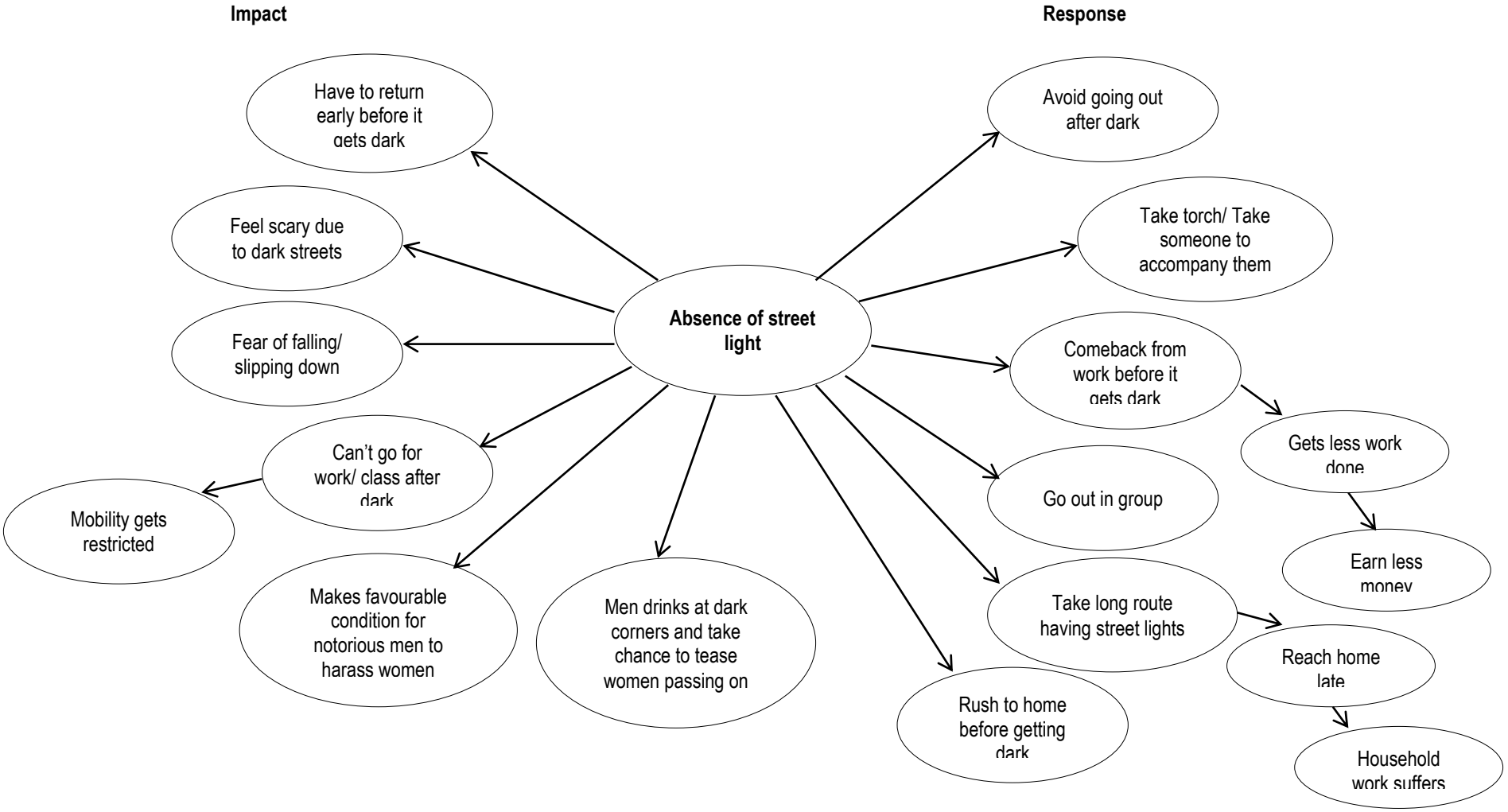
In the absence of street lights, women do not go out after dark and return home before it gets dark. Dark streets increases the fear and suspicion to encounter drunken men, prowling the streets. There is also fear of sexually harassment from passers-by. For parents, safety of children remains a huge concern when they go out for work or studies and come after dark. If there is a *katcha* and muddy road and there is no street light, it is almost impossible for women to step out after dark. In Bhaskar Nagar, participants revealed that men and boys drink in the dark corners of the street and harass the women who pass by those lanes and create unsafe environment. In Bhaskar Nagar and Lalmati, participants said that providing street lights won't solve the problem because local boys steal the lights and sell them for money to buy liquor. These local boys are seen to be drinking heavily and creating a lot of chaos in the night.

Picture 4: Dark streets give the sense of insecurity whereas shops giving light on footpaths creates safe environment for commuting in Bhaskar Nagar, Guwahati

Photo by authors

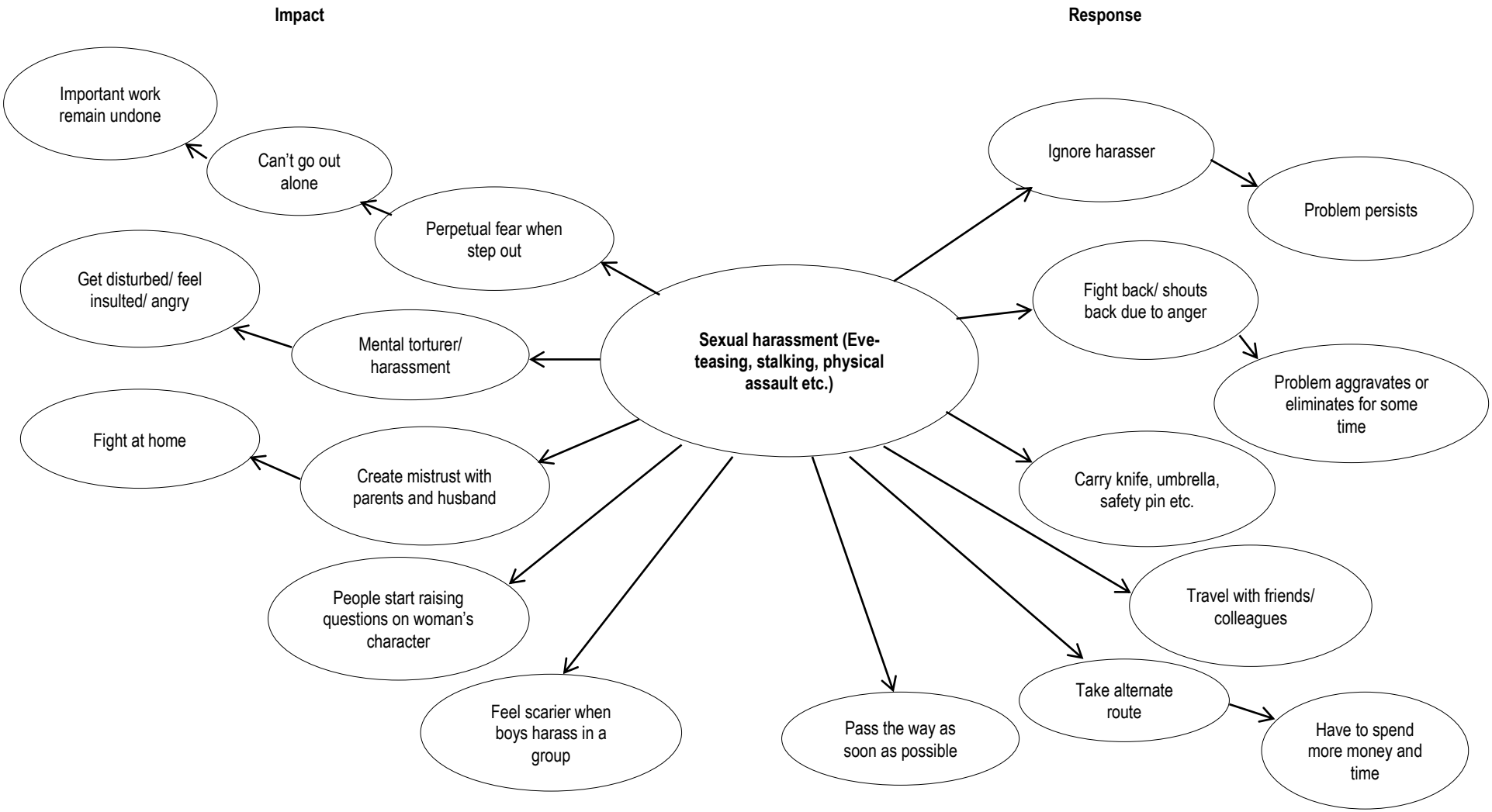
In Guwahati, women try to skip outing at odd timings but if it is necessary to work late evenings, usually parents pick women from the main road. Thus, unsafe environment increases women's dependency on parents especially male members as they need escorts to protect them from harassment by men. Sometimes they take longer route having streetlights but in this case, they end up reaching home late and as a result, their household work suffers. As women always try to come home early from work, they get less work done and earn less money. If women need to go after dark they accompanied by their parents. They also take torch if they need to go out in the evening or there is chance for coming back late. One of the participants revealed that she rushed to reach home as soon as possible before getting dark whereas another participant from Bhaskar Nagar takes longer route which comes from Anuradha Cinema and skips street which comes from Commerce College road because this street does not have streetlights.

Diagram 1: Problems being faced due to dark streets and women's response



Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

Diagram 2: Impact of sexual harassment and responses to various impacts

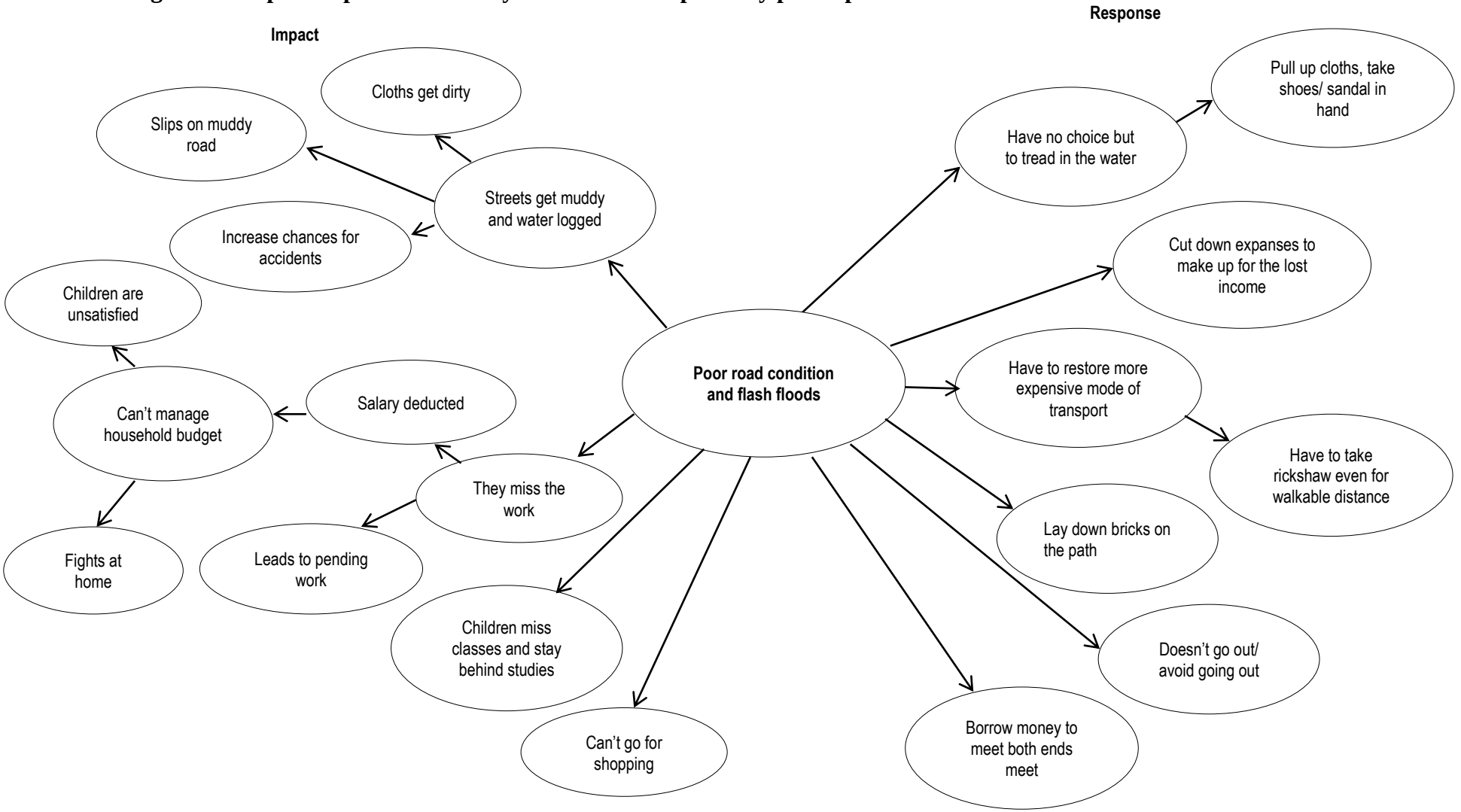


Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

7.4.2. Poor Road Condition and Flash Floods

The poor condition of roads was considered as one of the main reasons that make their journey unsafe. And when it rains, it becomes difficult to walk because road becomes muddy and slippery and increases chance of falling and getting hurt or sinking feet into muddy water. Indeed, a large portion of the city submerges with heavy rain. Shibnagar, Bihari Basti and Bhaskar Nagar are the settlements which get flooded because they fall under low lying areas. When it rains, these areas are flooded with knee-deep water and the roads become muddy and slippery and make it difficult for them to step out. Thus, either they do not go to work or they get late for their work and classes. As a result, their salaries get deducted, or else they remain behind at work/class, which in turn impacts their livelihood/ education. It becomes all the more difficult to manage their monthly household budget if their salary is deducted or if they don't get enough work. Though, on hills there is no water logging during rain but it become very difficult to travel uphill and downhill *katcha* roads having steep slope. Sometimes, it is impossible to walk, leading to work postponement because there is fear of gliding down and braking hands and legs. Ambulance also could not reach there in case of emergency.

Diagram 3: Impact of poor and muddy road and its response by participants



Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

Picture 5: Accident prone *katcha* road in Shibnagar, Noonmati (left). Muddy road of steep slope have chances for accident in Teennug Ganeshpur, Lalmati (right)

Photo by authors

Picture 6: A large parts of Guwahati gets flooded many times in a year with heavy rain and creates problem to walk out

Photo Courtesy: The Telegraph 25.07.2014

7.4.3. Overcrowded Buses and Low Frequency

The overcrowded buses and trekkers make travel unsafe for a woman. The overcrowd inside the bus gives opportunity to men to not only stand close to women but for unnecessary pushing, shoving and rubbing bodies. Women do not feel bad unintentional pushing due to crowd but when someone starts taking benefit of this situation, it's become irritating. The same situation happens when four and three people are sitting on the seat made for three and

two people in trekkers. There is always a chance of falling down for the person who sits at the edges of the trekker as there are no side doors in the trekkers. Women are forced to be in close proximity to men who sometimes use the chance to misbehave. When women protest, usually they reply, *"Galti se lug gaya"* (it happened by mistake) but when men do not take responsibility and matter becomes serious, often bus conductors ask women to get out from the bus and say,

7.4. A

> *"This is a public transport, if you have so many problems then you all should travel by rickshaw or a private car."*

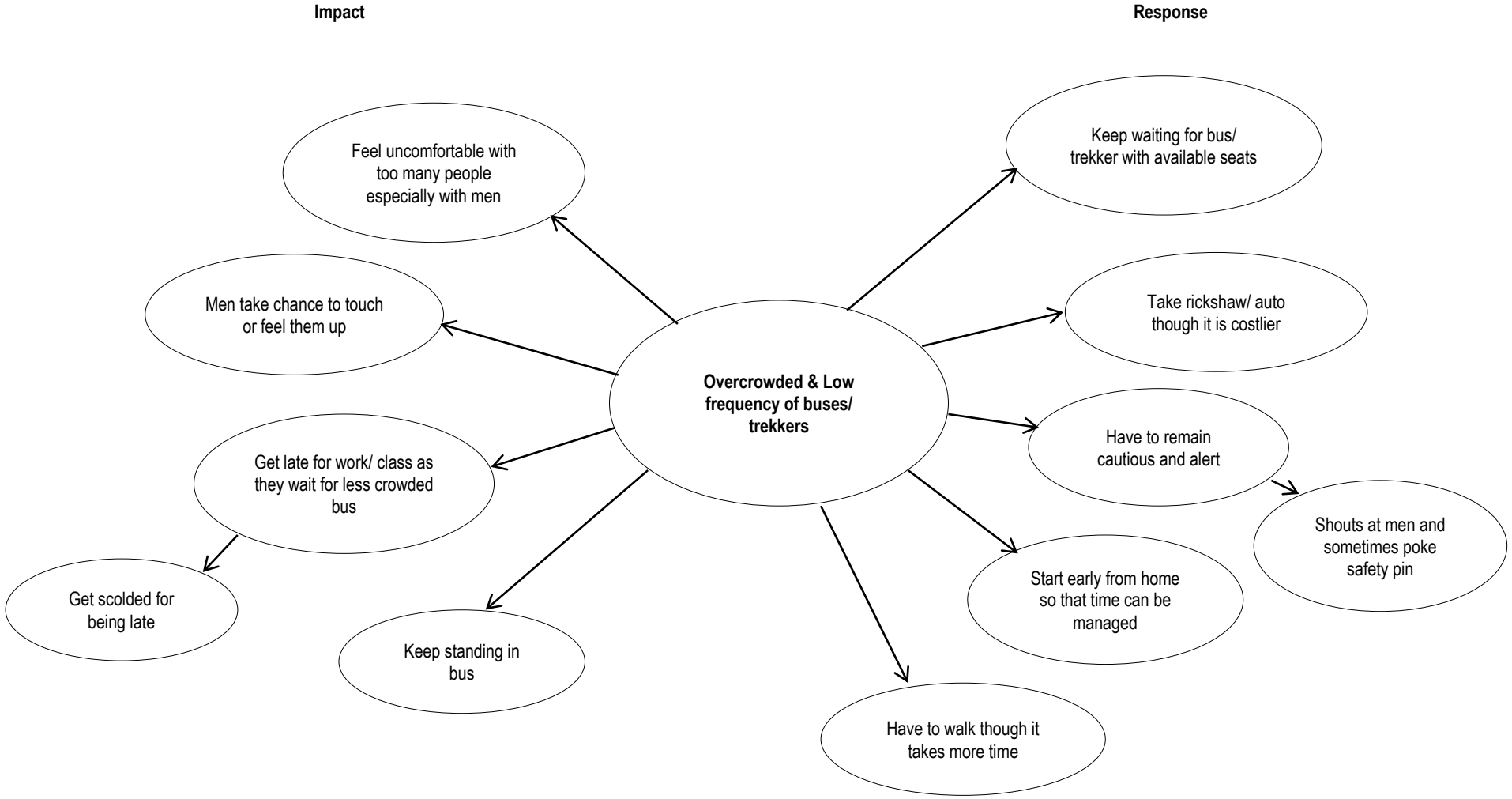
This kind of comments hurt poor women more because bus conductor knows very well that they could not afford rickshaw and even it is nightmare for them to think about traveling by car.

Picture 7: Overcrowded buses creates favourable environment to get harassed by men

Photo by authors

As women do not prefer to get into crowded bus sometimes they wait for less crowded bus. They also try to start their journey early morning so that they could get less crowded bus. For waiting less crowded bus or trekker ultimately increases their travel time. Even for women of few localities like Bihari Basti and Dhirenpara have no option but to board into crowded bus and trekkers because of low frequency of public transport. Few of the participants bought scooty because they were fed up of facing day to day problems. Obviously they can afford it, hence they did it but poor women do not have any other option but either to face day to day harassments or walk to work.

Diagram 4: Impact of crowded and low frequency of buses on women's day-to-day life and their coping strategies



Source: Compiled from all focus group discussions, 2014

7.4.4. Other Issues

A very common problem revealed by poor women is that often conductors and handymen[11] do not return the change. Suppose, if fare is INR 8 and passenger gives INR 10, they refuse to give them back INR 2 change. The domestic workers and daily wage workers found themselves more vulnerable in situations like these and often faced abuse when they demanded their money back. When they tried to resist for getting back, sometime they get back change but sometimes got abused. Conductors and handymen often curse them using slang term such as *maksudu* (mother fucker) and ask them to get off from the buses and trekkers. Some trekkers also mislead the passengers. They claim to go up to a certain point but often stop midway and ask the passengers to get off. The passengers must take another trekker thereby losing out on the fare money. A lot of time is also wasted in the changeover.

In almost every discussion, participants unanimously considered drunkards as major problem for them. After street lights, drunkards were considered as a hindrance who restricts their mobility in the evening. There are many informal liquor selling places comes on the way to Shibnagar, Lalmati, Dhirenpara and Bihari Basti. The number of men increase at these liquor stalls and all of them are drinking heavily. In poor localities, one could see men engage in activities like dendrite and drug consumption, gambling and alcoholism. Some young boys engage in fights on the road after consuming drugs or liquor. Women claimed that fear increases at evening as drunken men roam the streets, misbehaving and creating chaos. Women avoid going out after it gets dark and try to reach home before dark. If they encounter drunkards, they wish to pass them as quickly as possible. However, few women said that drunkards usually don't harass local women because they know drunkards and don't give them attention.

The NH- 37 passes along the Lalmati hill. If people must go to some areas like Beltola, Khanapara, Bhangagarah etc. they have to cross the busy highway to avail public transport. But the lack of any traffic controlling mechanism, it becomes a challenge especially for women and children as long route buses, trucks and trekkers keep running at full speed. Many accidents took place here in the past while people trying to cross the road.

[11]The person who invites passengers to take seats and collects money from them in trekkers is known as handyman in Guwahati.

Picture 8: In the absence of any regulatory mechanism such as traffic police, people trying to escape them from an accident and cross a the busy highway in Lalmati

Photo by Arup Das

Another common problem is reckless driving of buses and trekkers who race against each other putting passengers well-being at risk. Every year, several accidents happen in Guwahati due to this reason. However, the formal and informal shops on the way, having company (friends or family), and streets having streetlights and presence of women at public spaces were considered as the factors which contributes in making environment safe for women. Shilpa Phadke's research on Mumbai also reveals that certain level of crowd and open shops as factors that contribute to making a space safe. It further states that women find presence of certain kind of people like women in general, college students, pedestrians going to their work, as friendly presence.

8. Suggestions by Participants

Participants were of the opinion that city transport management can play an important role to resolve many issues. Plying buses exclusively for women, limiting the number of passengers that could travel in a bus, it was felt, could greatly help the cause. Women felt that police was not helpful in ensuring the safety of women but could play an important role in bringing changes to the present situation. They also voiced that the deputation of women police or more police patrolling in localities like theirs could be a step towards ensuring safety, as they had seen policemen behaving insensitively, especially with poor women. In Lalmati, women suggested deputation of traffic police in each crossing at highways to facilitate pedestrians to cross the road. They also asked for land rights so that they could claim road and street lights legitimately.

The need for streetlights was brought up unanimously by all participants but there was not much discussion on how it would be maintained in presence of drunkards and hooligans who do not want streetlights in these localities. In few discussions, women revealed that NGOs can also contribute building safe environment for women by creating awareness among people about these issues. Guardians and parents can play a role in creating a safe society as they can inculcate good values and morals in their boys from an early age. Girls should be taught how they could protect themselves or deal with unwanted situations. During a group discussion conducted by Jagori in Delhi participants revealed that women need to challenge the notion that women themselves are responsible for sexual harassment or assault, and that people need to raise their voices when they witness harassment right in front of their eyes.

Table 12: Experiences of harassment/discomfort

Location	Urban planning, infrastructure, transport based issues					Behavioural issues			
	Bad/ rash driving	Over-charging by buses	Fear of violence/ personal security	Teasing	Mugging	Rubbing/ pawing/ pinching	General misbehaviour by passengers / drivers/ conductors	Disurbance by strangers	Stalking
Bihari Basti FGD 1			8						
Bihari Basti FGD 2							3		
Bihari Basti FGD 3									
Bhaskar Nagar FGD 1							5		
Bhaskar Nagar FGD 2							4	7	
Bhaskar Nagar FGD 3							12		
Dhirenpara FGD 1	4			2	1				
Dhirenpara FGD 2	4			6					2
Dhirenpara FGD 3							9		
Dhirenpara FGD 4				5					
Lakhtakia FGD 1							15		
Lakhtakia FGD 2		15							
Lalmati FGD 1							1		
Lalmati FGD 2						5			6
Lalmati FGD 3							8		
Lalmati FGD 4									
Total	**8**	**15**	**8**	**13**	**1**	**5**	**57**	**7**	**8**

Source: FGDs at various locations, 2014

Table 13: Causes of harassment/discomfort

Location	Urban planning, infrastructure, transport based issues							Behavioural issues	
	Bad / muddy / flooded roads	No street lights/ dark streets	Overcrowded buses/ trekkers	Excessive fare	Low frequency	No gates at railway crossing	Overcrowded streets & junctions	Alcoholic on streets/ addas	Alcoholic/ druggists in buses/ trekkers
Bihari Basti FGD 1	11	3			1				
Bihari Basti FGD 2	8	5	3		7			3	1
Bihari Basti FGD 3	11	5	2		6				
Bhaskar Nagar FGD 1	7	6	3		2				
Bhaskar Nagar FGD 2	4	3	4			4		4	
Bhaskar Nagar FGD 3	8	4							
Dhirenpara FGD 1	9	3	5	2	4				
Dhirenpara FGD 2	4	1	2		6				
Dhirenpara FGD 3	2	1	3		6			9	
Dhirenpara FGD 4	9	4		9				3	
Lakhtakia FGD 1	5	10							
Lakhtakia FGD 2		5						10	
Lalmati FGD 1	19	8	1						
Lalmati FGD 2	7	8	4						
Lalmati FGD 3	9	13							
Lalmati FGD 4	7						8	15	
Total	**120**	**79**	**27**	**11**	**32**	**4**	**8**	**44**	**1**

Source: FGDs at various locations, 2014

9. Conclusion

Our research highlights two major categories of harassment/discomfort encountered by women while using public transport. In terms of experience of harassment/discomfort, women listed behavioural issues 76 percent) as their major concern. These included general misbehaviour by passengers, driver or conductor (47 percent), teasing (10 percent), stalking (7 percent) and disturbance by strangers (6 percent), rubbing of body parts (4 percent) by male co-passengers and mugging (1 percent). Other experiences of harassment/discomfort linked to urban planning, infrastructure and transport based issues (26 percent) were over-charging by buses (12 percent), fear of violence/personal security and rash driving (7 percent each). However, when the women were asked to enlist the causes of harassment/discomfort while using public transport, they identified factors linked to urban planning, infrastructure and transport based issues (86 percent) as major reasons for their experiences. These included bad, muddy and flooded roads (37 percent), darks streets due to absence of street lights (24 percent), low frequency of buses (10 percent), overcrowded buses (8 percent), excessive fares (3percent), overcrowded streets (2 percent) and unmanned railway crossings (1 percent). In contrast, behavioural issues like presence of alcoholics and drug abusers on the streets and buses were identified as causes in only 14 percent responses. Clearly, the women identify the lack of urban planning resulting in deficits of physical as well as transport infrastructure as the major cause of harassment and discomfort faced by them.

In light of the above, planners must rethink on how their interventions are contributing to the idea of women as equal citizens and their right to free mobility in the city. As researchers like Astrop et al. (1996) and Anand and Tiwari (2006) argue in the context of Pune and Delhi respectively, access to public transport plays a major role in enabling women to improve their standard of living through opening up opportunities across the city. As discussed earlier in this article, increasing instances of physical assault on women forces them to limit their mobility and behave in a manner so that they are seen to be 'respectable.' In the light of arguments put forward by Phadke et al (2009), limited mobility of women results in their exclusion from the citizenship of the city as they are no longer able to access the city spaces in a manner they would ideally like to. Increasing participation of women in the workforce challenges male dominance (Hanson 2010) and this may be the reason for the high proportion of behavioural issues in the experiences of harassment/discomfort reported by women. General misbehaviour, rubbing of body parts, teasing may however be a result of more reasons that one including sexual frustration and increased societal control on the way the sexes interact.

Given how Root et al (2000), Hanson and Pratt (1990) argue that women are more dependent on mass transit than men, planners must make efforts towards making these services available with good levels of service and safety, so as to enable women to access opportunities at par with men. A city that is safe for women and children is usually safe for men as well. Unless efforts are made to address infrastructure deficits through the provision of well-lit, walkable and safe streets while ensuring that the public transit system itself is capable of catering to the demand for travel, it would be impossible to retain existing women ridership and attract more. Only then will they be able to use the city's public realm the same way as men leading to an inclusive city.

9.1. Policy Recommendations

Given the high dependence of women on public transport (unlike men), policy makers must intervene to address the deficiencies in their provision through increasing the routes and frequency of buses.

If IPT such as trekkers have to be used, these have to be regulated. There should be a gradual plan to transit to small buses that are safer than the trekkers.

The most important planning intervention is to promote mixed land use that reduces distance to travel and also provides activities on the street round the day, reducing areas with no activities during the night. Activities on the street that invite both men and women create safe spaces.

Urban design and planning must ensure the creation of public spaces that prevent or at least present lesser opportunities for violence against women. Interventions such as well-designed, wide and lighted streets make walking safer from traffic point of view as well as harassment of women.

Another important urban design intervention is designing streets in a way to allow vendors to use them for their business and creation of special vending zones in areas where natural markets have developed so that there ae always eyes on the streets. Promoting mixed land use, avoiding dark alleys, dead ends and ensuring 'eyes on the street' through design, bye laws and hawker-friendly policies can help discourage violence against women.

Provision of well-designed streets with usable footpaths and streetlighting should help reduce the risk of harassment for women.

Bus stands have to be constructed in Guwahati and these have to be well lighted.

Distance between the bus-stands should not be more than 500 m on any road so as to increase accessibility.

Given the high dependence of women on public transport (unlike men), policy makers must intervene to address the deficiencies in their provision.

Policing must be stepped up especially after dusk to provide a sense of security to women travelling back from work or elsewhere. If the number of women on streets increases, they will find strength in numbers and this will act as a deterrent to potential harassers.

The education system must respond to the challenges posed by increasing instances of violence against woman and include themes of gender equality, equal rights and women's right to respond to incidences of harassment as part of the curriculum.

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Annexure

Annexure-1

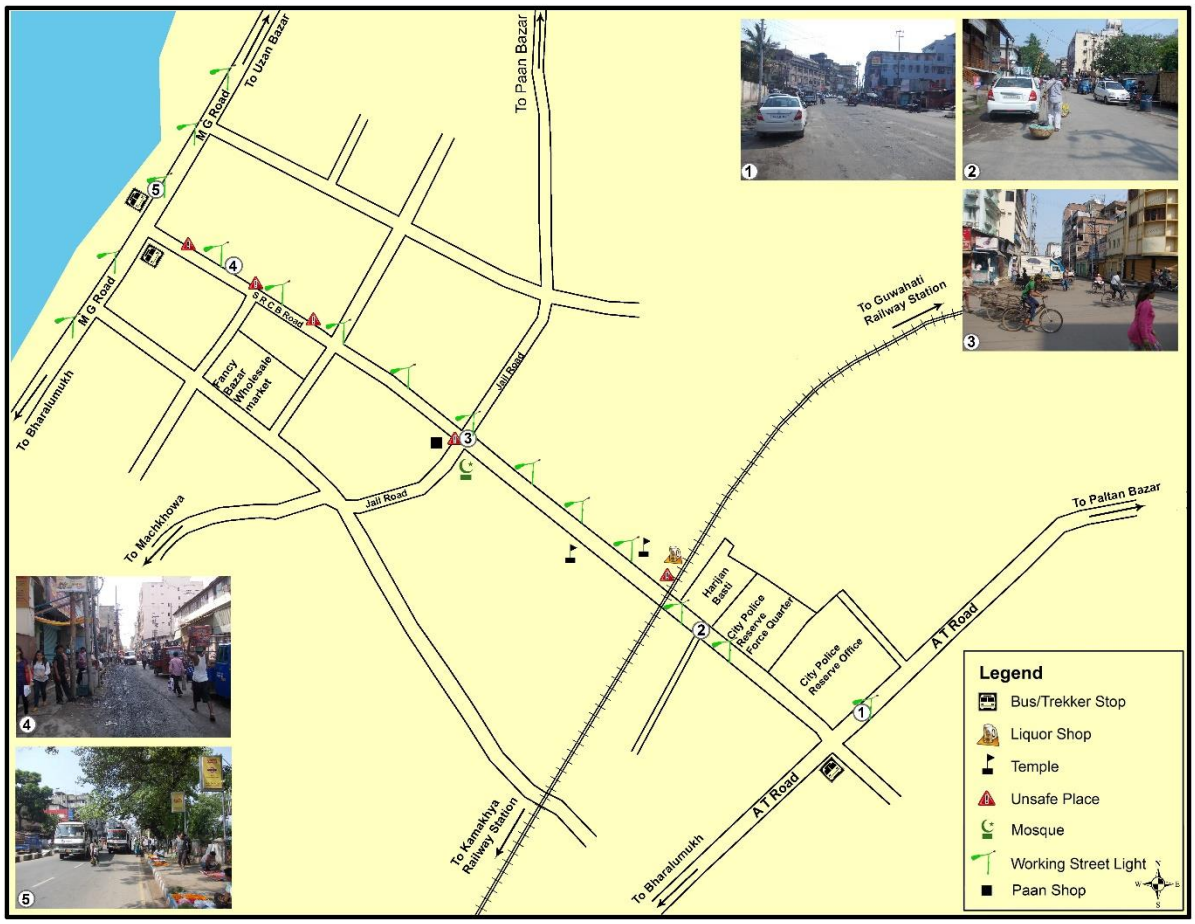
Age-group and occupation of the participants who took part in FGDs, and listing and prioritization of problems by each group.

Name of the Locality	FGD No.	Age-group	Occupation	Prioritized Problems
1. Dhirenpara	1	21-52	Home-maker, employee in printing press, student and social worker	1. Poor road condition 2. Over-crowded bus / trekker 3. Rash driving and low frequency of trekkers
	2	16-21	Student	1. Eve-teasing 2. Low frequency of trekkers 3. Poor road condition
	3	30-45	Home-maker, domestic-help and daily-wage labour	1. Drunkards 2. Mis-behaviour by co-passengers 3. Low frequency of trekkers
	4	28-50	ASHA worker, employee in a hotel and domestic-help	1. Poor road condition 2. Over-charged by trekkers 3. Eve-teasing
2. Pub-Bhaskar Nagar	5	19-50	Student, tailor, anganwadi worker, domestic-help and daily-wage worker	1. Floods and muddy road 2. No street-lights 3. Mis- behaviour by passengers / conductors and co-passengers
	6	18-37	Student, home-maker, domestic-help, tailor	1. Mis-behaviour by passerby and co-passengers 2. No street-lights 3. Flash floods
	7	19-39	Student, cook, domestic-help, social worker	1. Mis-behaviour by men 2. Flash flood 3. No streetlight
3. Lakhtokia	8	16-17	Student	1. Mis- behaviour by passengers / conductors and co-passengers 2. No street-lights 3. Flash flood and muddy road
	9	24-31	Women constable in the special force of women-police – known as *veerangana*	1. Mis-behaviour by passerby 2. Drunkards 3. No streetlight
4. Shibnagar	10	22-40	Student, cook, domestic-help	1. Drunkards 2. Eve-teasing 3. Stalking
	11	17-40	Domestice-help, daily-wage labour	1. Eve-teasing 2. Crowded bus 3. Mis-behaviour by conductors over change and bus-fare
	12	20-35	Domestic-help, daily-wage labour and factory worker	1. No streetlight 2. Crowded buses 3. Poor road conditions and water logging over streets
	13	25-45	Domestice-helper and rag-picker	1. Mis- behaviour by passengers / conductors and co-passengers 2. Muddy and water logged streets

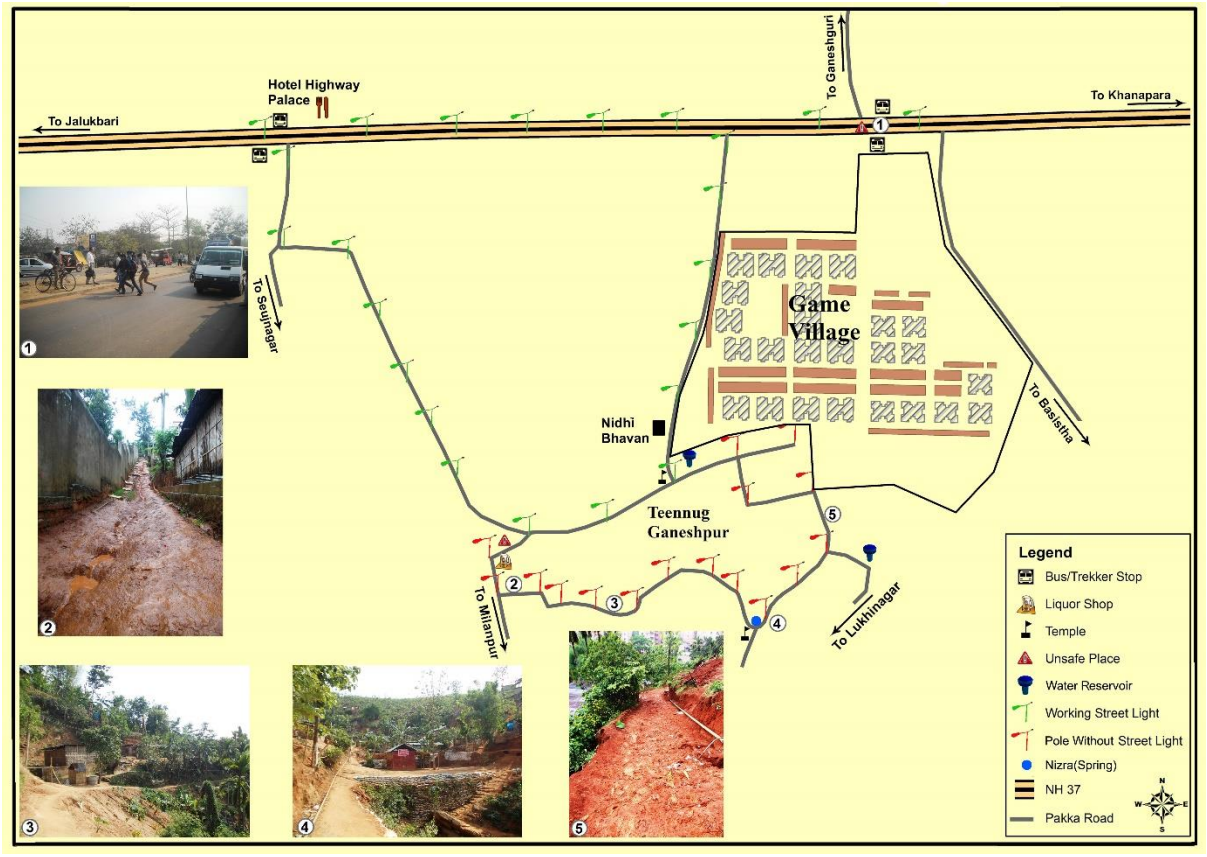
				3. No streetlight
5. Bihari Basti / Pragati Nagar	14	22-53	Student, teacher, ASHA worker and home-maker	1. Poor road condition 2. Low frequency of buses and trekkers 3. No streetlight
	15	23-35	Home-maker	1. Water logged streets 2. Low frequency of buses and trekkers 3. No streetlight
	16	20-48	Student, teacher, home-maker, NRHM employee	1. Poor road condition 2. Low frequency of public transport 3. No streetlight
6. Lalmati	17	26-35	Home-maker and domestic-helper	1. Poor road condition 2. No streetlight 3. Flash flood and water logged street
	18	28-40	Home-maker, domestic-helper, daily-wage labour and street vendor	1. No streetlight 2. Muddy streets 3. Pushing in overcrowded buses
	19	30-40	Home-maker, peon in a private school, daily-wage labour, social worker	1. No streetlight 2. Muddy streets 3. Mis-behaviour by co-passengers in trekker
	20	28-37	Home-maker, employee in bottle washing company	1. Drunkards 2. Huge traffic and absence of traffic police 3. Muddy road

Annexure-2

Map showing land uses, bus/trekker stand, routes, functional and functional street lights, safe and unsafe points in Lakhtokia, Guwahati



Map showing land uses, bus/trekker stand, routes, functional and functional street lights, safe and unsafe points in Lalmati, Guwahati



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