WOMEN
AND THE STREETS OF GOA
A pilot study of safety of women in public spaces in Goa

The Bachchao Project
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10th April 2018
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About The Bachchao Project

The Bachchao Project is a techno-feminist collective that undertakes community-centric efforts to develop and support open source technologies and technical frameworks with the goals of mitigating gender-based violence and working towards equitable rights for women, LGBTQIA, and gender non-conforming groups. We conduct research and advocacy in all the above areas and guide communities in determining appropriate technological interventions for themselves.

Safe Goa Project

Is a collaborative project under The Bachchao Project looking at the safety in the streets of Goa.
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Goa has recently received a very prestigious title. It has been named the “safest state for women in India” based on Gender Vulnerability Index guided study by Plan India. For many, this may seem the most natural outcome of the study. After all, Goa has long been known and promoted to be the place you come to in India where you can do things you most likely can’t do in most other places in this country. Party hard, travel solo, be out late, meet like minded people, relax on a beach, swim, trek, enjoy varied music etc. But for the women who live/ work/ visit here, it’s all relative.

TESTIMONY: FEMALE, STUDENT, EARLY 20S

How safe do you feel living in goa

“I think compared to other states I feel safer. Compared to Delhi and all.”

In the past 3 months have you ever experienced / witness abuse?

“Yes in neighbourhood I witnessed someone getting abused.”

Why are the risks women in Goa face not perceived as “as severe” as those faced by women in other parts of our country? And why is this “relative” safety something to celebrate? This declaration of “safest state” could very well become a convenient way to push aside the fact that Goan women’s lives aren’t quite as susegad as one would imagine.

This much talked about report is primarily based on secondary data across various indicators like records of enrollment in schools, number of cases filed by married women etc. This in itself makes it necessary take this report with a huge pinch of salt.

Lives and voices of women and girls are not reflected in this report. Any relevant data that didn’t enter government records is excluded from the report and hence makes it inadequate.

"Hence it is important that girls and women who face the effect of vulnerabilities are able to understand and accept the issues related to them, so that the strategic approaches can be employed to deliver tangible solutions. " - says the Way Forward section of the report.

This sort of official condescension is par for the course when talking about women and safety.

Sure, some of us are more carefree and able to be ourselves in Goa. This of course is also a reflection of the privilege many of us enjoy of being an educated, independent, English speaking, middle class women with a family that is supportive of our life choices.

But that said, many of us have faced harassment and assault multiple times in Goa too. The reality for everyday Goan women - the ones who plan their time so they don’t miss the last bus home, who need to ensure they don’t have to walk alone through the dimly light village roads at night- is very different from the often one sided story of a progressive Goa that is often in the limelight.
Do you use public transport in Goa if no why? if yes what is your experience?

“Yes. The sexual harassment always there, you don’t take it seriously there is always some kind of the commenting.

If you are travelling late in the night, try to inform you parents or friends let them know of your travel. Try using a known mode of transport. Try to learn self defence.”

Reports such as the one by Plan India run the risk of presenting a very distorted picture of ground realities. This is especially true when looking at gender vulnerabilities because the data itself is skewed by means of access and representation. Even if quantitative data were robust, it cannot adequately reflect the lived reality of the women we are talking about.

Goa is a wonderful place to live, for everyone especially women because the community here is very loving and kind. Everyone looks out for each other. But we should not get carried away just because this State treats women marginally better that other States do. There is much proactive work to be done to ensure Goa stays at the top of these indices.

It was these lived experiences and intersectionalities that led us to conceive and execute the SafeGoa study in Goa in 2016.

Safe Goa started its journey in Goa in February 2016.

The aim was to focus on schools, colleges and other public spaces to collect harassment data and analyse them to help local police take necessary measures.

We consulted some User Interaction experts to help us find an inclusive and accurate way to collect data on street safety in Panjim City. These discussions led to the design of a study that would use physical maps placed in public places for data collection along with group discussions on the issue. The mode of reporting would be witness based hence removing the stigma attached to being identified as a survivor.

The map was a field paper map showing street level view of Panjim City. Stickers were placed next to the maps. A user - member of the general public in our case - had to just pick up the relevant sticker and put it on the place/ location they wanted to mark. Two kinds of stickers were used to collect data - 1. Red – for those who had experienced harassment.
2. Yellow – for those who had seen harassment happening.

There was separate space for those who wanted to elaborate the harassment they had witnessed or seen happening.

Pic: A field map from Central Library Panjim one of our sites

In addition to this, the team also used consultations and interviews to obtain more personal accounts and in-depth information needed for the analysis. A total of 5 consultations and around 20 in depth personal interviews were conducted for this report.

Check Annexure C for a more detailed methodology
Our Maps were placed in 7 locations in Panjim for a period of 13 weeks (starting from 20/2/2016, Annexure A). The reports we received pointed to harassment in all the areas of the city. The density of the reports were high around the market and the bus stand area and the miramar beach.
30% of the women had faced harassment in the 3 months leading to the interview

When we conducted individual interviews with 20 women we found that 1 in 3 women had faced harassment in the recent past. Furthermore every women we interviewed or met in group consultations agreed that the crime rate especially crimes against women was increasing.

In the group consultations we asked our participants to talk about their interactions with the city and the factors that contribute to them feeling unsafe. There was a long list of factors and we understand that each person would have a different yardstick to measure safety.

The broad themes impacting perception of safety were:

**DARK STREETS**
Many women we talked to in our consultations said they avoid going out in the night. Dark Streets appeared as a recurring theme in all the consultations we held. Some participants spoke about how they avoid going into certain parts of the city after dark. It was not limited to walking but also driving through such areas was scary for certain participants. Women avoid going out in the evening especially when the frequency of public transport decreases. Most participants also admitted to feeling unsafe when they are alone in a street irrespective of lighting on the streets.

**MORE MEN THAN WOMEN IN PUBLIC**
Visibility of more men as compared to women was an issue particularly echoed by all demography of women. They explicitly said that seeing more men congregated together (either drunk or sober) always created a
feeling of uneasiness (unsafe). Some participants even said that they felt unsafe boarding a bus which did not have a lot of women.

**LACK OF FAMILIARITY**

The lack of familiarity of their surrounding or people around them caused the feeling of being unsafe. Some women indicated that they would feel safe when they hear a familiar language or in a familiar area. There was also a mention that availability of sign boards indicated directions and information increased the sense of safety.

**UNCONTROLLED CROWDS**

Most participants also shared that they felt unsafe in the midst of Uncontrolled crowd environments such as concerts, festivals and parades.
How does Panjim make me feel unsafe?

**DIMLY LIT AREAS & ABANDONED STREETS**

Panjim has several areas where the participants of our consultations felt reluctant to visit after dark. Some of these areas are at the heart of the city like the Patto Center. Patto Center one of our participants described as

> “Patto is a place I would avoid going at night because the crime rate is high since the place is not crowded and the area is not well lit”

7 reports were from the Panjim bus stand and Patto area.

Several participants also spoke about being harrassed near the bridge connecting Patto Center with Fontainhas and the Rio de Ourém road. They described these as places ones they would not venture into after dark. There were similar sentiments to different areas of the city like Altino, Dona Paula and Goa University.

In some parts of the city the lack of lighting made them feel unsafe.
In particular parts of the city like Panjim Market the participants said that if shops were open they would not feel unsafe after dark.

The complete list of areas and paths with dimly lit streets and isolated streets, that women prefer to avoid is available at ANNEXURE B.
In Panjim and surrounding areas, buses are the most commonly used mode of transport for women. This includes students, working professionals and the home makers.

In our consultations and interviews the harassment in buses was spoken at length. Public transport is used by women more often and most times it is their only way of interaction for Goan women with the city.

But sadly the buses seem to be the place where women experience a lot of harassment.

Almost 100% of women we spoke to who use public transport regularly have faced this harassment at some point in time.

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, WORKING WOMEN, 30-35 YEAR OLD:**
Do you use public transport in Goa? If no why? If yes what is your experience
I use it and there is no safety for women. There are certain men who purposefully board buses and sit right next a women to inappropriately touch her. There is a lot of eve teasing as well. A lot of women use public transport but there is no safety there.

The other issue highlighted by the participants were the reduction of frequency or non-availability of buses in some cases after dark.

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, STUDENT, EARLY 20S:**
How do you think safety can be improved?
It will be good to have transport at night. If that is not possible that we need to take charge. But I would say that you need to be on your own.
For some in the participant group it led to the belief that women should own vehicles. For others this was
impediment to travel in the night and led to self-censorship of travel.

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, HOME MAKER, EARLY 40S:**

*How do you think safety can be improved?*

“To travel in public transport for women in the evening is very risky. There a lot of drunkard travelling and if
something happens no one to helps them. So girls should reach home early and avoid using buses later in the
evening”
What do women do in case of Harassment?

During our consultation and Interviews we asked the question of what do people do when they face of witness harassment. Here are some of the responses:

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, HOME MAKER, EARLY 40S:**
“Once while travelling on a train. Someone started stalking me and so i came home as fast as i could. From then I have not been travelling by train.”

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, STUDENT, 20 YRS OLD:**
“ Five months ago I was travelling on Panjim district ferry. One person was staring at me. Then he came and tried to molest me. I went into a state of shock. I didn’t know what to do. Then i tried to contact my friends and my friends came but the person had left by then.”

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, LECTURER, EARLY 30S:**
“Three months ago, a man entered the crowded bus and tried to inappropriately touch a woman. The woman didn’t raise her voice but chose to move away from the man.”

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, STUDENT, EARLY 20S:**
“I faced two incidents but it was solved locally where me and my friends spoke to the person causing the incident and solved it. One was a verbal incident and the other a bit physical, I would say.”

What women said about approaching the police:

It appears from the response that there is fear of reporting. This fear is sometimes based on first hand experience of police minimizing situations or blaming the person who was abused/ assaulted/ harassed. But we also find that some respondents who had never filed a complaint still have an internalised assumption that the police will not take action. This points to a serious public image issue for the Police department that is responsible for citizens safety.

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, CAMERA PERSON, 24YRS OLD:**
“Yes, I’ve tried to file a complaint. This was due to misuse of my photographs. I tried to contact the police about this but they said that it was my fault.”

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, LECTURER, EARLY 30S:**
“People don’t file reports because of societal pressure. Also because it is sometimes unsafe to do so. Women travel long distances and people can follow you and threaten you on those routes if they know you have filed a police complaint against them.”

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, HOME MAKER, EARLY 40S:**
“I don’t report because I’m a widower. If i fall in trouble, who will come to help me? Thats the big question. Sometimes when we go to file a complaint they don’t support women. We find it very difficult especially if the other person is powerful, they don’t care.”

**TESTIMONY: FEMALE, STUDENT, 20YRS OLD:**
“I wanted to file a complaint but my teacher said if I go to the police they will ask for proof. Later they might even dismiss saying that I’m just going and complaining.”
Our Recommendations

Based on our consultations and interviews one of the most apparent needs is for **more access points for women to report experiences** so that appropriate security/safety steps can be taken in problem locations.

From the response around where women felt safe/ unsafe in the city, we feel that **an audit of the Outline Development Plan for Panjim city from gendered lens** is paramount to ensure women's inclusion in the city.

Another burning need is to find effective ways to address safety of women commuters on public transport services. This could take the form of **increasing in frequency of bus services** during all times of the day especially post 8pm, designing effective communication of process of reporting/ intervention in case of harassment or increase in government owned bus services

**Better street lighting in the city** can play a role in increasing the feeling of safety and visibility. Our study shows that lack of effective lighting has been identified throughout the city. Please refer **Annexure B** for details.

Addressing the role of the police is also important. There is a need to increase police patrolling in areas identified as unsafe. This could also be done by collaborating with citizens to form neighborhood watch committees to increase vigilance and reduce response time. **Programs to build better relationships between the police and especially women citizens** of the city has also been identified as an immediate need. This will encourage people to have faith in the police and start reporting issues.

Last but not the least, there remains a continued need for sensitization of police force on how to address cases ranging from harassment to assault.
The way forward

“Women and girls experience and fear various types of sexual violence in public spaces, from unwanted sexual remarks and touching to rape and femicide. It happens on streets, in and around public transportation, schools and workplaces, in public sanitation facilities, water and food distribution sites and parks.

This reality reduces women’s and girls’ freedom of movement. It reduces their ability to participate in school, work and public life. It limits their access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational opportunities. It also negatively impacts their health and well-being.

Although violence in the private domain is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it.” - UN Women on the Creating Safe Public Spaces

We believe that there is a need for robust, participatory enquiry into the issue of women's access and participation in public life on Goa’s streets. In order to do this, we hope to collaborate with government and civil society organizations to expand this pilot study.

Our aim is to enable the People and Government of Goa to take decisions that will benefit the women of Goa by taking heed of their needs based on data and feedback from women. We want to arrive at these solutions by tapping into the wisdom of those who live these experiences everyday.
Acknowledgement

This report was possible thanks to the hard work of our volunteers Viola Rodrigues, Priyanka Singh and Gabriel Fernandes.
We would like to thank Tallulah Dsilva and Sabina Martins for their valuable advice.
We would like to thank Gabriela Dcruz, Chitra Singh and Yugendran Muthuvel for their valuable contributions.
We would also like to thank the following organisations for the in kind and volunteer support they provided to make this work possible

SafeCity (Red Dot Foundation)
Global Shapers Panjim Hub
Art of Hosting Goa
9 Assagao
Kala Academy
Institute Piedade, Panjim
Womens Studies Department, Goa University
Kokum Center

City Library Panjim
Bookwork Goa
Gallery Gitanjali
Chat Street
Sahakar Bhandar
Goa for Giving
International Center Goa
Annexure A

List of places when our paper maps were installed

1. Panjim Central Library
2. Garcia De Orta
3. Gallery Gitanjali
4. Chat Street
5. Sahakar Bhandar
6. Goa for Giving
7. International Center Goa
8. Goa University
Annexure B

Day time
1. Interconnected roads in Goa University
2. St Cruz road

After Dark
1. Patto Center and its surroundings
2. Blue bridge from patto center to Fontainhas
3. Mala bus stand
4. Around Miramar
5. Interconnected roads in Goa University
6. Bambolim to Dona Paula
7. St Cruz road
8. Bus Stand
9. Panjim Market
10. Mandovi Bridge
11. Merces Road
12. Bhatlem
13. Santa Cruz football ground to Bhatlem
14. Altino church road to joggers park
15. Caculo mall to nagendra child hospital
16. Goa University to Taleigao road
17. Taleigao Park to Caranzalem post office
18. Bambolim to Dona Paula
19. St Inez to Taleigao
20. Patto Center to Ribandar

Note: Data was collected in 2016 and 2017 any recent changes in infrastructure may not be reflected here.
Annexure C

The Methodology for this project was a four stepped approach

1) We chose printed **field paper maps showing street level view** as a way of collecting data to give us information of existing harassment incidents

2) We chose structured interviews to collect personal accounts of harassment and to understand the issues in depth

3) We used focus group discussions to understand “meaning of safety?”

4) We also needed a more elaborate way of identifying interventions, hence we choose structured focus group discussions as a tool to collect that information

MAPS

- The study area within the city was divided into several parts based on usage and demographics of use.
- Maps of the city marked with landmarks, road names and area names were created and printed
- Maps were placed across the city such that each area of the city has a collection point.
- Areas with more varied demographics had more maps
- Accessibility and visibility were given prominence in placing these maps.
- Maps had two variants of stickers on them Red for “I faced harassment” and Yellow for “I witnessed harassment”
- The map had information about the initiative, a link to the website and a set of instructions on how to use it
- It had 21 red and yellow boxes and the red and yellow stickers with numbers on them
- The yellow and red boxes also had options to report like V for verbal, NV for non-verbal and P for physical and an additional spaces to add more details
- These maps were placed and collected every 2 weeks or on completion of 21 reports of red/yellow whichever came first.
- At the end of every week the maps were photographed and tagged.
- The maps were evaluated for a period of 3 month. At the end of which all the data was aggregated manually.
The map data was collaborated with focus group discussions of diverse participants. Along with the map data, the volunteer observations for each week are recorded in a separate document.

**Data Fields**

- week
- city
- lat-long
- Type of Harassment
- Color
- Place of Reporting
- Number
- Description
- Remarks

**Legend:**

- **Week**: week number starting from 1 for first week of placing the map when the photo of the map was clicked.
- **City**: City placement of the Map.
- **Lat**: Latitude of the place where the sticker was marked for the report.
- **Long**: Longitude of the place where the sticker was marked for the report.
- **Type of Harassment**: Verbal, Non Verbal or Physical.
- **Color**: The sticker of the report is Red or Yellow.
- **Place of Reporting**: Where is the map placed.
- **Number**: Number on the sticker of the map.
- **Description**: Description given by the reporter for the report.
- **Remarks**: Observations by the volunteer who places the maps and clicks pictures.

**Aggregating / Scraping the Data:**

1. The pictures taken by the volunteers are tagged with week number and location of the map.
2. The report numbers on the map are carefully recorded and the location is decoded for each report.
3. The details such as number, description, type of harassment are recorded from the map.
4. The additional remarks for the week if any from the volunteer is recorded along with other data.

**Analysis of the results**

1. A density model of the reports based on location and numbers is created to understand how and where harassment has been reported.
2. Patterns of consistency in reports is obtained through periodical evaluation of the reports and cross evaluation through various demographics.

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

- Discussions are conducted among diverse audience.
- Each group containing 15-20 people with majority being women and other genders.
- These discussions are moderated through a series of questions:
  - When do you feel safe?
  - When do you feel unsafe?
● The answers to these questions are recorded by the participants using post its to anonymise
● The findings are then separated into different but related modules and discussions are held around them
● These discussions are used to aggregate a common consensus on what is the reason for feeling unsafe amongst the group
● Maps from the initial analysis are then placed in these groups and a correlation of factors with reports is done.
● The fourth round of discussion is to identify those factors which can be changed

**Analysis of the results**

- Safety for a particular demographic is recorded and common factors for safety is identified
- Set of tangible solutions to make a place safer is identified

**STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

**Interview Questions**

Demographic data of the respondent:
How long have you stayed in Goa?
How safe do you feel living in Goa?
Do you use public transport in Goa if no why? if yes what is your experience
What is your perception of women’s safety in Goa?
In the past 3 months have you ever experienced/witnessed abuse?
What do you think of crime rates in Goa in the past 3 years
if there is an increase/decrease in it what do you think is the reason
Have you ever reported harassment to the police? if yes how was your interaction if no why not?