

Towards a Safer City for Women

*A survey by North East Network in Guwahati
2012-13*



Acknowledgements

- ▶ Jagori, New Delhi
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A Survey by North East Network (NEN)

Background

The safety of women in many public spaces is a perpetual national concern. The incident of molestation of a young girl in July 2012, in full public view by a mob right in the heart of Guwahati (Assam), ignited the debate on safety for women in the city and raised questions on ways of preventing such incidents from happening. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2012 figures, Assam witnessed 13544 incidents of crime against women. The rate of cognizable crimes against women is highest in Assam (89.54 percent).

Women from all economic sections, having different levels of education and belonging to various age groups and occupations, face incessant and diverse forms of violence and harassment, both during day and night, in crowded as well as secluded places. These incidents typically take place in public transport, particularly buses and cars, market places, around educational institutions (schools/colleges), restaurants, roads, and public toilets and parks. Especially vulnerable are school and college students.

The North East Network (NEN) initiated a survey in Guwahati city to address the issue of 'women's safety in public places' as a part of its broad campaign on violence against women. Our survey was inspired by Jagori's Baseline Survey (2010) carried out in the national capital of Delhi. NEN's survey, based on a total sample of 1,045 women, identified, gathered and analysed information about:

- ▶ The factors that contribute to greater safety concerns for women in public places in Guwahati city;
- ▶ Incidence and forms of sexual harassment and /violence faced by women in public places;
- ▶ The response of women on sexual harassment and / violence and steps taken by them to avoid such situations; and
- ▶ Institutional response towards ensuring safety of women in public places.

Titled Towards a Safer City for Women, the NEN report aims to create awareness towards ensuring safe public places for women and girls; spread the message that women and girls have the right to live without fear and insecurity and have a sustained initiative leading to advocacy on safe cities for women.

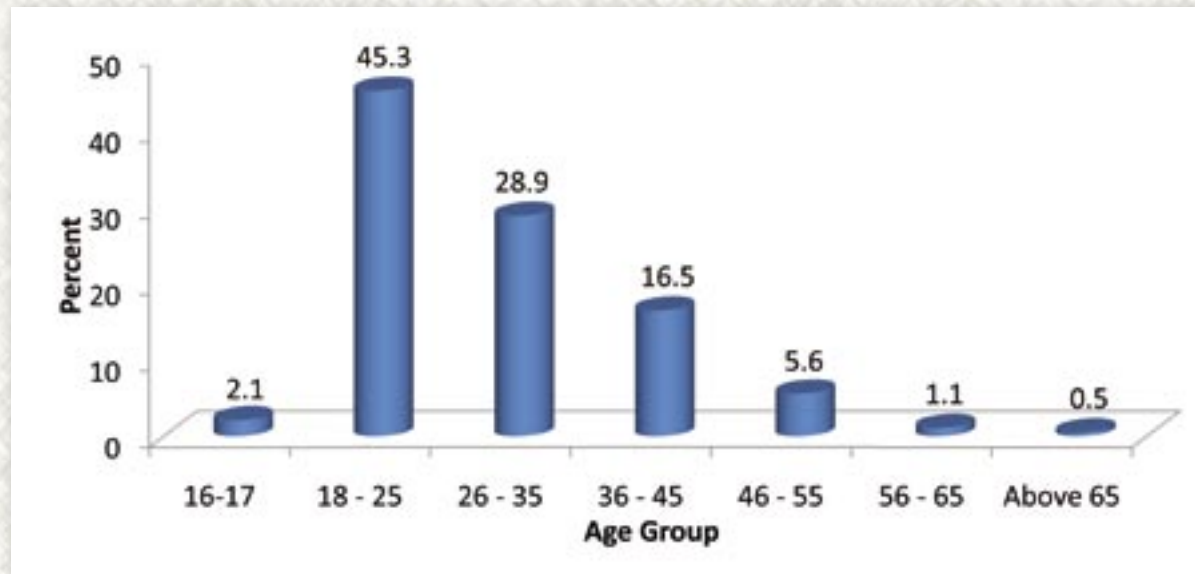
Survey Methodology

The study adopted Purposive Sampling methods based on the specific knowledge of the purpose or objective of the study, and the capacity and willingness (appropriateness) of the individuals to participate in the study. The intention was to quickly reach the targeted sample and draw articulate information, interviewing the readily available women.

The survey, beginning on 25 November 2012 with the '16 Days Campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls', culminated in January 2013. It was carried out by 59 volunteers (39 women and 20 men) in both individual and institutional capacity. They were trained by NEN. Information was collected from a total of 1,045 women, of age 16 years and above. The sample size chosen for the study is realistic and indicative to assess the complex issue of violence against women, given that the urban metropolitan population of Guwahati is 968,549, of which 505,542 are males and 463,007 are females (Census 2011).

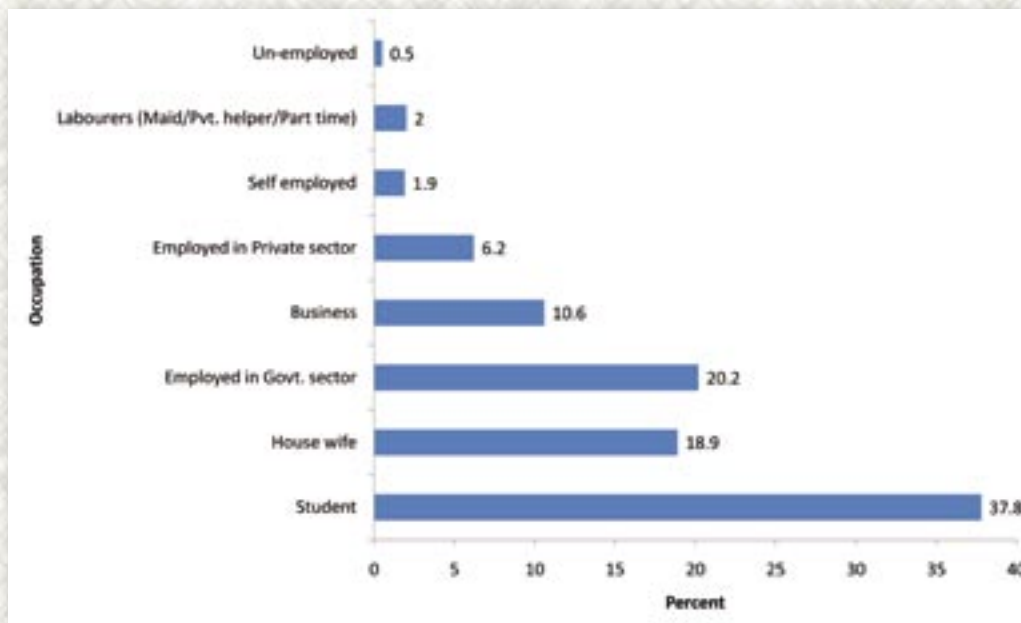
Profile of Respondents

Age Group of the Respondents



The respondents belonged to diverse occupational categories and socio-economic and educational background.

Occupation of the Respondents



Interviews were carried out with women waiting in bus stops, either for their children or going to school/college or office; women on streets/markets/malls and other public places; women in slums; and women who were street hawkers/vendors. Each of the respondent categories were further divided into groups broadly based on their nature of work such as student, housewife/home-maker, employed in government or private sectors, self-employed or in business, labourers or domestic helpers, and unemployed.

The survey was conducted in 62 areas, spread across Guwahati and covered 25 out of the 31 Municipal Wards in the city. Though attempt was made to cover the entire city of Guwahati, uniformity was not maintained in selecting the number of respondents in a particular area/interview site. However, an effort was made to maintain homogeneity in fixing the number of respondents per interview site, which approximately covered half km. radius. A good number of interviews (389) were conducted after dark.

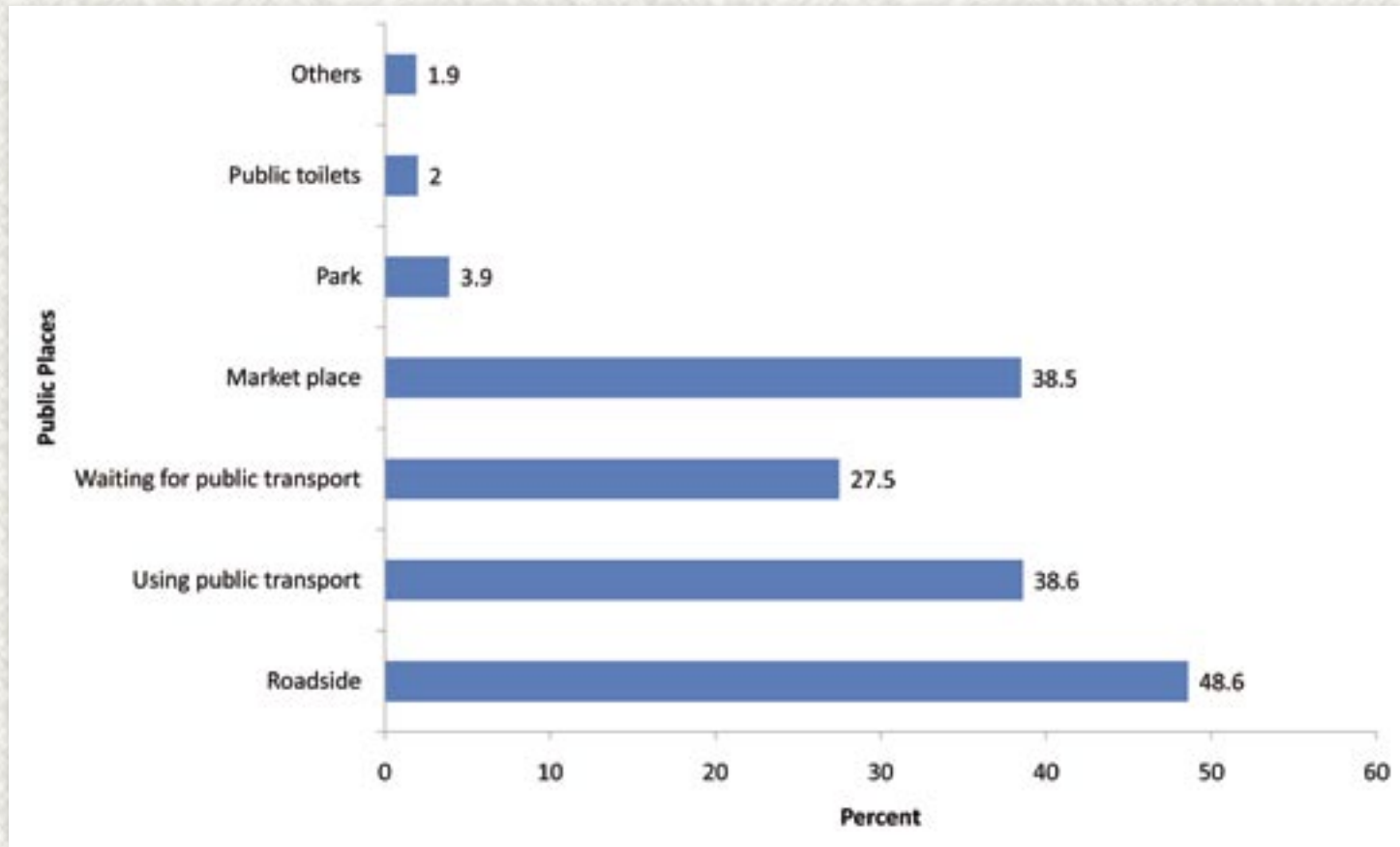
This is a survey report first of its kind in Assam, especially in the city of Guwahati. The study is unique in terms of its inclusion of all categories of women, the broad sweep of the areas covered and assessment of all types of violence and harassment against women.

Major Findings

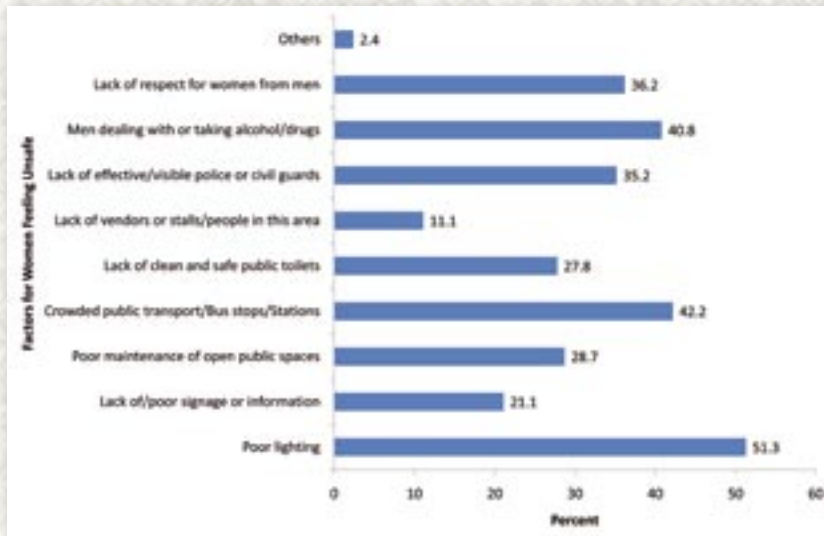
Factors affecting women's safety in public places

- Incidents of sexual harassment and/violence occur in both crowded and secluded places. It was reported that roadside, while using or waiting for public transport and market places were specific public places where women face higher incidence of sexual harassment and violence.

Specific Public Places where Incidents of Sexual Harassment and / Violence Occur



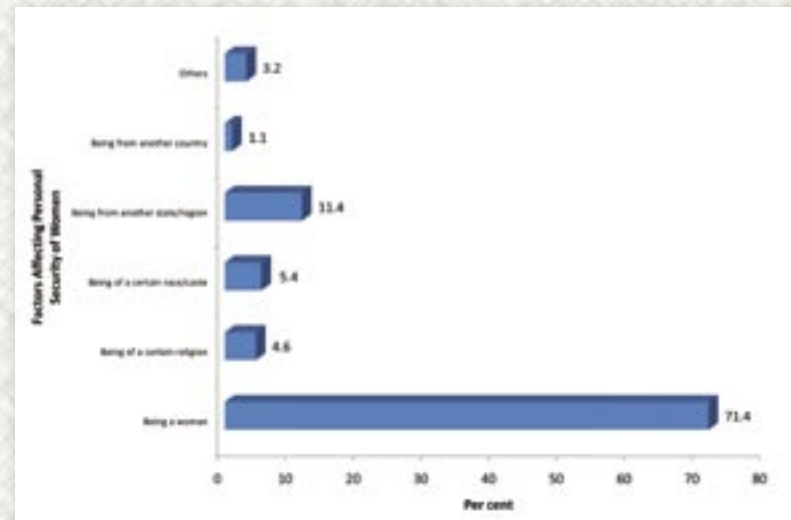
Factors Contributing to Women Feeling Unsafe in Public Places



► Being a woman was reported as the major factor (71.4 per cent) affecting the personal security of women. Other factors include being from another state/region or country and belonging to a certain race/ caste or religion.

► The main factors contributing to women feeling unsafe include poor infrastructure (insufficient lighting, lack of signage and public toilets, and deplorable condition of open public spaces); crowded public transport and bus stops; usage of alcohol/drugs by men; lack of respect for women from men; and absence of effective/visible police or civil guards.

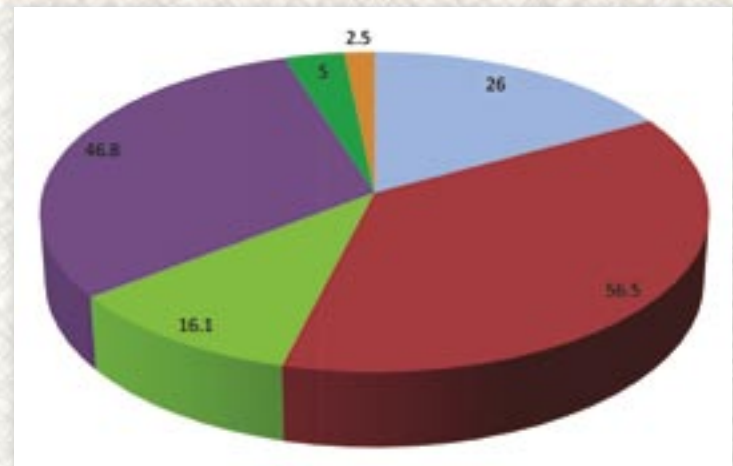
Factors Affecting Personal Security of Women



Personal Safety Risk Concerns of Women in Public Places

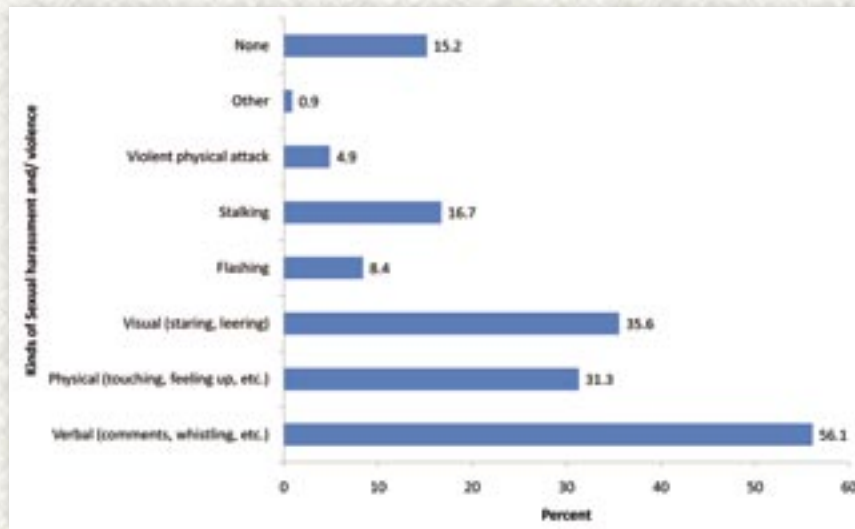
- 1. None, I have no concerns
- 2. Sexual harassment, hassling, eve teasing, stalking, touching, flashing, staring
- 3. Sexual violence or rape
- 4. Robbery or having money or possessions stolen
- 5. Murder
- 6. Others

► Sexual harassment, hassling, eve teasing, stalking, touching, flashing and staring were the major safety risk concern for a majority of women (56.5 per cent), followed by robbery or theft (46.8 per cent) and sexual assault or rape (16 per cent).



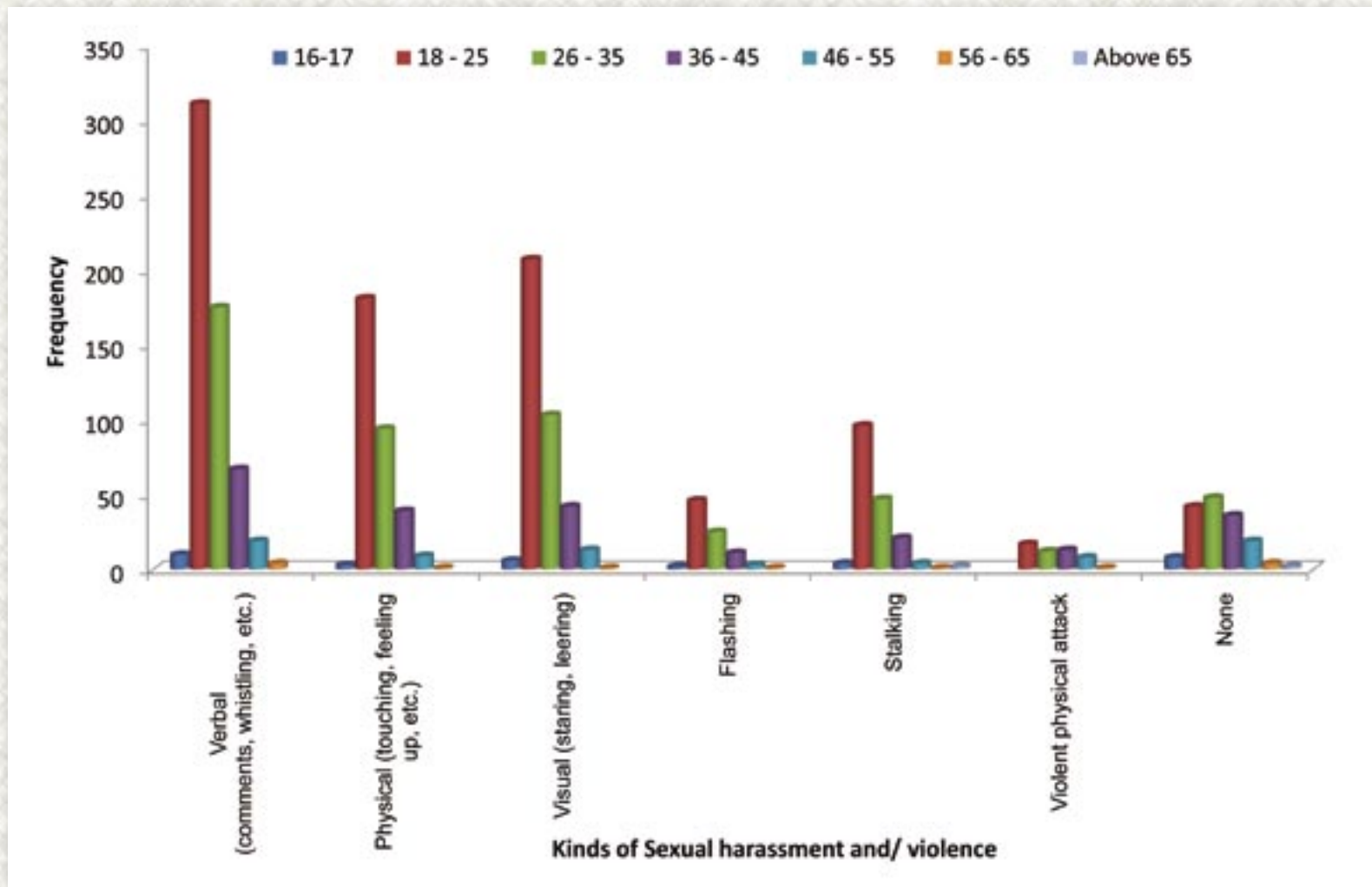
Experiences of women on sexual harassment and /violence

Kinds of Sexual Harassment and/ Violence Faced by Women in Public Places



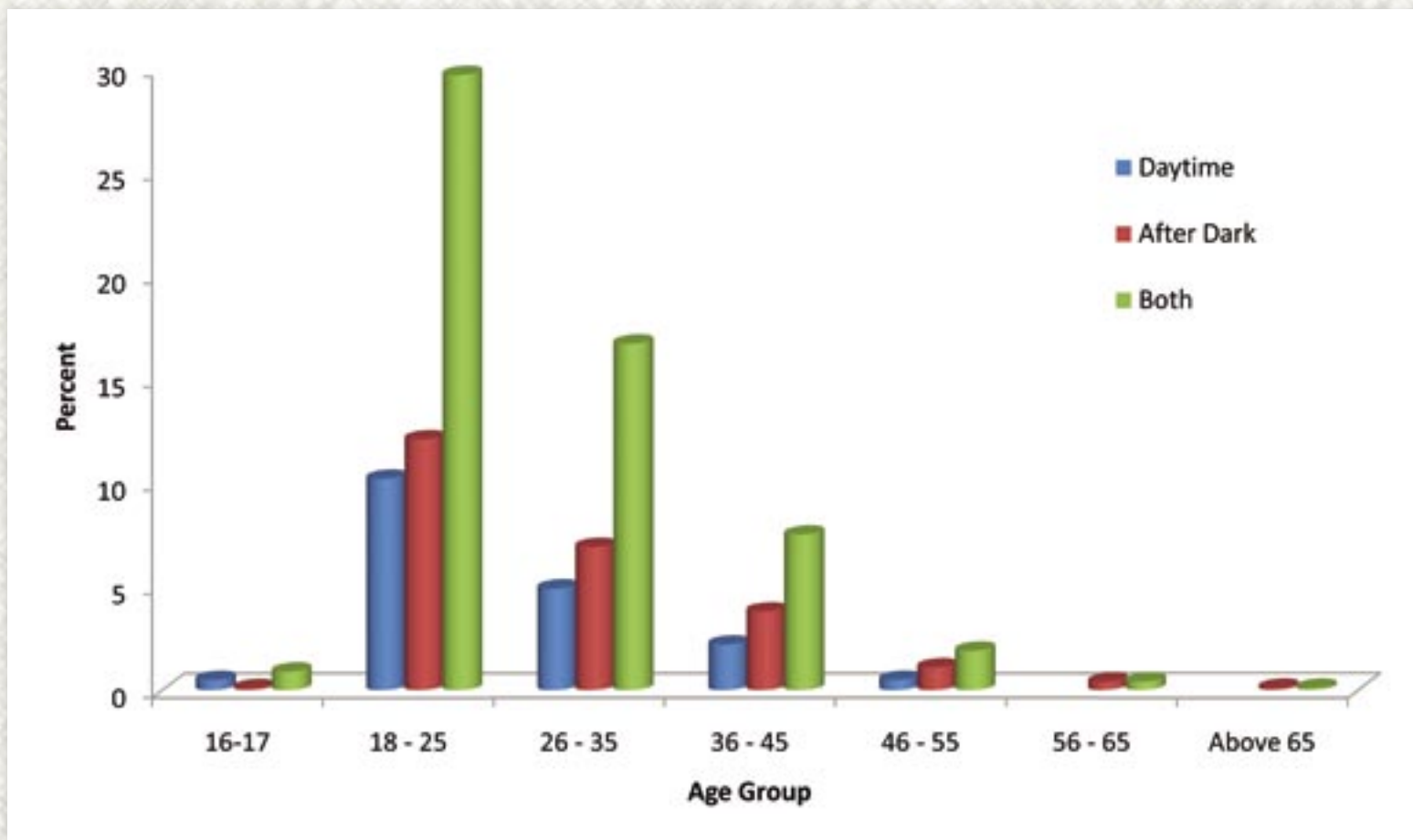
► The most common form of sexual harassment and / violence faced by women in public places is verbal (comments and whistling), followed by visual (staring and leering) and physical (touching and feeling). A lot of women reported experiences of stalking, flashing and even violent physical attack.

Age Group-wise Vulnerability of Women to Various Kinds of Violence



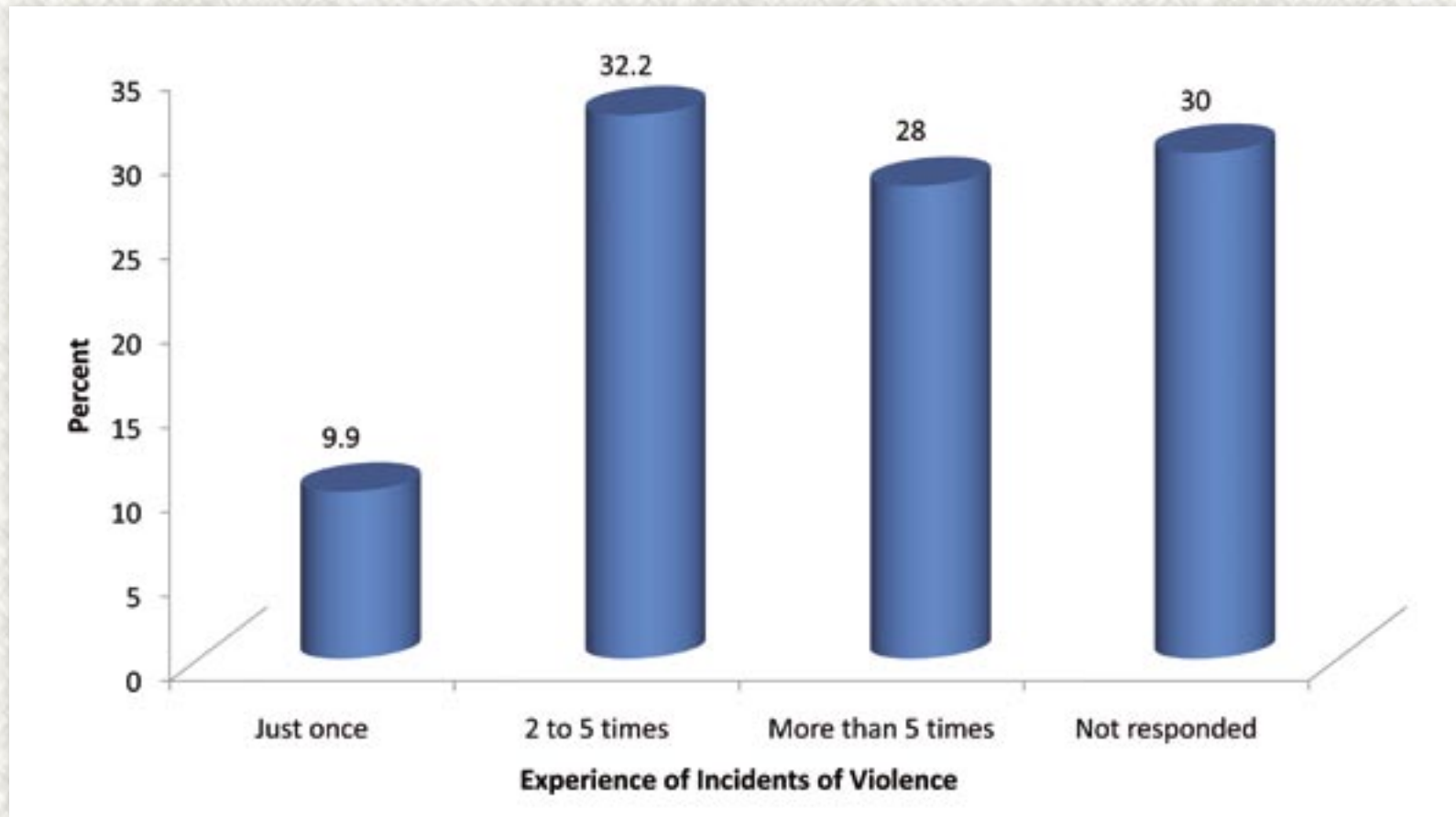
Women and girls in the age group of 18-25 years, especially students, are highly susceptible to all kinds of sexual harassment and / violence , the most common forms being verbal (56.1 per cent) and visual abuse(35.6 per cent)

Age Group of Women most Vulnerable to Incidents of Violence



- The study demystified the widely shared perception that violence against women takes place primarily after dark. While 12.9 per cent of respondents said that incidents of sexual harassment and / violence occurred during daytime, 40.4 per cent women said that they occurred both before and after dark. A majority of women in the age group of 18-25 years have faced incidents of sexual harassment and / violence both during daytime and after dark.

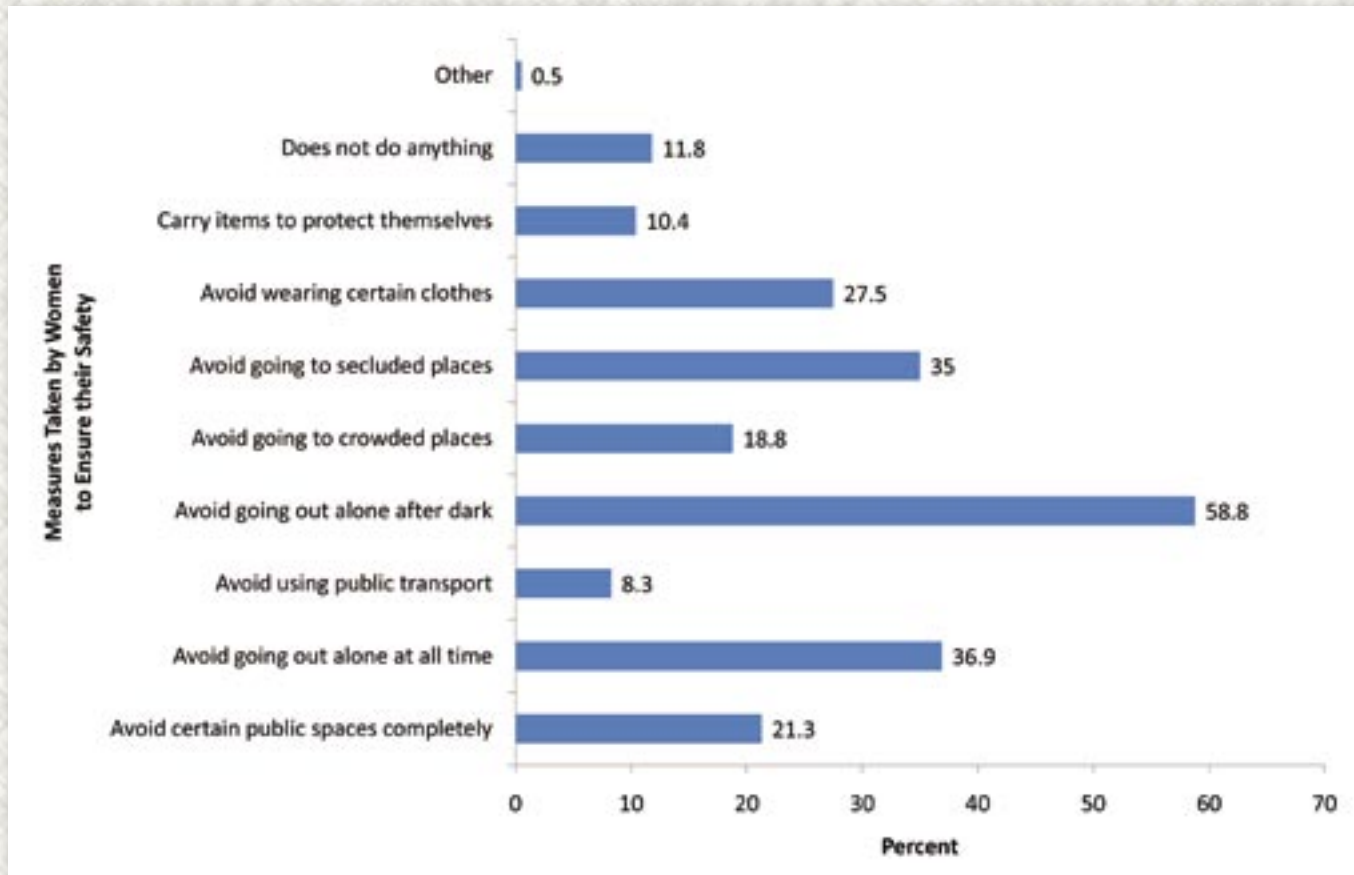
Frequency of Experience of Incidents of Sexual Harassment and / Violence on Women



► While around 70 per cent women reported facing some form of sexual harassment and / violence in public places at least once in the past year, about 28 per cent reported experiencing such incidents more than 5 times.

Women, particularly students and girls who have either completed or are going through college/university are most vulnerable and have experienced incidents of sexual harassment and/ violence in public cases at least 2 to 5 times and in many cases more than 5 times as well.

Measures Taken by Women to Ensure their Safety



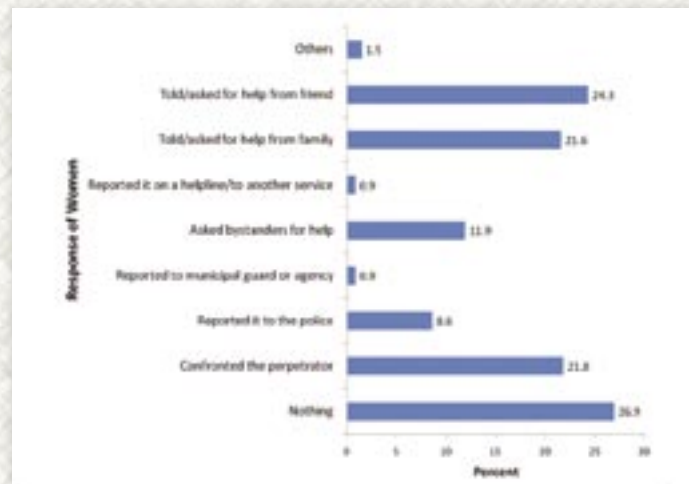
► Women are primarily responsible for ensuring their safety. They do so by avoid using certain public places, using public transport and visiting crowded/secluded places; staying indoors after dark, having someone to accompany them while going out, maintaining a dress code and carrying items like pepper spray, knife or safety pins to protect themselves. Some of them have taken up karate lessons as a self defence training. Majority of the women (58.8 per cent) interviewed felt it is best not to go out alone after dark. A substantial number of women from all occupational backgrounds, however, did nothing to ensure their safety in public places.

Women's experiences with the state agencies

Age Group-wise Response of Women to Incidents of Sexual Harassment and/ Violence

▶ A large number of women dealt with incidents of sexual harassment and/ violence by confronting the perpetrator, asking the bystanders for help, reporting to police, municipal guard or agency and helpline/other service, and asking help from family or friend. Quite a few women (26.9 per cent) did not take any action fearing retaliation by the perpetrator. Some responded saying that such incidents are frequent occurrences and as women they are ignorant of the consequences of such incidents in their lives and also have no idea regarding support services.

While a substantial number of women in the age group of 18-25 years and students did not do anything when faced with incidents of sexual harassment and / violence , majority of them asked their friend for help, followed by confronting the perpetrator and asking help from their family. Very few of them reported such incidents to the police.



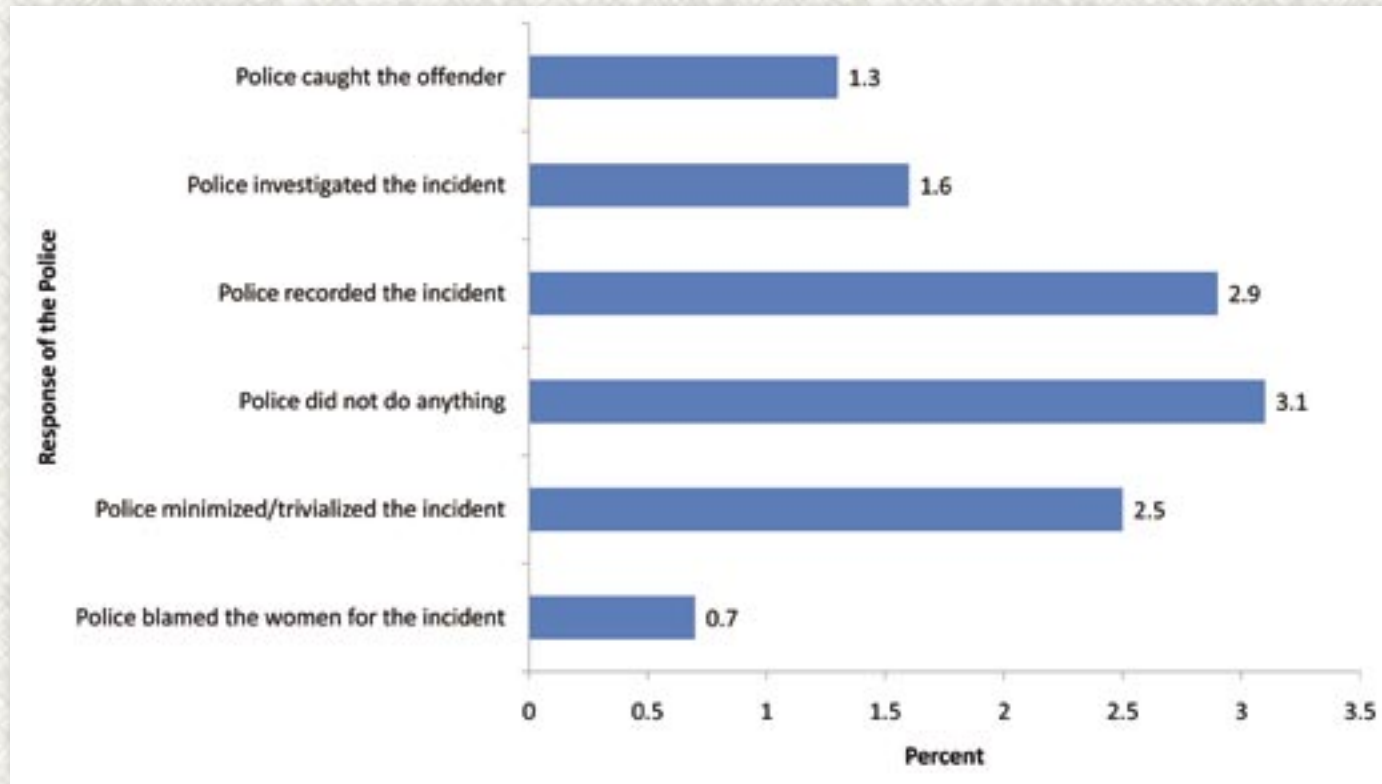
Nature of Incidents of Sexual Harassment and / Violence Reported to the Police



▶ Among the incidents of sexual harassment and/ violence that were most frequently reported to the police were verbal and physical abuses (36.7 and 25.6 per cent respectively).

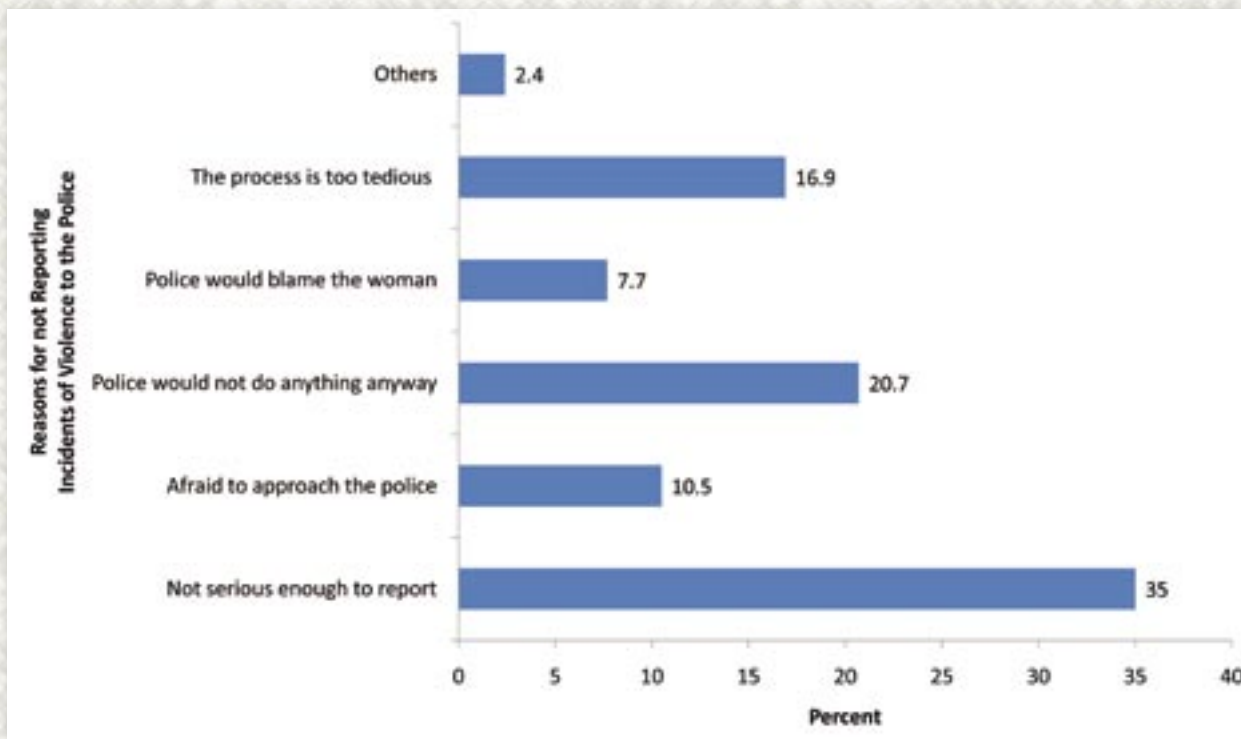
Women in the age group of 18-25 years have been more prompt in reporting incidents of violence experienced by them in public places to the police. Students have mostly reported to the police incidents of flashing and stalking. Women from all occupational groups have also reported incidents of violent physical attack.

Response of the Police when Incidents of Sexual Harassment and /violence were Reported



- ▶ When incidents of sexual harassment and / violence were reported to the police, in majority of cases the police did nothing. They either trivialised the incident or blamed the women for it. While the police recorded most of the incidents, very few cases were followed by investigation and apprehending the offender.
- ▶ A substantial number of women refrained from reporting incidents of violence to the police because they were afraid of approaching the police, the tedious process involved, the police blaming the woman for the incident, and police inaction
- ▶ Also 35 per cent of women didn't think it was serious enough to report. It not only reflects their socialisation to accept and adjust to violence, but also shows their disbelief in justice mechanisms.

Reasons for Not Reporting Incidents of Sexual Harassment/Assault to the Police



Women in the age group of 18-25 years cited that the police would not take any action and the process was very tedious. Many of them were afraid to approach the police.

Way Forward

Our survey was diagnostic in nature. NEN intends to collect more perception and responses from women and men on strategies for creating safe space for women in the city. The survey brought forth a multitude of risk factors which threatens women's safety in public places. While laws are in place, there has to be a combination of State obligation and public responsibility to collectively move towards possible intervention for creating safe public place for all.

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