

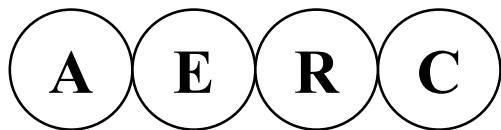
THE ELECTRICITY **CONSUMER GRID**

A quarterly information bulletin

January – March, 2006



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PREFACE

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“Assam consumes only 100 units of electricity against the national average of 600 units. This deficit must be overcome as power consumption is an important indicator of development”

These were the some of the words of Hon’ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on his recent visit to Assam for laying the foundation stone of NTPC’s 500 MW Bongaigaon Thermal Power Project at Salakati. Indeed, Assam has a long way to go in regard to power sector development and the process towards this has only begun.

This volume of the Consumer Grid contains the report of electricity consumer survey conducted by Consumer Advocacy Cell of AERC. This was the first such survey conducted by the Commission. The report provides useful feedback to the service providers for improving service quality and enhancing consumer satisfaction. It also brings to the forefront the importance of the press, electronic media and consumer advocacy groups in creating awareness among the consumers on power related issues.

In order to make a good beginning of our Assamese section “Grahak Abhimat”, we have included an appeal in Assamese in this issue to all those interested to contribute articles by electricity consumers. They are requested to send their views and ideas on any matter related to the power sector.

Hope this New Year 2006 brings happiness and good luck to all our readers.

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"If you are planning for one year, grow rice

If you are planning for ten years, grow trees

If you are planning for hundred years, grow men."

----A Chinese Proverb

"Successful Men Don't Do Different things, They do Things Differently"

----- Shiv Khera

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON'S DESK

The first issue, like the bringing up of a first child, is always more difficult but like a first born, is always full of promises and hope. We at the Commission expect that the second issue of this publication contributes to the hope and is indicative of the steps the Commission has taken and will take to make the lot of the power consumer in Assam happier.

We are waiting for the partnership between the Commission and the consumers, so essential for healthy growth of the power sector to start off on the right note. With this objective in view, we have included a page by way of an appeal to the consumers to contribute articles relating to power sector, particularly from the consumers' points of view. We hope and expect that consumer would make significant contributions to the process of growth of a healthy and sustainable power consumers' movement through the pages of this bulletin.

I convey the good wishes of all of us at the Commission to the consumers at the beginning of the New Year, and wish them a successful year ahead in all spheres.

Bhaskar Barua

A TRIBUTE

The Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission pays homage to Late P. M. Sayeed, Former Union Minister of Power who passed away on 18th December, 2005. The former Power Minister's reasoned and meticulous approach to work combined with his persuasive skills was instrumental in giving a new direction and push to the reforms in the power sector. He was also instrumental in formulating and spearheading the 'Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vaidyutikaran Yojana' which aims to electrify all villages in the country within five years. His contributions to the power sector during his short tenure as Minister will always be fondly remembered by the Nation. May his departed soul, rest in peace.

News Briefs

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh laid the foundation stone of Rs. 3000 Crore National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Project at Salakati, Bongaigaon, which will generate 500 MW power after completion. This would be the largest power project in the state and will go a long way in ushering in economic development of the region. It is expected to become functional by 2009 and will provide power to Assam and the NE region on a priority basis. The coal needed for the project will be supplied from North East Coal Field located in Tinsukia District of Assam.

The 120 MW Borgolai Plant Project in the state of Assam is likely to be implemented during the 11th Plan. The state has identified the Tipong Colliery in the Margherita Coal Fields of the state to source coal supply for the project. Assam has urged the Power Ministry to intervene and persuade NTPC to partner APGCL for the development of the project. Electricity tariff for the proposed plant which is estimated to cost Rs. 615 crore would work out to Rs. 3.15 per unit.

It is proposed to replace the existing 134 MW capacity Namrup Thermal Power Station which was commissioned in 1965, with a new 234 MW gas-fired plant. The attempt is to take up this project by tying up with Oil India Limited for ensuring supply of gas at a reasonable rate to improve the commercially viability of the project.

The Lakwa Waste Heat Project proposed with a capacity of 38 MW is to be financed from the State plan. BHEL was the only one to submit a bid for supply of main plant package but has asked for a higher price. The Power Ministry has been requested by Assam to persuade BHEL to bring down its offered price.

NHPC has claimed that the 90 MW Loktak downstream hydropower project in Manipur was no more viable owing to cost escalation. Work has been stopped for the time being and the matter has been referred to the Power Ministry for consideration. Construction work could not start on time due to adverse law and order problems leading to time overruns and thus cost escalations.

ASEB and its successor entities filed ARR & Tariff Petitions before AERC for FY 2006-07 on 26.12.2005. However, Government of Assam have sent a communication to the Commission that the Government is considering reorganisation of the three Discoms in Assam into one, and has requested the Commission not to proceed with the petitions before it.

Presentation on National Seminar on Best Practice in Distribution: AERC staff paper on Electricity Cost of Supply was selected for presentation in the 2nd National Seminar on Best Practice in Distribution organized in Mumbai from 18th to 20th January 2006 by Ministry of Power, Government of India in collaboration with Indian Electrical & Electronics Manufacturers Association (IEEMA). It was presented by Shri M.K. Adhikary, Joint Director (Tariff), AERC.

Electricity Consumer Survey in Assam

◆ **Introduction:** One of the objectives of Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission (AERC) is protection of consumer interests and the AERC has published regulations and guidelines which lay down several provisions for achieving the above objective. AERC also established the Consumer Advocacy Cell (CAC) in February, 2005 for empowering consumers in electricity matters.

The CAC has endeavoured to empanel consumer groups as members and provide these groups with inputs to act as effective partners of the Commission in power sector development. A quarterly information bulletin is being published since 28th October 2005. A separate page for consumer advocacy has also been added in the AERC website: www.aerc.nic.in.

In order to gauge the performance of the supplier and the related satisfaction level among the consumers, the CAC decided to conduct a consumer survey. A questionnaire was designed comprising of 32 questions and divided among four different aspects of functions to assess the related satisfaction level from the responses of participants. The findings of the study are analysed in the following pages.

The Consumer Advocacy Cell gratefully acknowledges the support of all its team members and well wishers in carrying out the survey. The Cell plans to conduct more such surveys in the future targeting specific categories and greater number of consumers in different parts of Assam.

- ◆ **Purpose of the Study:** The broad objectives of the survey are
- To gauge the quality of service from the viewpoint of consumers
 - To assess the difficulties faced by the consumers
 - To examine the changes (based on the responses) that may be necessary for improving the quality of service.
 - To highlight the areas on which the supplier needs to lay stress for increasing consumer satisfaction.
 - To estimate the level of awareness among consumers on the changes that are taking place in the power sector.

SECTION I: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

◆ **Methodology of Survey:** The following methodology was adopted for conducting the survey

- The survey focused on some important issues concerning different aspects of electricity service to the consumers. Hence the questionnaire was drafted keeping in view certain critical areas
 - Service related matters (13 questions)
 - Bill related matters (8 questions)
 - Meter related matters (5 questions)
 - Consumer awareness (6 questions)
- Questionnaires were distributed among the empanelled consumer groups for collecting responses from their respective areas of operation. This was done to take advantage of the close links that local consumer groups have with consumers and as they are aware of the ground realities. Some members of the empanelled consumer groups were briefed about the survey and its purpose by direct interaction.
- Responses were also collected directly by distributing questionnaires to the consumers coming to pay their bills at the different collection centres of LAEDCL at Guwahati.
- Some questionnaires were also sent to different subdivisions for distribution among consumers.

- The responses received from consumers were grouped into ***Guwahati City*** and ***Other than Guwahati*** for assessing the service quality separately. The number of responses from different Discoms is provided in the table below.

TABLE: I

Sl. No.	Discoms	Number of responses	Percentage (%) of respondents
1	LAEDCL	181	73.3
	<i>Guwahati</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>49</i>
	<i>Others</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>24.3</i>
2	CAEDCL	19	7.7
3	UAEDCL	47	19.0
4.	TOTAL	247	100.0

◆ **Sample size:** Considering the fact there are nearly 10 lakh electricity consumers in Assam, and that this is the first study of this kind, no attempt at a scientific selection of the sample could be taken up. Hence the selection of the respondents was entirely at random. Basically, the focus was on domestic consumers. However a representative sample of industrial consumers was also included.

◆ **Period of Survey:** The period covered during the survey was from August to October 2005. The process of conducting the survey started during the second week of August 2005. Although the last date for receiving the filled in questionnaires was fixed as end of October, 2005, consumers continued to send their views even as late as end of November, 2005. All the 247 questionnaires received up to the date of report have been considered.

◆ **Limitations:**

- The selection of respondents was entirely at random. Although effort was made to select samples from all categories of consumers like domestic, commercial, etc, the focus was on domestic sector.
- As there was limited scope to conduct any pre-test of the questionnaire, the study possibly suffers from errors resulting from inadequate framing of the questionnaire, which would be attempted to be rectified in future. Some respondents wrote that they wanted more areas to be covered, while some felt the questionnaire was lengthy and needed to be cut short.
- The questionnaire was only in English. Perhaps the response would have been higher had this been in Assamese as well.
- The responses were collected during the monsoon period, during which season power availability in the system is generally adequate. However due to adverse weather conditions (storm & heavy rainfall) in some areas, there are frequent system breakdowns which result in more power interruptions at the consumer end. These factors may have some effect on the outcome of the survey.
- Although consumers often grumble in private about the poor quality of power supply and other grievances, they are usually reluctant to complain perhaps owing to ignorance, tolerance or inertia. Another fact may be a fear that the supplier may create problems for them if they express their real views on the service related matters. One of the empanelled consumer groups experienced great difficulty in collecting responses from consumers due to this fear among the respondents. Barring this, the survey in general received reasonably good response.

SECTION 2: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

2.1 Analysis of Responses

A) Category of the respondents

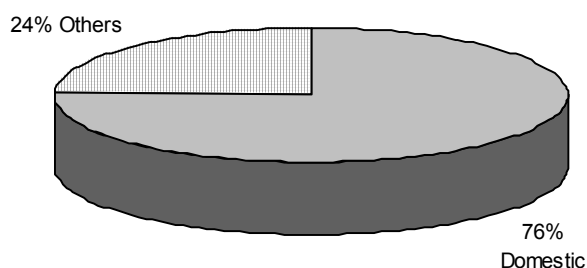
Respondents were asked to indicate the category to which they belong in regard to use of electricity. Even among all consumers belonging to the domestic category, use of electricity may differ between different consumers and the same consumer may be a user of electricity for different purposes. For instance, an industrial consumer may fall into both domestic and industrial categories. He may have different views about the quality of power supply as an industrialist and as a domestic customer.

Hence it is difficult to put consumers into watertight compartments labelled domestic, commercial etc. However based on the responses, the total respondents have been divided into the following categories:

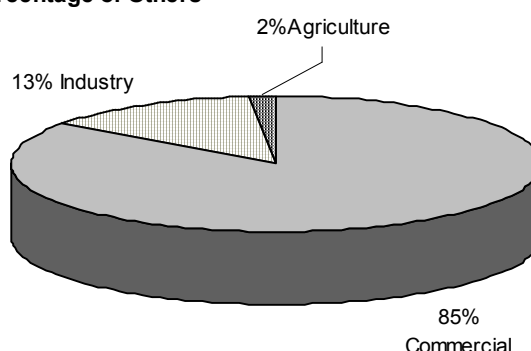
Table 2: Category of respondents

Sl.No.	Categories	Numbers	Percentage of Total
1	Domestic	187	75.71%
2	Commercial	51	20.65%
3	Industries	8	3.24%
4	Agriculture	1	0.41%
5	Total	247	100

Consumer Mix



Percentage of Others



Out of the consumers responding, the percentage of domestic consumers is 76%. Of the others, 85% are commercial while 13% and 2% are industrial and agricultural respondents respectively.

Observations: Majority of the respondents (187) belongs to the domestic category. Therefore views expressed in this study may be inferred to be mostly of domestic consumers.

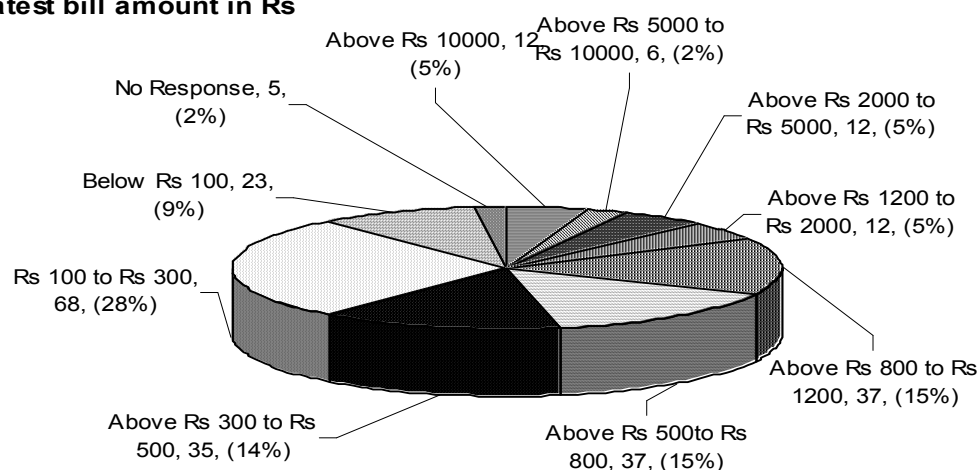
B) Consumption of Electricity

This information was asked in terms of both Units and Rupees, to assess the financial status of the respondents. Some respondents mentioned consumption only in terms of Rupees. Based on the responses received, the consumption of power per month (in Units) and in Rupees for some of the categories of consumers is graphically represented below

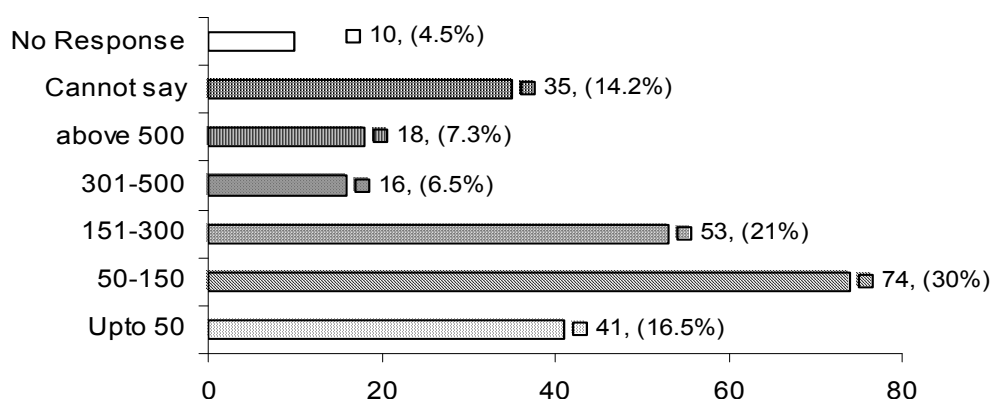
Overall

Response

Latest bill amount in Rs



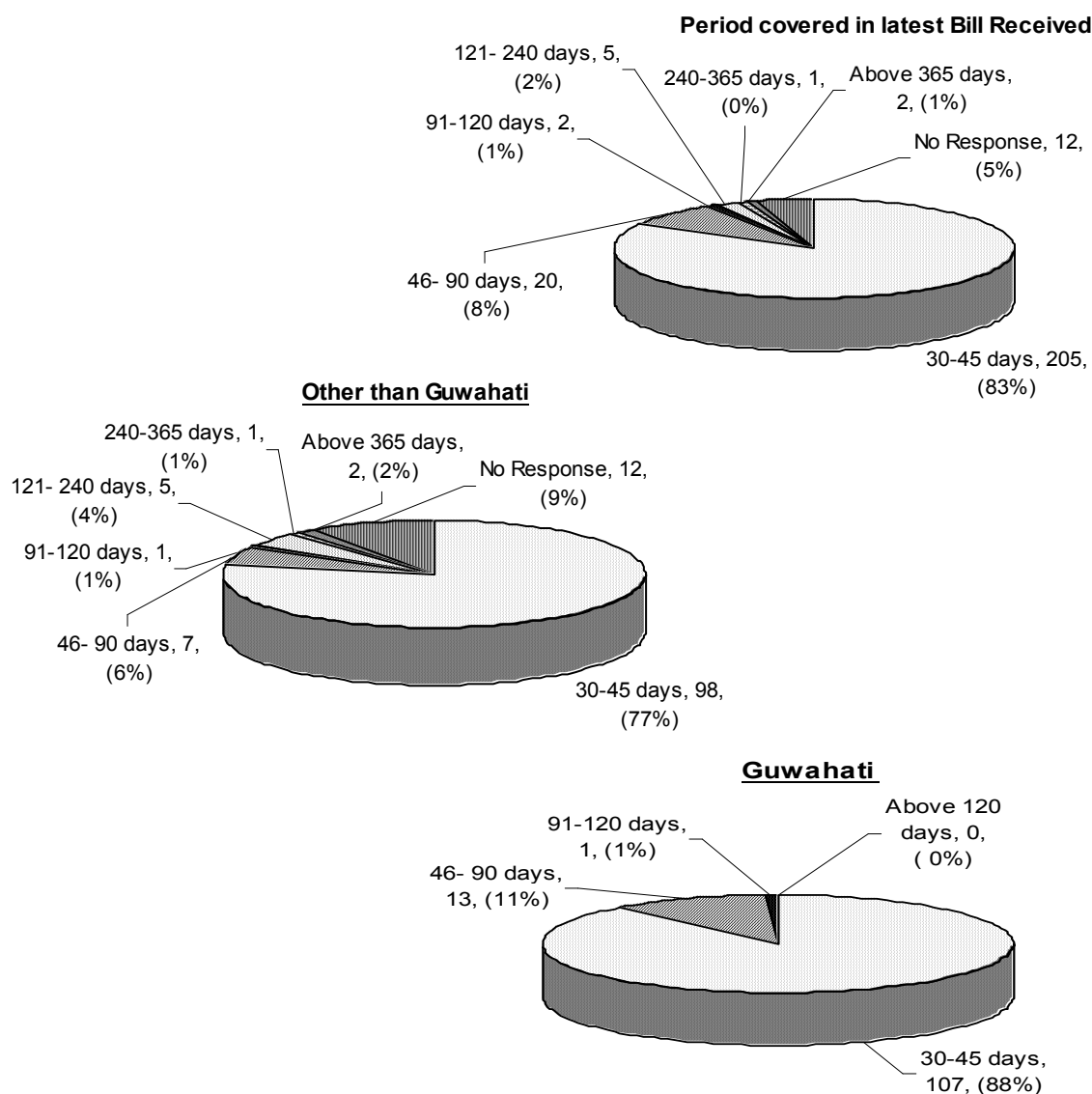
Units consumed in latest bill



Observations: Overall 30% of the respondents, who answered this question in terms of amount of bill, had bills amounting between Rs 300 to Rs 800. 28% (68) respondents paid between Rs 100 to Rs 300. 9% (23) of the respondents paid below Rs 100 while 5% (12) of the respondents were served bills above Rs 10, 000. On the other hand, 30% (74) respondents consumed between 50-150 units of energy and 7% (18) respondents consumed above 500 units of energy. There were 41 respondents who consumed below 50 units. 14% (35) of the respondents said they did not know the units consumed.

C) Period covered in latest Bill received:

The respondents were asked about the period covered in their latest bills.



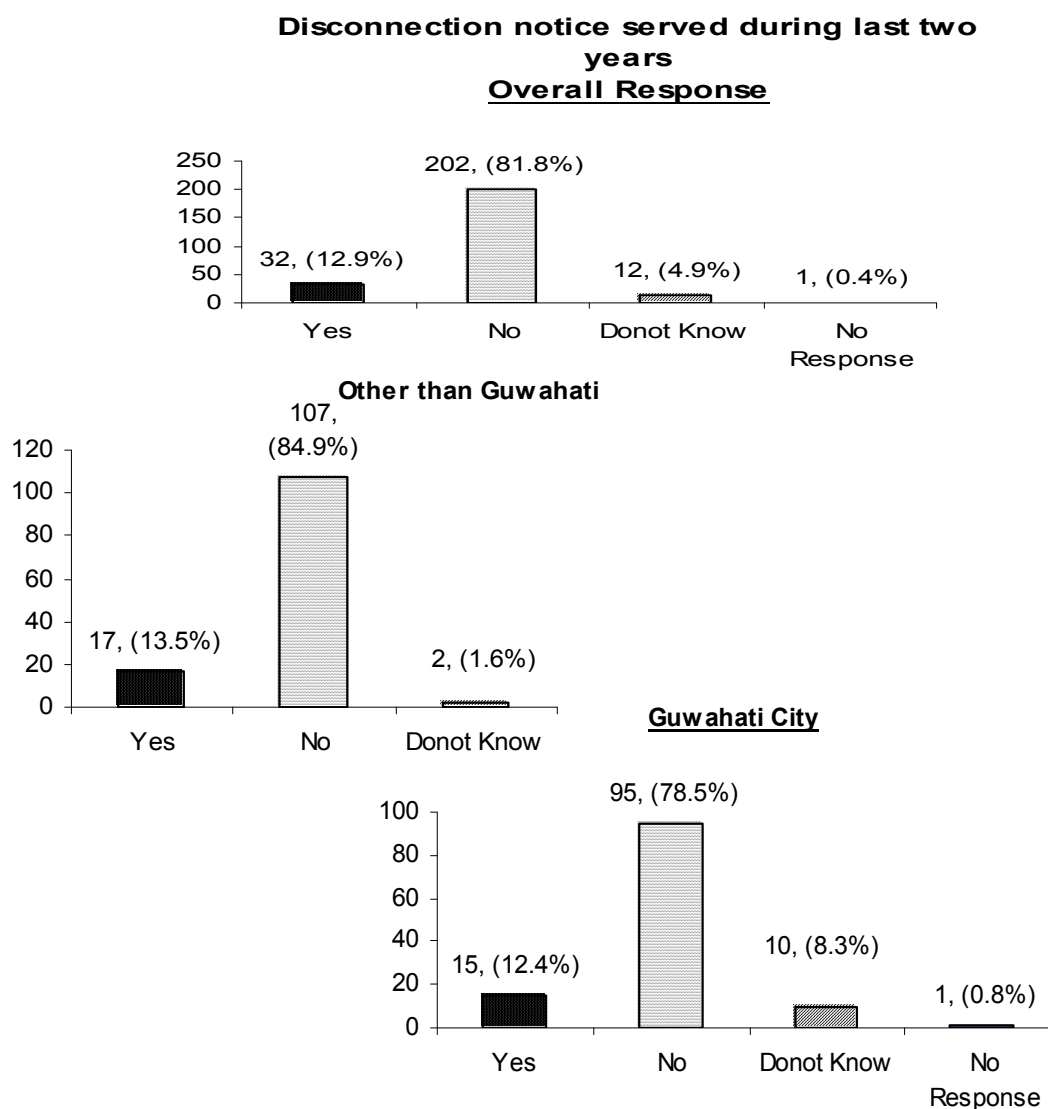
Observations: Most of the respondents (83%) said that the bills received covered a period of 30-45 days. In Guwahati, none of the respondents received bills covering periods above 120 days. The situation is different in regions outside Guwahati.

It is surprising that there were cases (2) of bills covering periods above 365 days and that as many as 13% of the bills covered periods above 46 days.

2.2 SERVICE RELATED MATTERS

A. Disconnection notice served during last two years

The distribution licensees are supposed to give advance notice to consumers before disconnecting power supply. The AERC has stipulated that the notice of disconnection is to be given FIFTEEN days in advance.

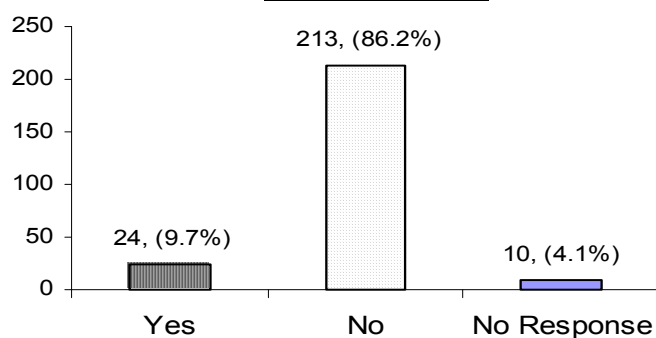


Observations: On being asked if the respondents were served any disconnection notice during the past two years, 82% (202) of the respondents said that they had not received any disconnection notice during this period. Only 13% (32) of the respondents said that they had received notices of disconnection of power supply. The figures for respondents receiving disconnection notices in Guwahati and regions outside Guwahati are 15 (12%) and 17 (13.5%) respectively.

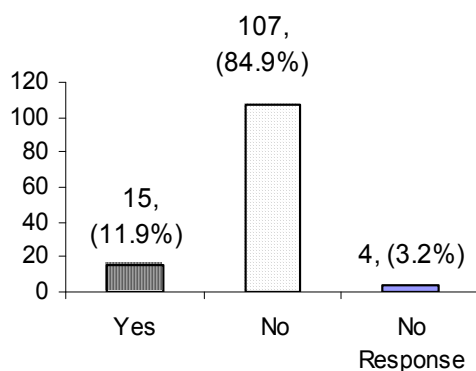
B. Electricity disconnected during last two years

The respondents were asked to indicate if their supply was disconnected during the last two years. The graphs below indicate the total number of disconnections indicated by the respondents who responded to this particular question asking them if their power supply was disconnected during the last two years.

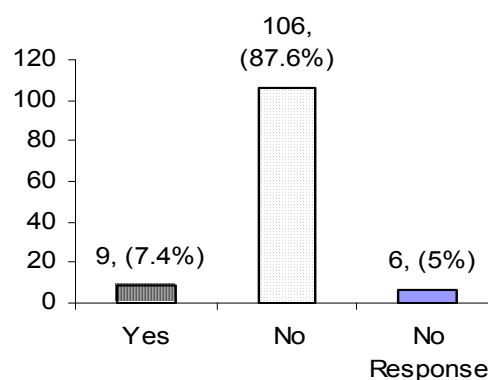
Electricity disconnected during last two years
Overall Response



Other Than Guwahati



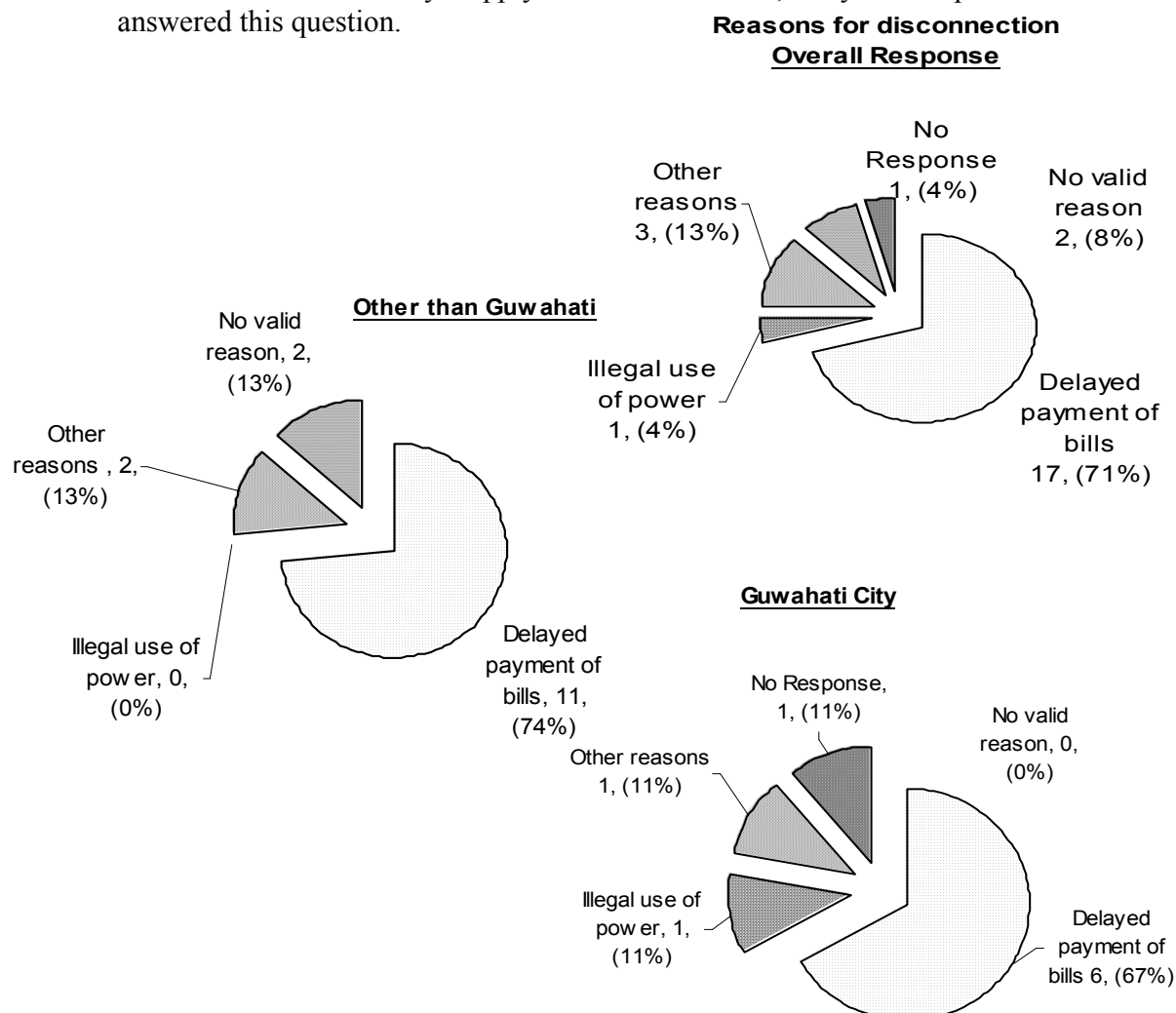
Guwahati City



Observations: The survey revealed that while 13 % (32) consumers who participated in the study were issued disconnection notices only in 10 % (24) of cases actual disconnection was done. The percentage disconnections are marginally less in Guwahati. It can be concluded that most of the disconnections were done after issuing notice. Some respondents said this question is not applicable to them since there was no instance of disconnection.

C. Reasons for disconnection

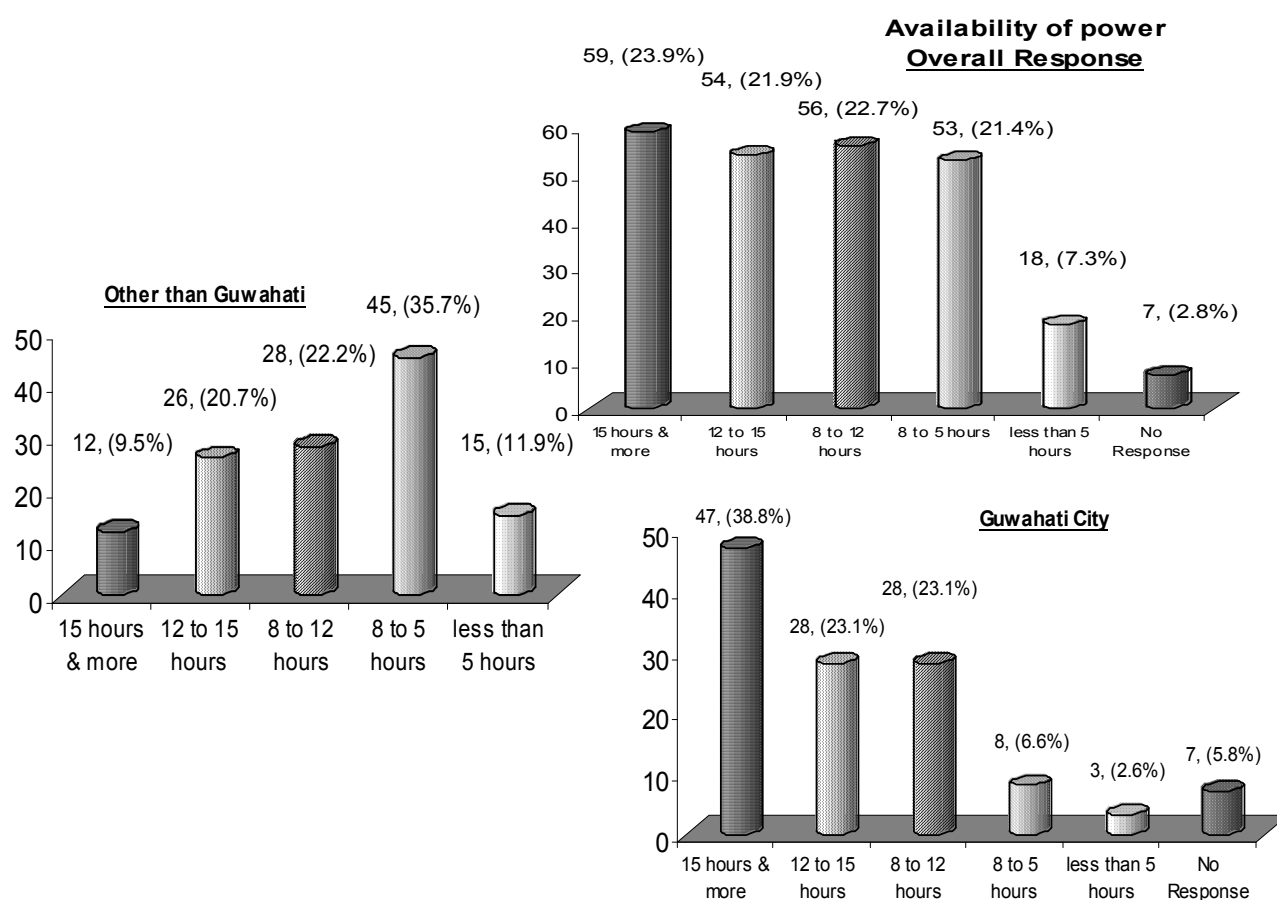
Disconnection of power supply to a consumer's premises cannot be done without a valid reason. On a question as to what was the reason for disconnection, 71% (17) respondents said that the main reason for disconnection is delayed payment of bill. However 8% (2) respondents said that their disconnection was without any valid reason. 4% (1) respondents said that it was due to illegal use of power. Out of the 24 respondents who said that their electricity supply was disconnected, only 23 respondents answered this question.



Observations: Power supply for none of the respondents was disconnected without a valid reason in Guwahati whereas in areas other than Guwahati, no respondents' power supply was disconnected for illegal use of power. Also, 11% respondents were disconnected due to illegal use of power in Guwahati and 13% respondents for no valid reason outside Guwahati. ***Thus, it can be inferred that there is occurrence of illegal use of power on the one hand and disconnection of supply to consumer without any valid reason on the other hand.***

D. Availability of power supply

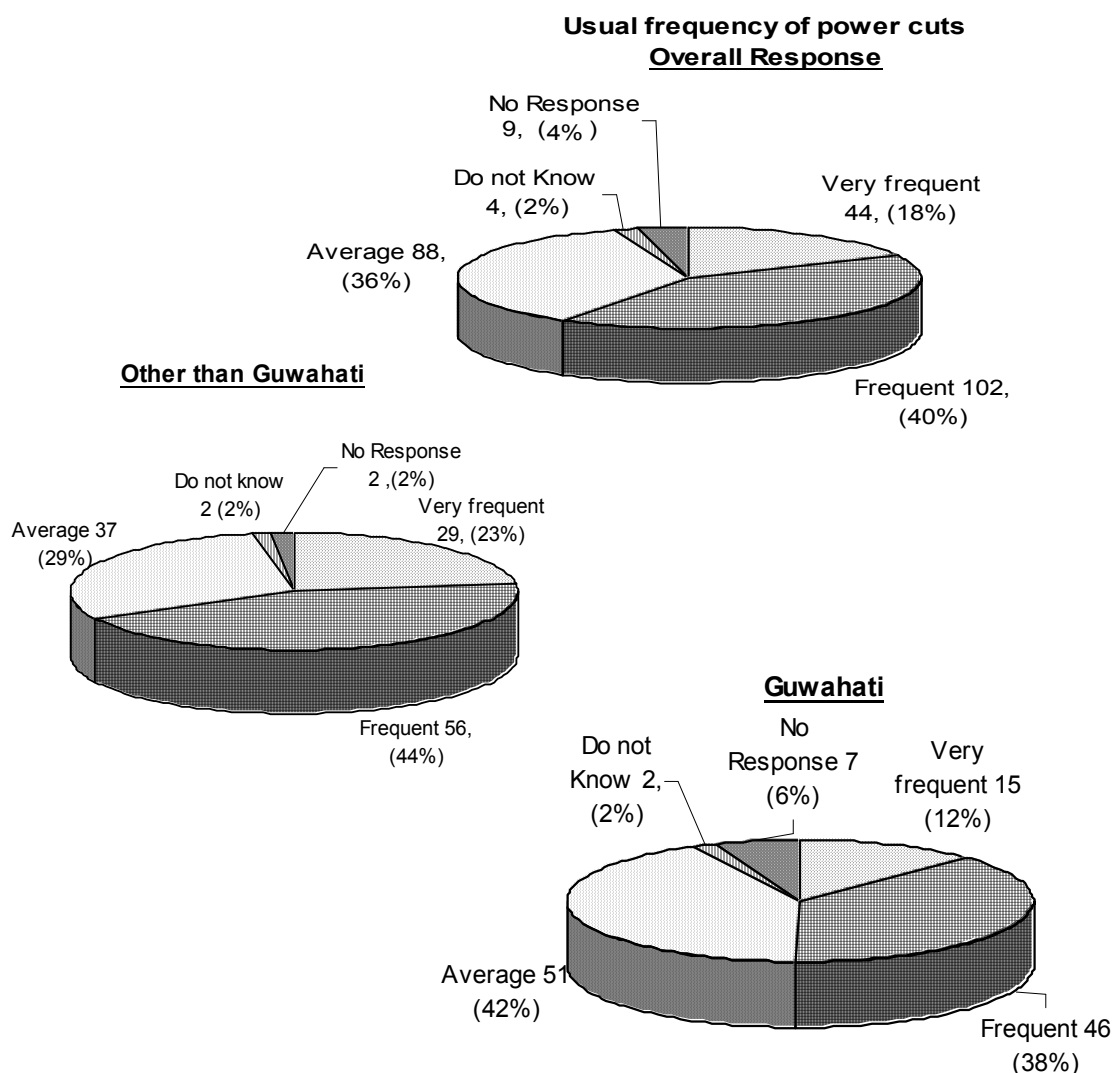
Availability of power is one of the basic requirements of a consumer. However, due to several reasons, the entire state of Assam is facing shortage of power and thereby consumers are denied continuous power supply. The situation is worse in rural areas. Although it is desirable that supply of power is available for all 24 hours in a day, however, keeping in mind the existing poor supply situation, the highest range of availability considered for the study is 15 hours and more.



Observations: On the question of average availability of power supply at the respondents' premises, the study indicates that only 24% (59) respondents get power supply for 15 hours and more while 7% (18) respondents said that power is available for less than 5 hours. The figure for Guwahati city is 39% and 2.6% respectively. The study further indicates that 44% (110) respondents get average power supply for 8-12 hours only. Out of the 114 respondents belonging to Guwahati who answered this question, only 47 said that power supply is available for 15 hours and more. In areas outside Guwahati, only 12 respondents out of 126 said so. The figures in graphs confirm the often held assumption that availability of power supply is poor in the state particularly in areas outside Guwahati.

E. Frequency of power cuts

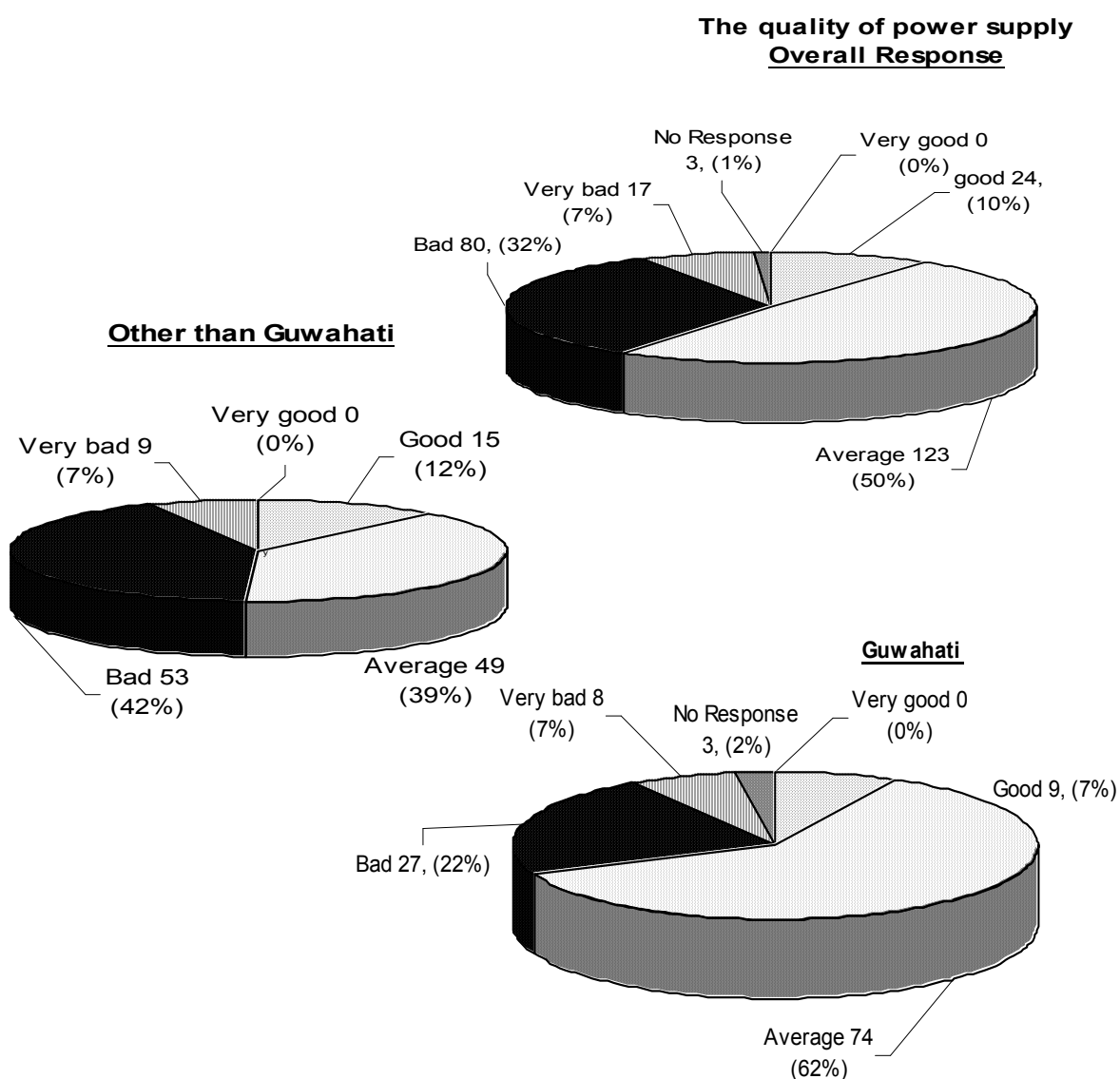
On the question of frequency of power cuts, overall 40% (102) respondents revealed that the interruptions in supply are frequent. The frequency of power cuts in Guwahati and other areas is 38% and 44% respectively. A total of 44 (18%) respondents said that power cuts are very frequent of whom 15 (12%) respondents are from Guwahati and the other 29 (23%) respondents are from outside Guwahati.



Observations: The study indicates that power cuts are frequent all over the state.

F. Quality of power supply

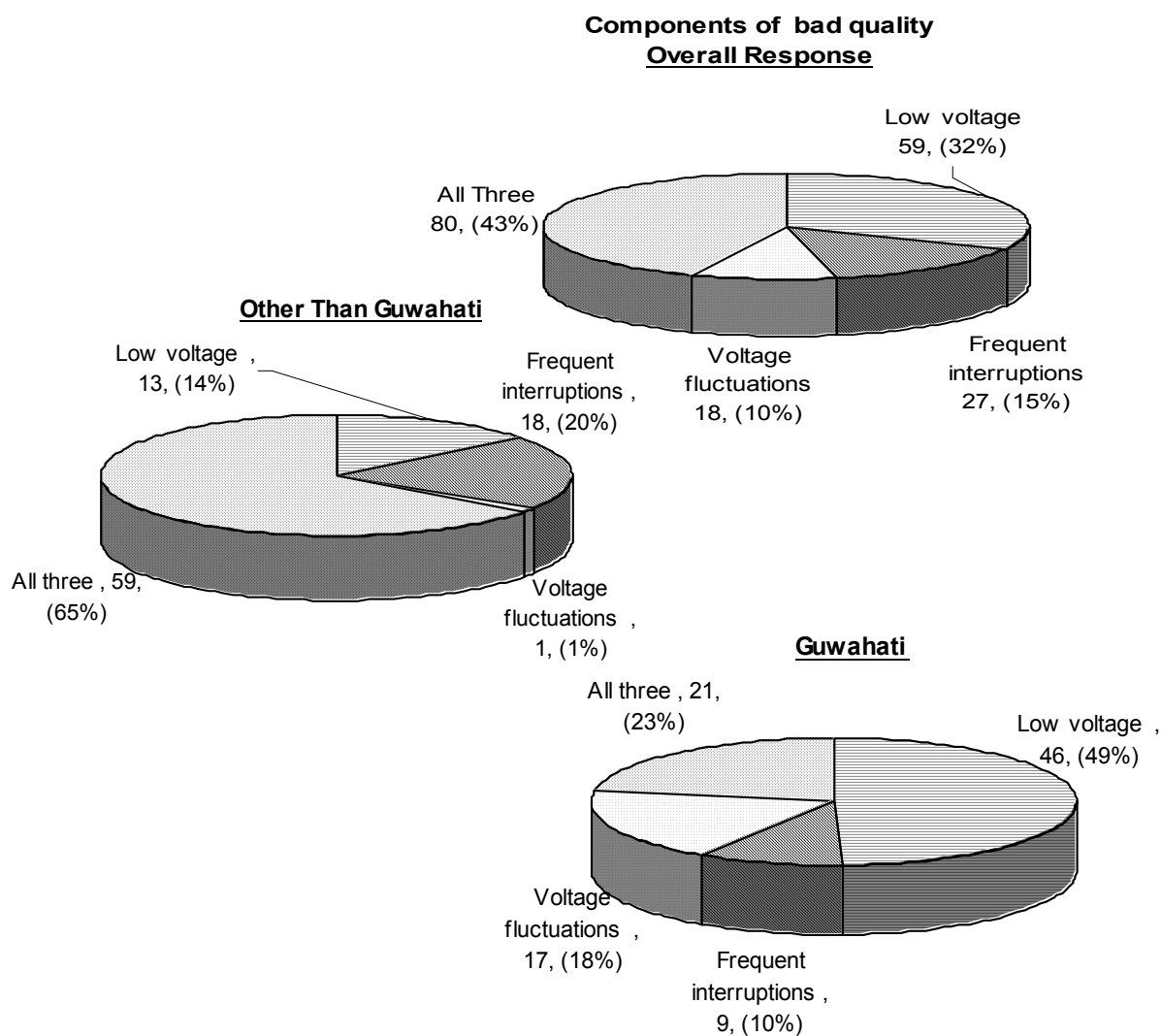
The respondents were asked to indicate the quality of power supply in their locality. On this question, 10% (24) respondents termed the quality of power supply as good and 50% (123) respondents termed the quality as average. The figure in Guwahati city is 7% (9) and 62% (74) respectively.



Observations: The study reveals that quality of supply is relatively better in Guwahati city. However, there is much to be done in this regard, where 22% (27) respondents have termed it as bad and 7% (8) respondents said that quality of power is very bad. Not a single respondent has said that the quality is very good against total 7% (17) respondents who said that power supplied to them is of very bad quality.

G. Components contributing to bad quality

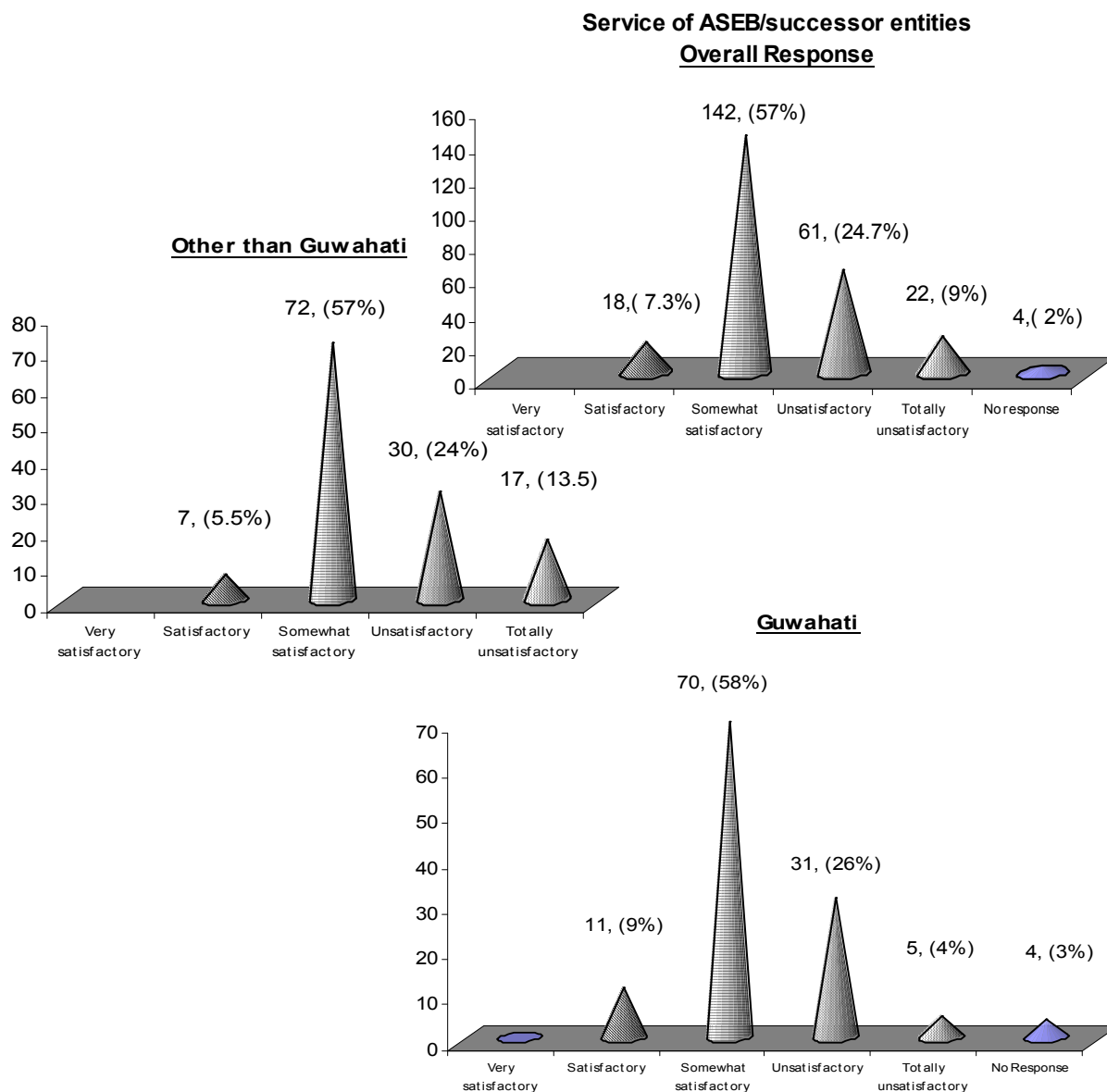
Regarding bad quality of power supply, respondents were asked to indicate the major factors which caused the power quality to be bad in their neighbourhood.



Observations: Overall 43% (80) respondents said all three factors namely low voltage, frequent interruption and voltage fluctuation contributed to bad quality of power. 32% (59) respondents said it is due to low voltage. In case of Guwahati City, low voltage is the principal factor contributing to poor quality of power (49% or 46 respondents said so) and 23% (21) respondents said all three factors mentioned above were responsible. In other areas, a very large number of respondents 65% (59) said that all the three major components are the root cause behind bad quality.

H. Service of ASEB / Successor entities

The respondents were asked to specify the level of satisfaction from the service offered by ASEB/successor entities. Only 7% (18) of the total respondents termed the service as satisfactory while 25% (61) respondents said they are unsatisfactory.

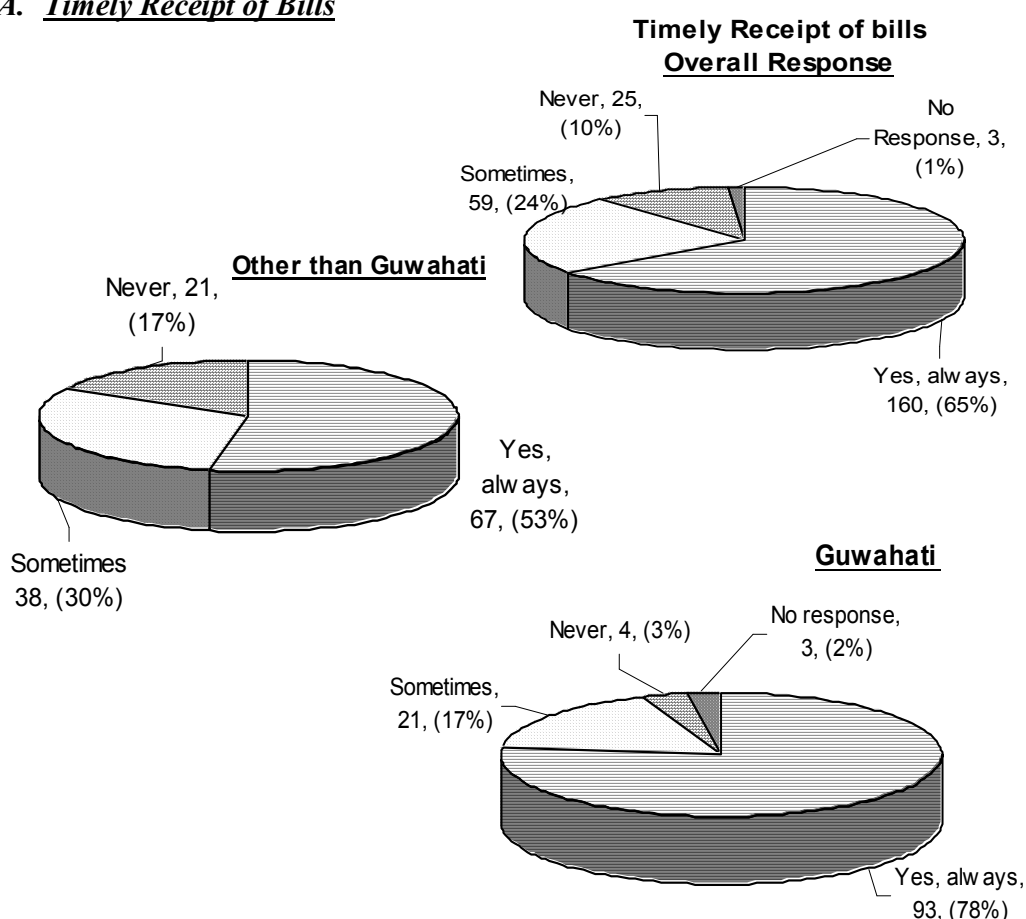


Observations: Regarding service satisfaction among respondents, the study indicates similar trends in both Guwahati and in areas outside the capital city. When no respondent has said that the service is very satisfactory, 9% (22) respondents said that service is totally unsatisfactory. Majority or 57% (142) respondents have termed the service as somewhat satisfactory.

2.3 BILLING RELATED MATTERS

The respondents were asked several questions relating to bills like receipt of bills, mistakes in bills, time taken to set right the mistakes, method of payment of bills etc. These are discussed below.

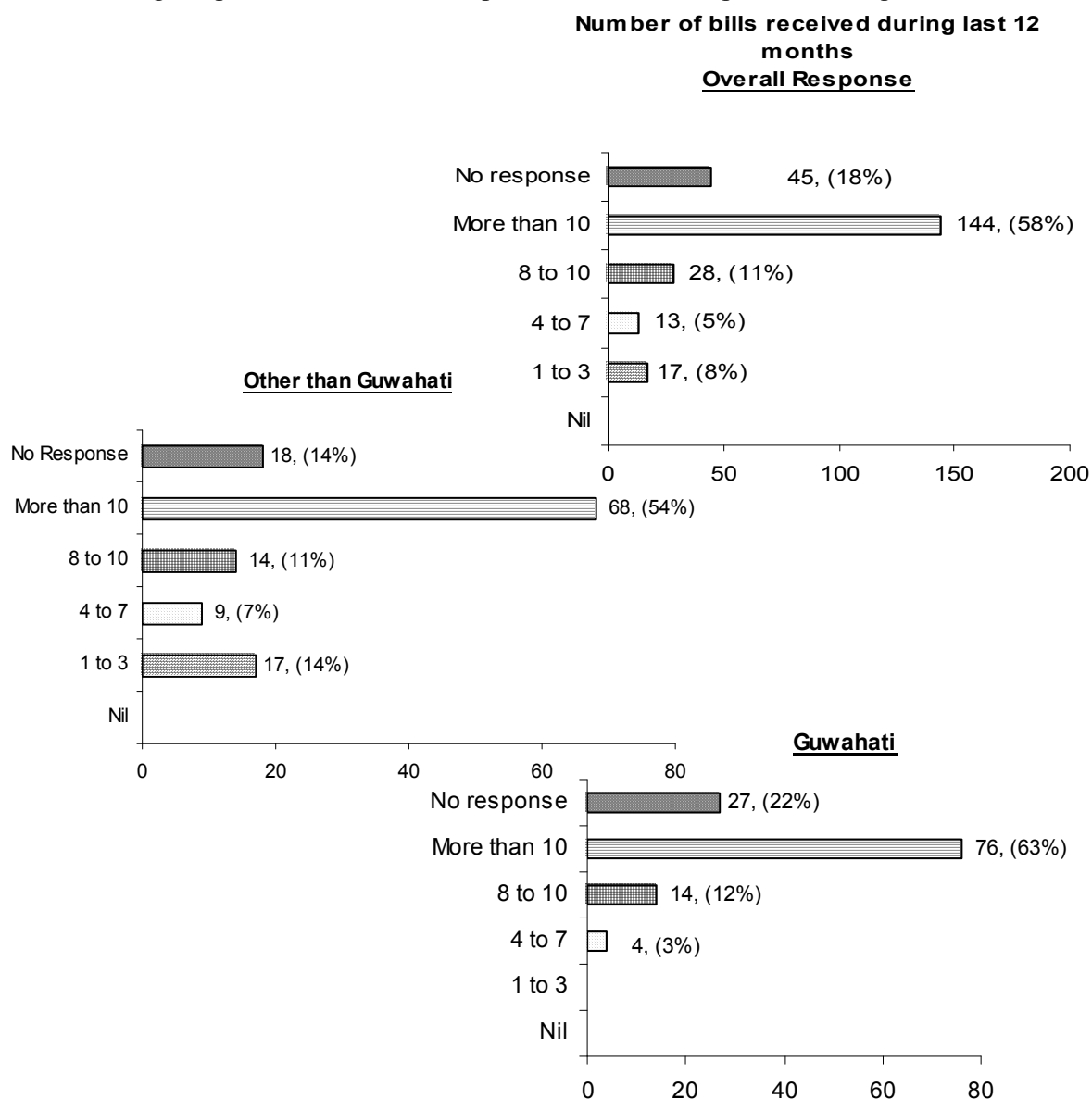
A. Timely Receipt of Bills



Observations: On the question on timely receipt of electricity bills, overall 65% (160) respondents said that they are receiving their bills in time against 10% (25) respondents who said they never receive bills in time. 1% (3) respondents did not answer this question. The related figures for Guwahati City are 78% (97 respondents) and 3% (4 respondents) respectively. In other areas, 53% (67) respondents said that they received bills in time and 17% (21) respondents said that they never received the bills in time.

B. Number of bills received during the past 12 months

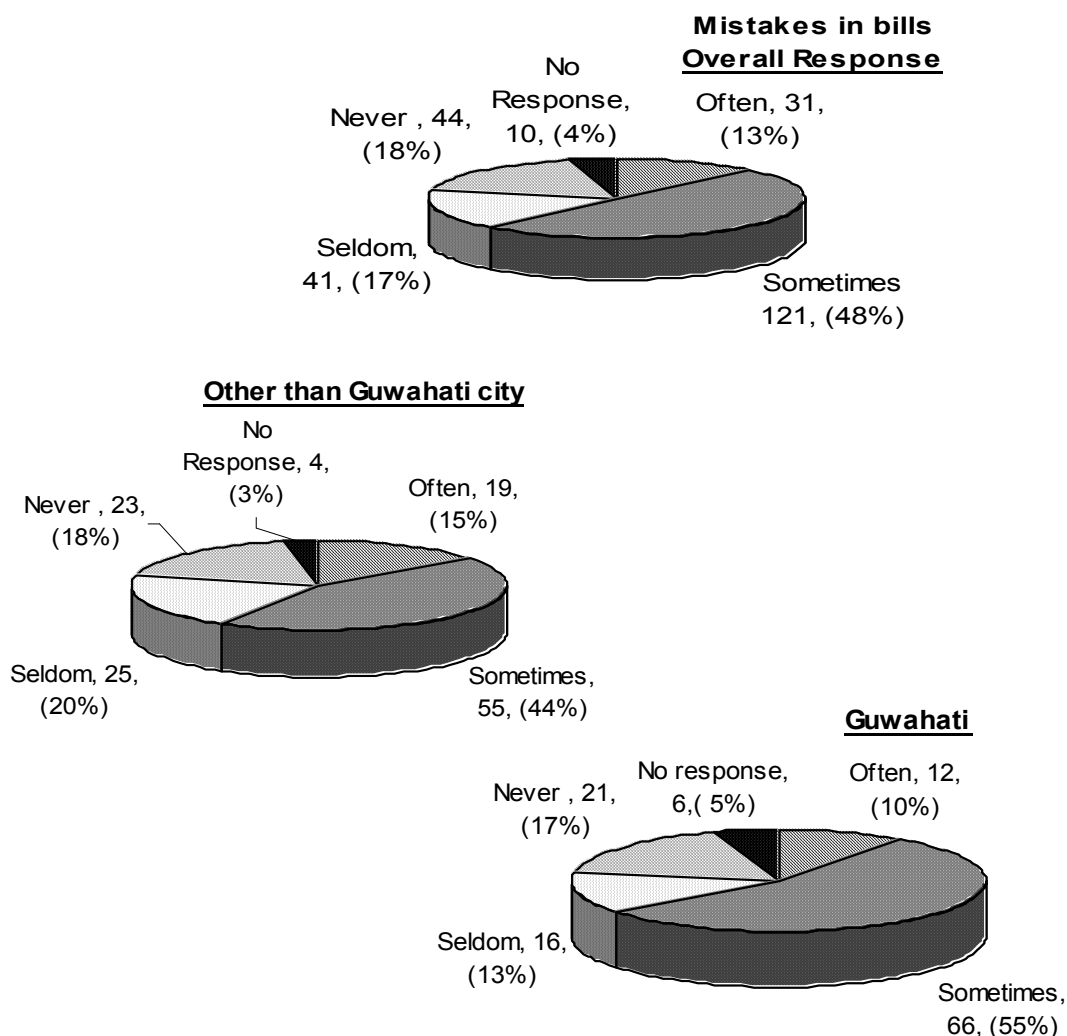
The respondents were asked to indicate number of bills that they received during the past 12 months. 45 respondents did not respond to this question.



Observations: The study indicates that there was no occasion where the respondents did not receive bills at all in the past 12 months. Overall 58% (144) respondents said that they received more than ten bills during last 12 months against 8% (17) who received one to three bills only. The figure in respect of Guwahati City is somewhat better where 81% (76) respondents received more than 10 bills and there was no respondent in the category of one to three bills only during the past year.

C. Frequency of mistakes in bills

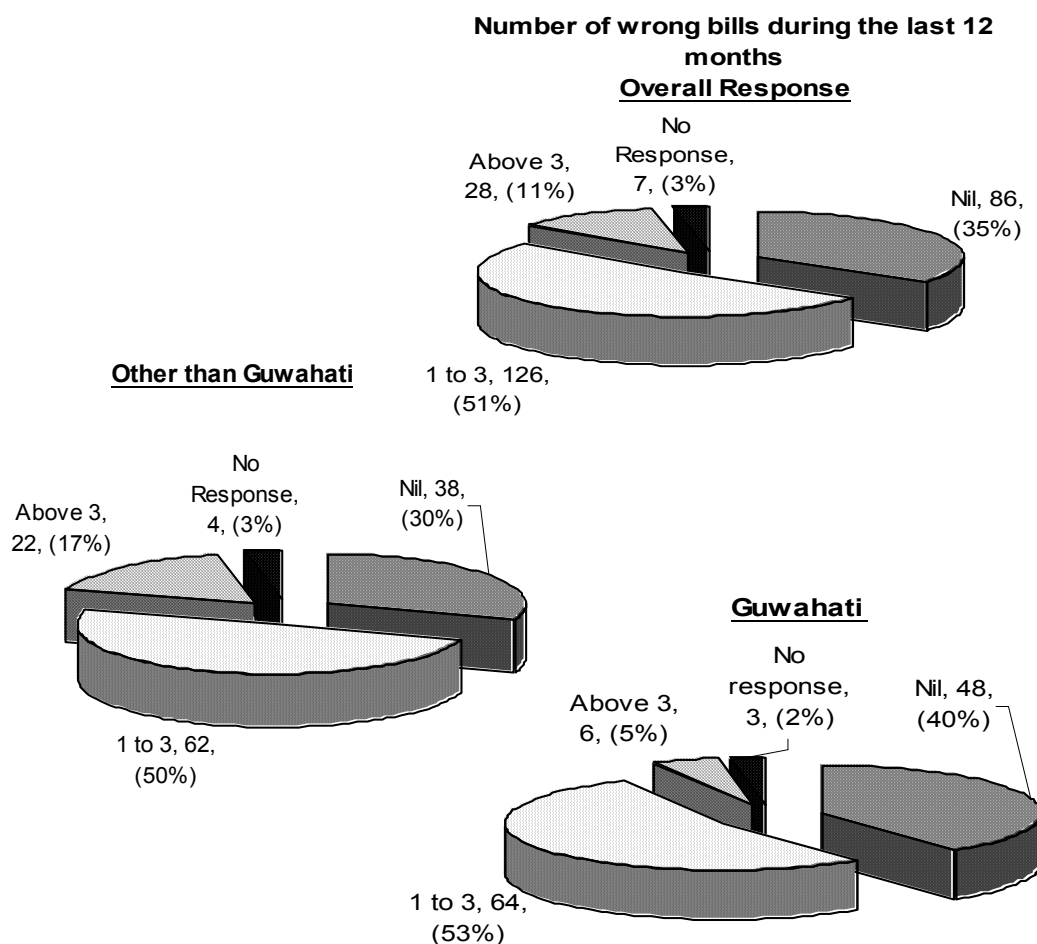
The respondents were asked to point out the frequency of mistakes in their electricity bills.



Observations: In this regard, against 18% (44) respondents who said that there were no mistakes in their bills, 48% (121) respondents said that they sometimes found mistake in their bills. In case of Guwahati city, 17% (21) respondents opined that they never found mistakes in their bills and 55% (66) respondents said that they sometimes found mistakes in their bills. A greater number of respondents outside Guwahati said that they often had mistakes in their bills.

D. Number of wrong bills served during last 12 months

7 respondents (3%) did not respond to the question about the number of wrong bills during the past twelve months.

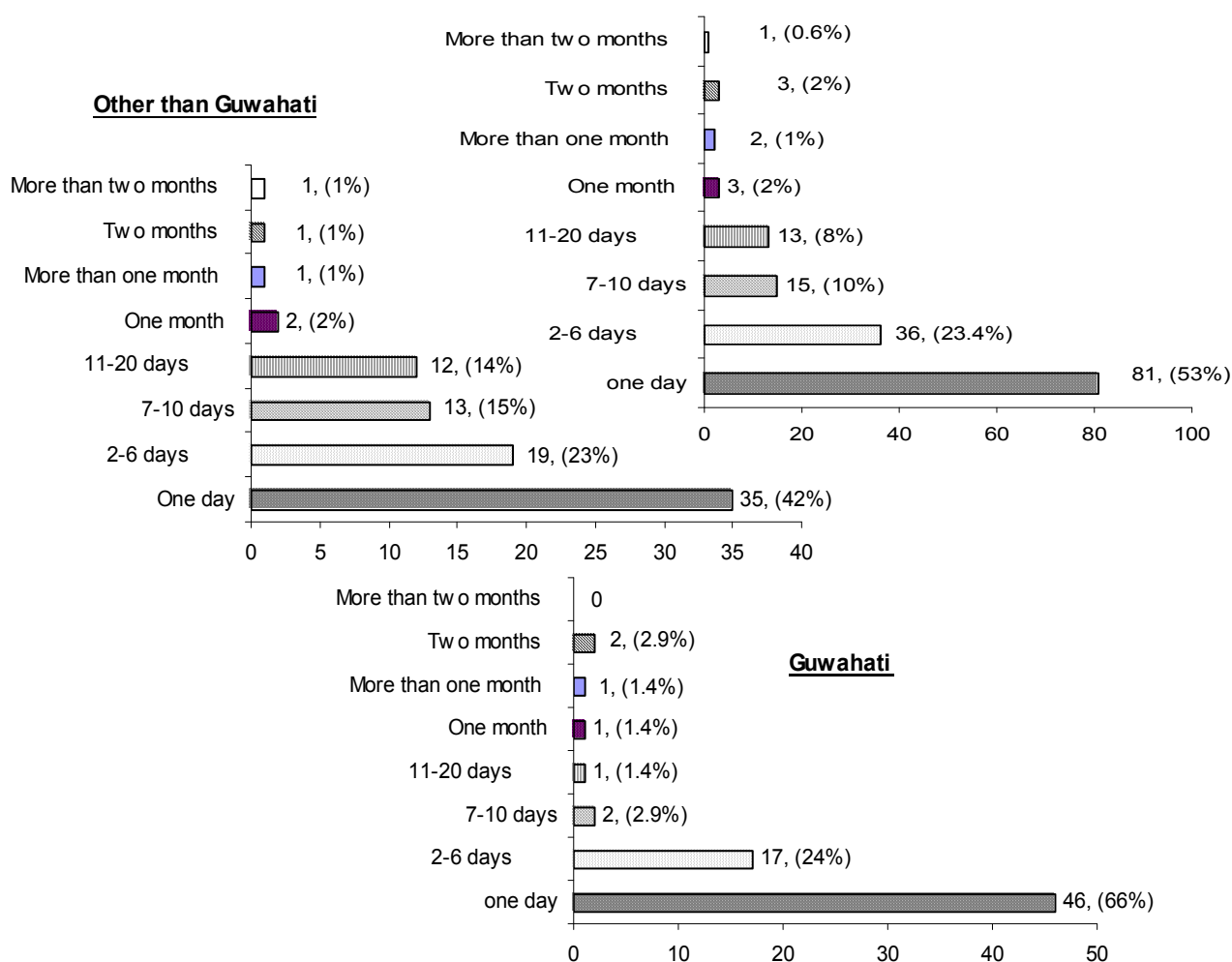


Observations: When asked about the number of wrong bills during the last 12 months only 35% (86) respondents said that they have not received any wrong bill during this period against 11% (28) respondents who received wrong bills more than 3 times during this period. In case of Guwahati city, only 40% (48) respondents said that they received no wrong bills during the period and 5% (6) said that they have received wrong bills more than three times.

E. Time Required for Correction of Bills

All the 154 respondents who said that they had mistakes in their bills answered this question. Respondents were asked to indicate the time required for rectification of mistakes in bills. The types of mistakes encountered by them like wrong calculation or totalling, excessive billing, and wrong application of tariff rates etc, were not gone into, so as to avoid a lengthy questionnaire.

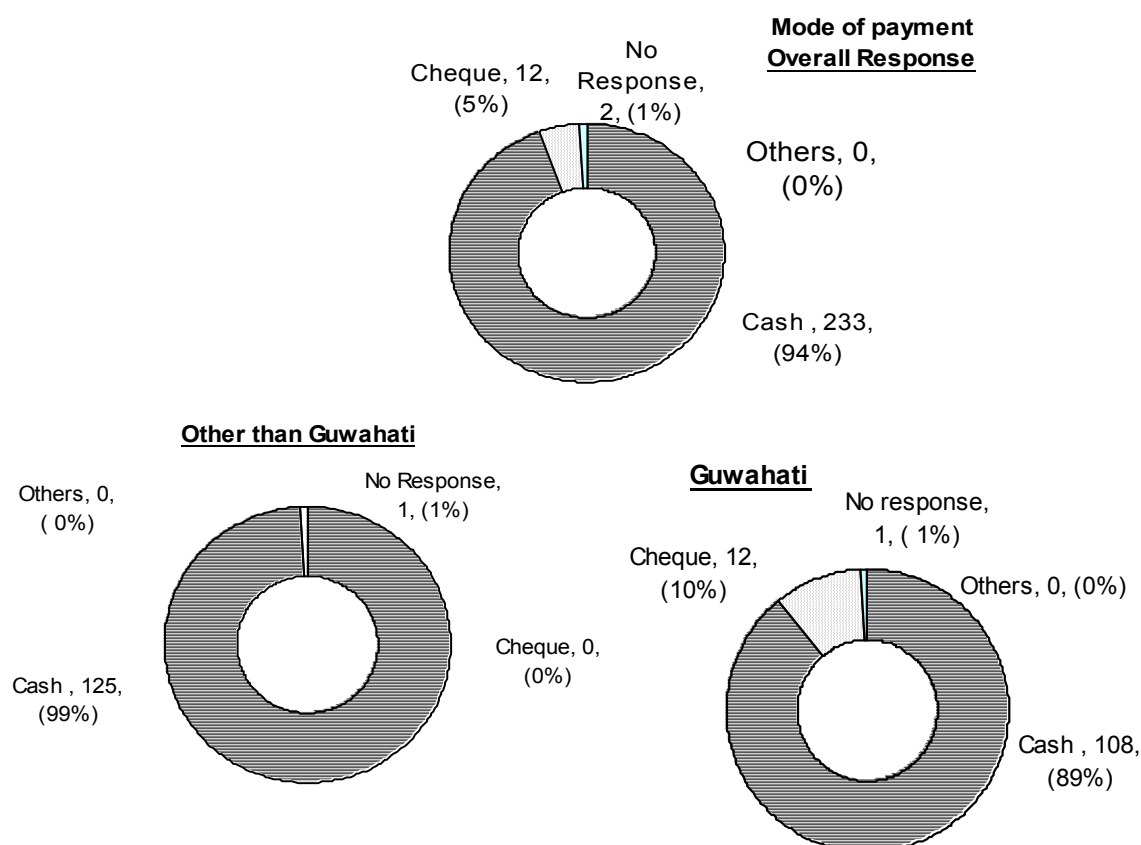
Time required for correction of wrong bills Overall Response



Observation: A total 53% (81) respondents said that it takes one day for rectification of bills but the rest said that it takes two days to two months for the same. In case of Guwahati city, the situation is not good either, where 66% respondents said that their wrong bills are corrected within a day whereas 3% said that it takes two months to correct wrong bills. The AERC Guidelines for Redressal of Consumer Grievances stipulate that mistakes in bills are to be rectified within one day of complaint and in case additional information is required within 3-7 days.

F. Payment of Bills

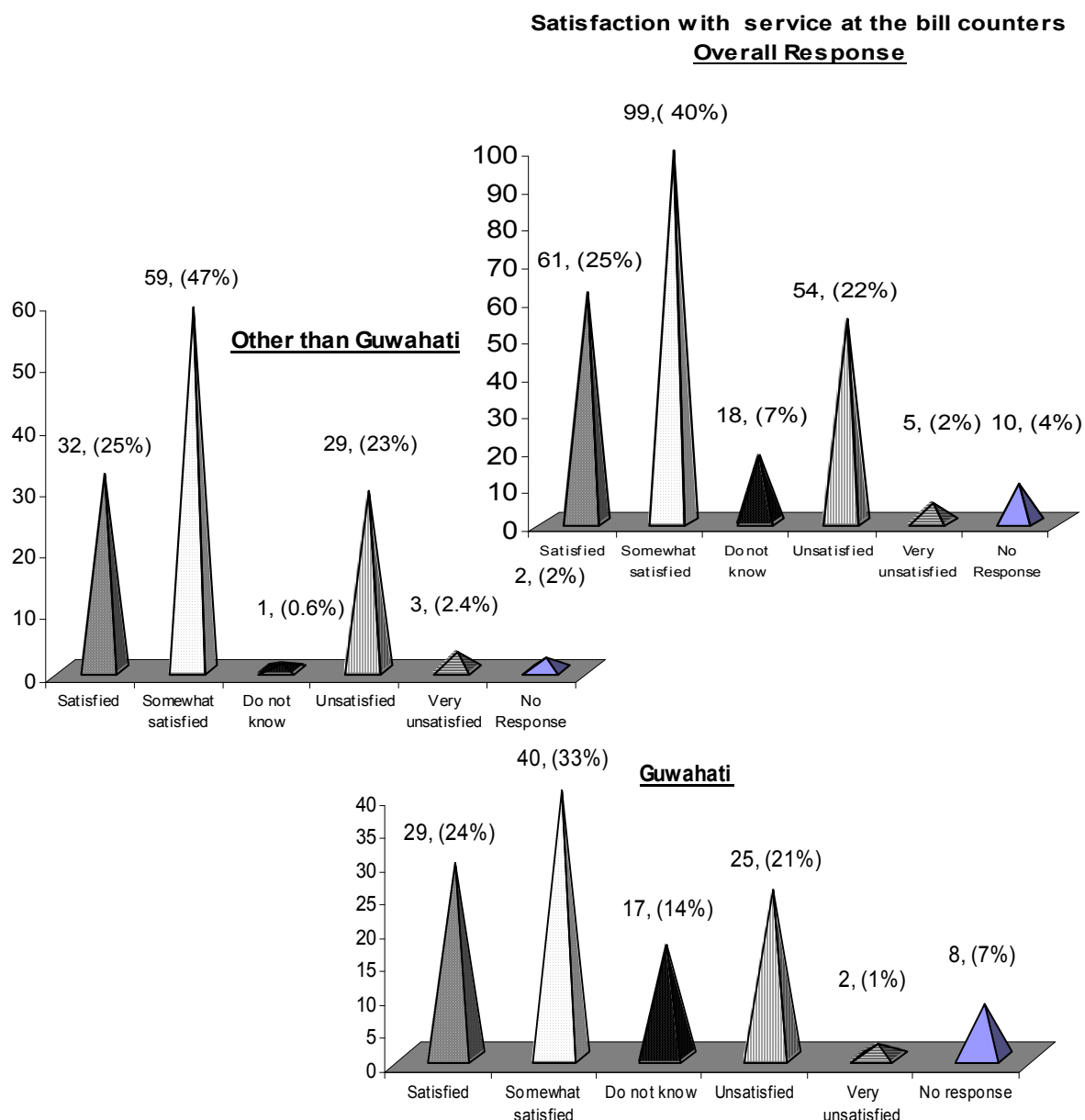
The respondents were asked as to how they paid their electricity bills. This question was meant to get an idea whether the respondents were availing the facilities like Cheque Drop-boxes introduced by the Discoms during the last one year for paying their bills.



Observations: Although consumers can pay their energy bill by cash/cheque or draft, 94% (233) respondents said that they pay their bills by cash, only 5% (12) pay by cheque. In case of Guwahati city, 89% (108) respondents pay the bills by cash and 10% (12) respondents through cheque. Payment through Money Orders, Demand Drafts, and other methods is nil. The study indicates that although Cheque Drop Boxes have been introduced by the Discoms, these are yet to prove popular among the respondents. Perhaps, there is a need to educate and encourage consumers to pay through these new systems that are being introduced.

G. Satisfaction with service at the bill counters

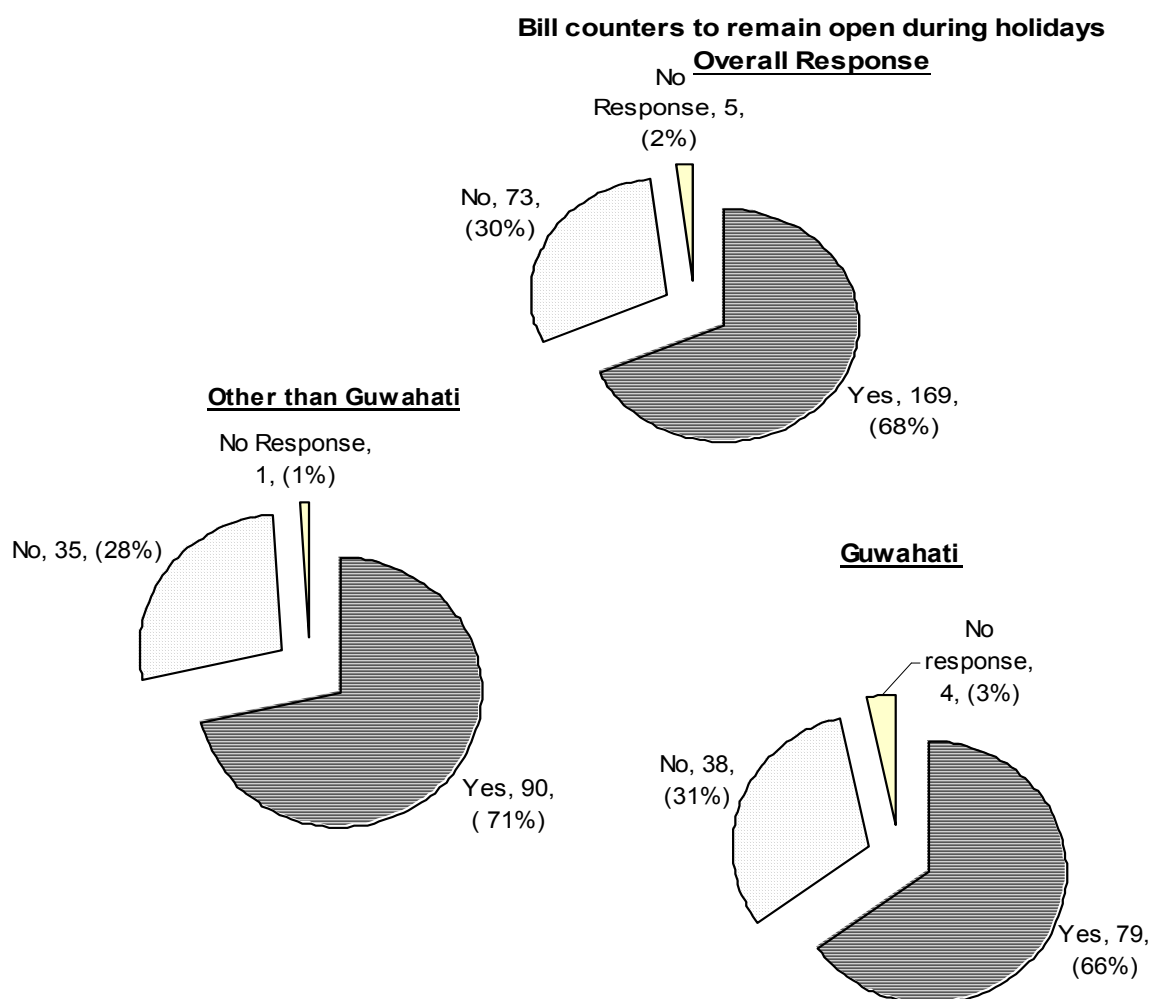
In order to assess the level of satisfaction with service provided in the bill counters by the Discoms, respondents were asked to indicate as to how satisfied they are with the service at the bill counters.



Observations: The study indicates that 2% (5) respondents said that they are very dissatisfied with the service at the bill counters and 22% (54) respondents said that they are dissatisfied. However, 40% (99) respondents said that they are somewhat satisfied. In case of Guwahati City, only 33% (40) respondents termed the service at bill counters as somewhat satisfactory, against 47% (57) respondents who said so belonging to regions outside Guwahati.

H. Bill counters to remain open during holidays

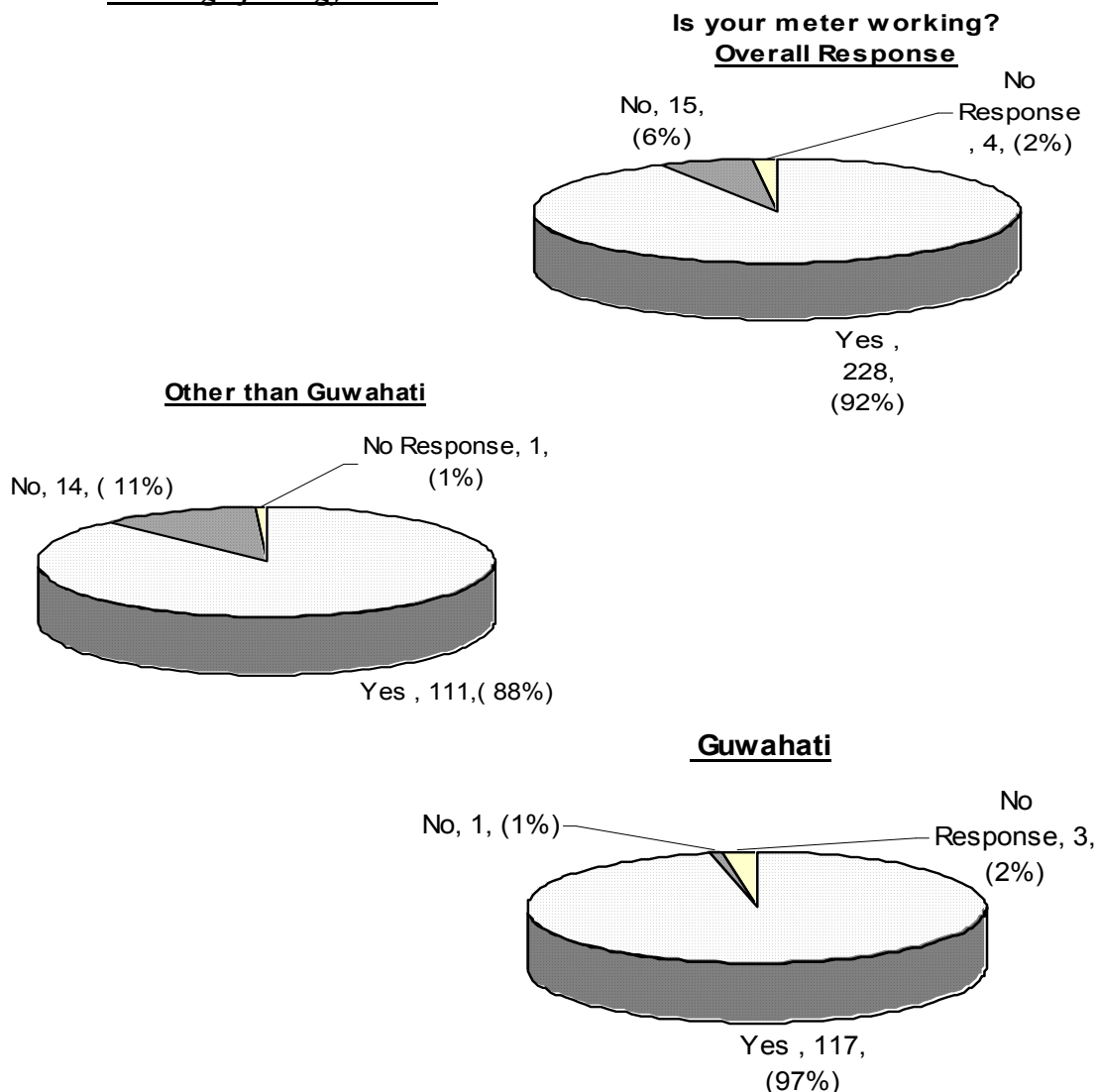
In reply to the question which asked whether respondents wanted the bill counters to remain open during holidays, 68% (169) respondents said that the bill counters should remain open during holidays which would facilitate easy, timely payment and perhaps save the consumers from standing in long queues.



Observations: In case of Guwahati City, 66% (79) respondents and in regions outside Guwahati, 71% (90) respondents suggested that bill counters should remain open during holidays. These indicate that action may be taken by the management of Discoms in this regard to maximise the days during holidays when bill counters remain open.

2.5 METER RELATED

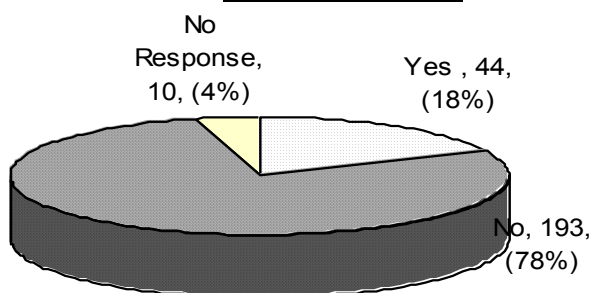
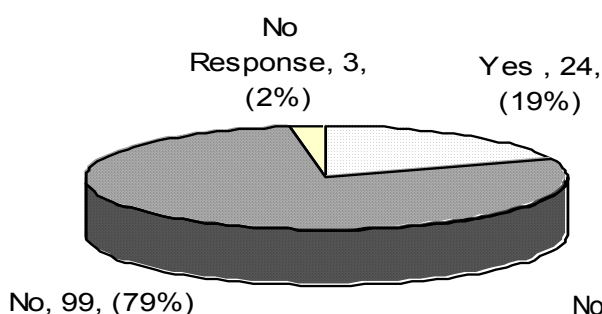
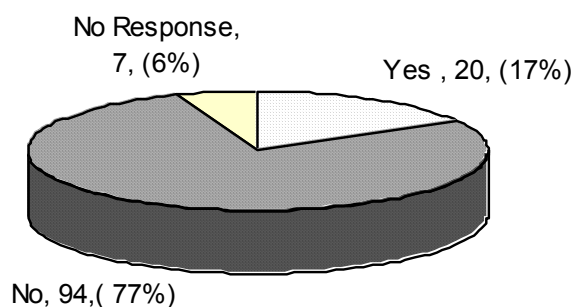
A. Working of energy meters



Observations: To a question, whether the electricity meters are in working condition, overall 92% (228) respondents replied in positive. In case of Guwahati, 97% (117) respondents (out of total 121 respondents) said that their meters are working and only a single respondent said that his meter is out of order. A total of 2% (4) respondents did not answer this query.

B. Meter Replacement

The respondents were asked if their meters were replaced recently i.e within the last one year. This question was asked to provide some idea on the average number of new meters being installed within a year.

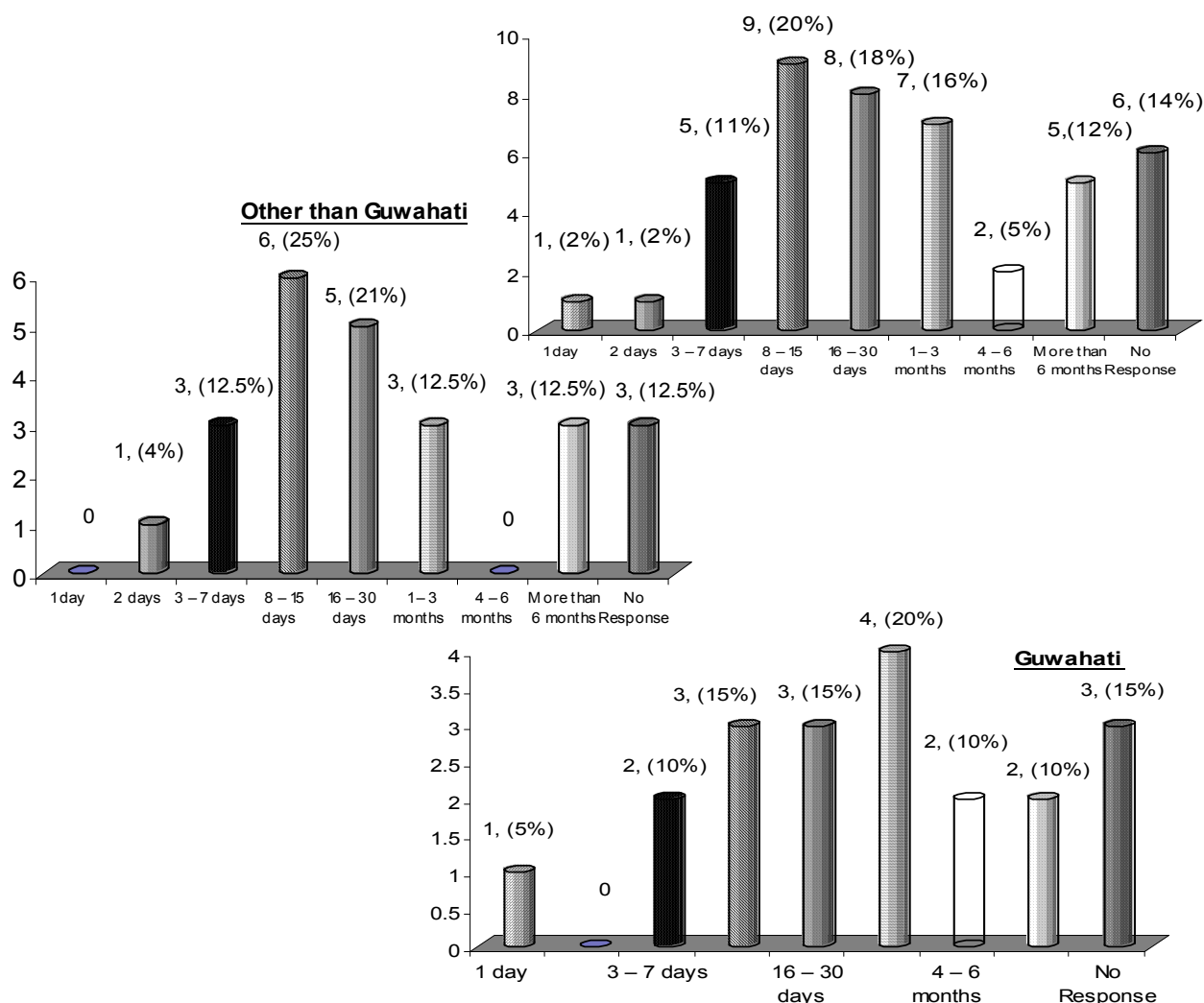
Meter replaced recently i.e last one year**Overall Response****Other than Guwahati****Guwahati**

Observations: 78% (193) respondent said that their meters were not replaced within the past one year. In case of Guwahati city the figure is 77% i.e. 94 respondents. In areas outside Guwahati, 79 % (99) respondents (out of total 126 respondents) said that their meters were not replaced during this period.

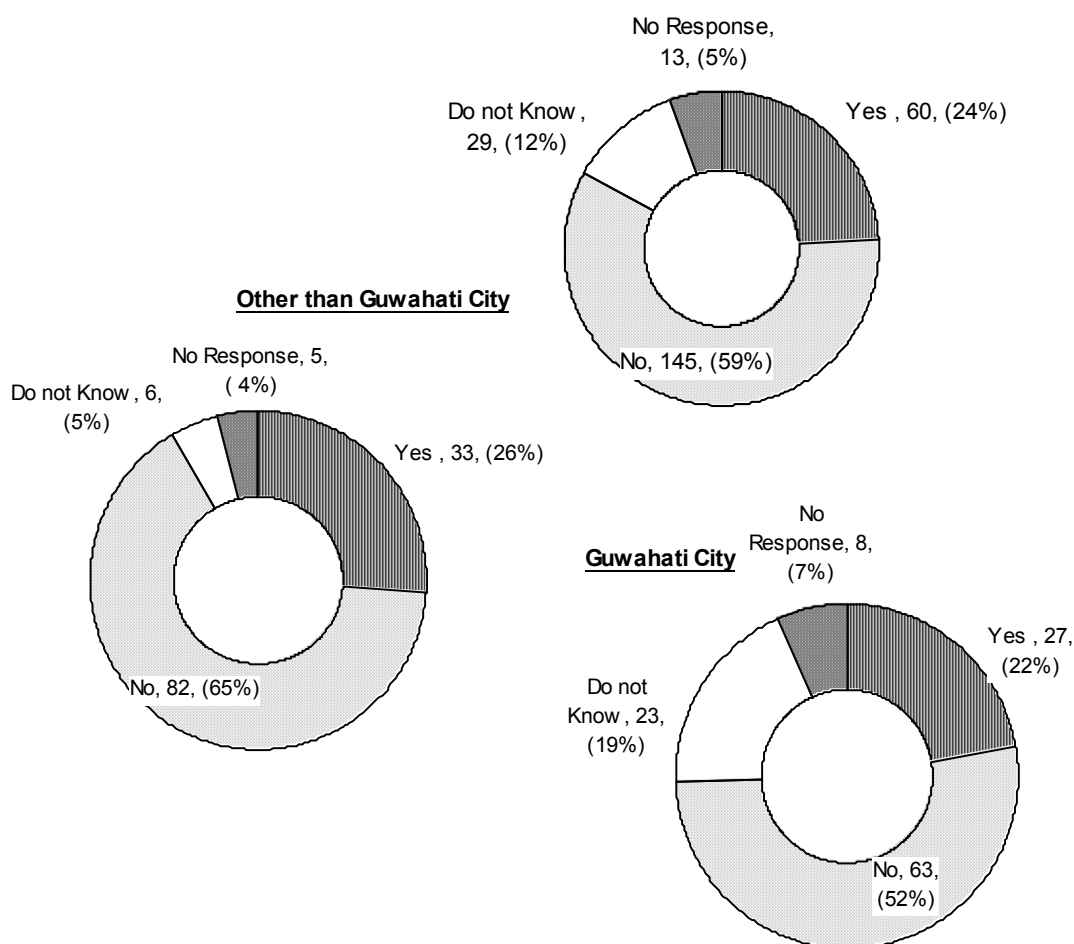
C. Average time required for replacing defective meters

The respondents were asked to indicate the average time taken to replace the defective meters. Out of total 44 respondents who said that their meters were replaced during the past 12 months, 38 responded to the question.

The average time required for replacing your defective meter
Overall response



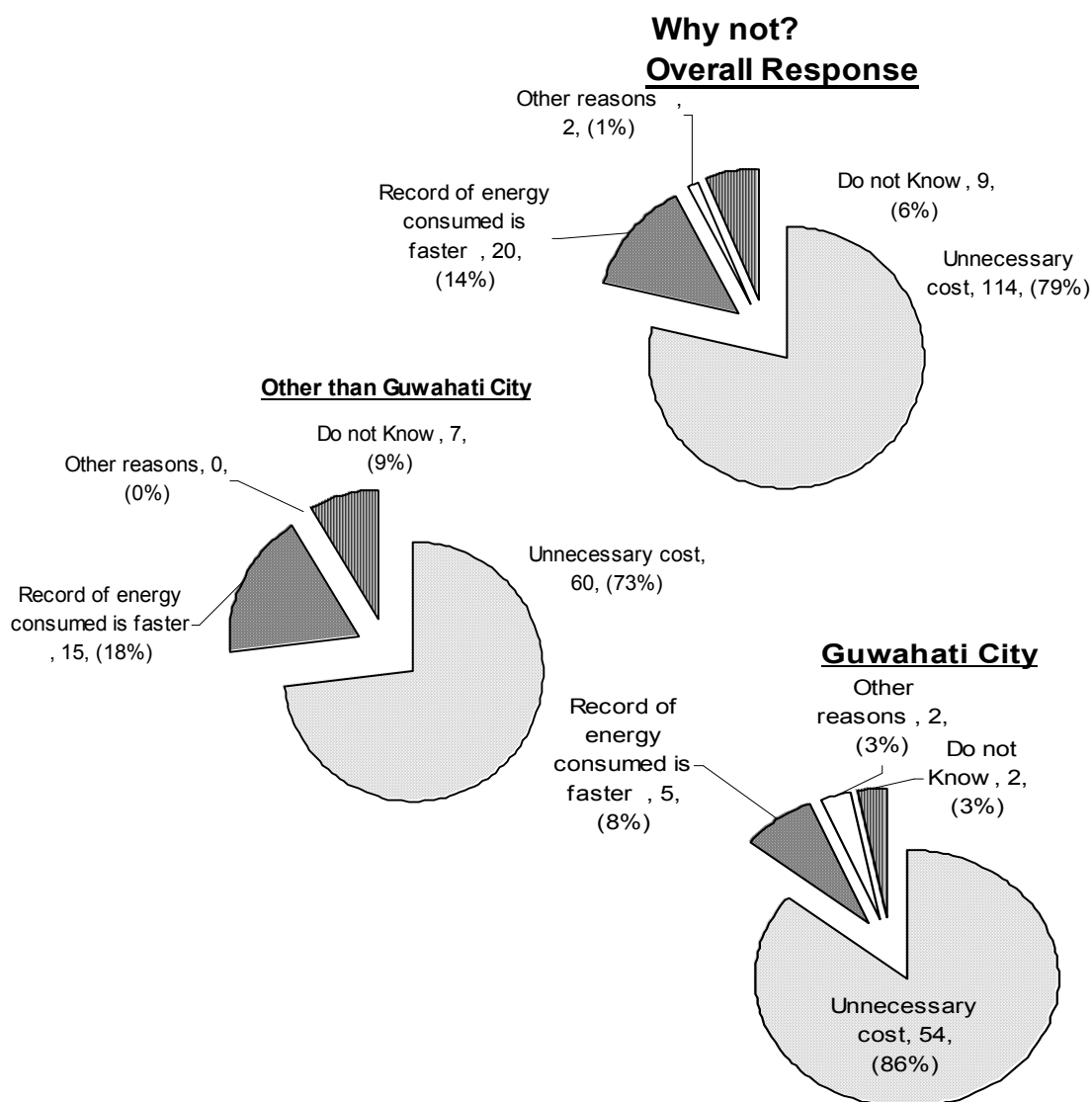
Observations: A total 12% (5) respondents said that it takes more than 6 months to replace a defective meter and 20% (9) respondents said that the replacement was done within 8 to 15 days. The figures in Guwahati city shows that 10% (2) respondents said that it takes more than six months for replacement and 20% (4) respondents said it takes 1 to 3 months for replacing a defective meter. The AERC (Distribution Licensees Standard of Performance) Regulations have specified that defective meters must be replaced within 7 days or 30 days on urban or rural areas respectively.

D. Replacement of electromagnetic meters with electronic meters**Replacement of electromagnetic meter by electronic meter****Overall Response**

Observations: On being asked whether respondents would like to replace their electromagnetic meters with electronic ones, 24% (60) respondents said that they preferred replacement of their meters by electronic meters against 59% (149) respondents who did not agree to replace their meters by electronic meters. In Guwahati city, the response is almost similar where 22% (27) respondents preferred replacement while 52% (63) respondents were against replacement. The responses from outside Guwahati show that 26% (33) respondents agreed to replacement while 65% (82) disagreed to the same. 29 respondents said that they did not know the answer.

E. If no, why not?

All respondents who said that they did not agree to replace their present meters by electronic ones responded to this question.

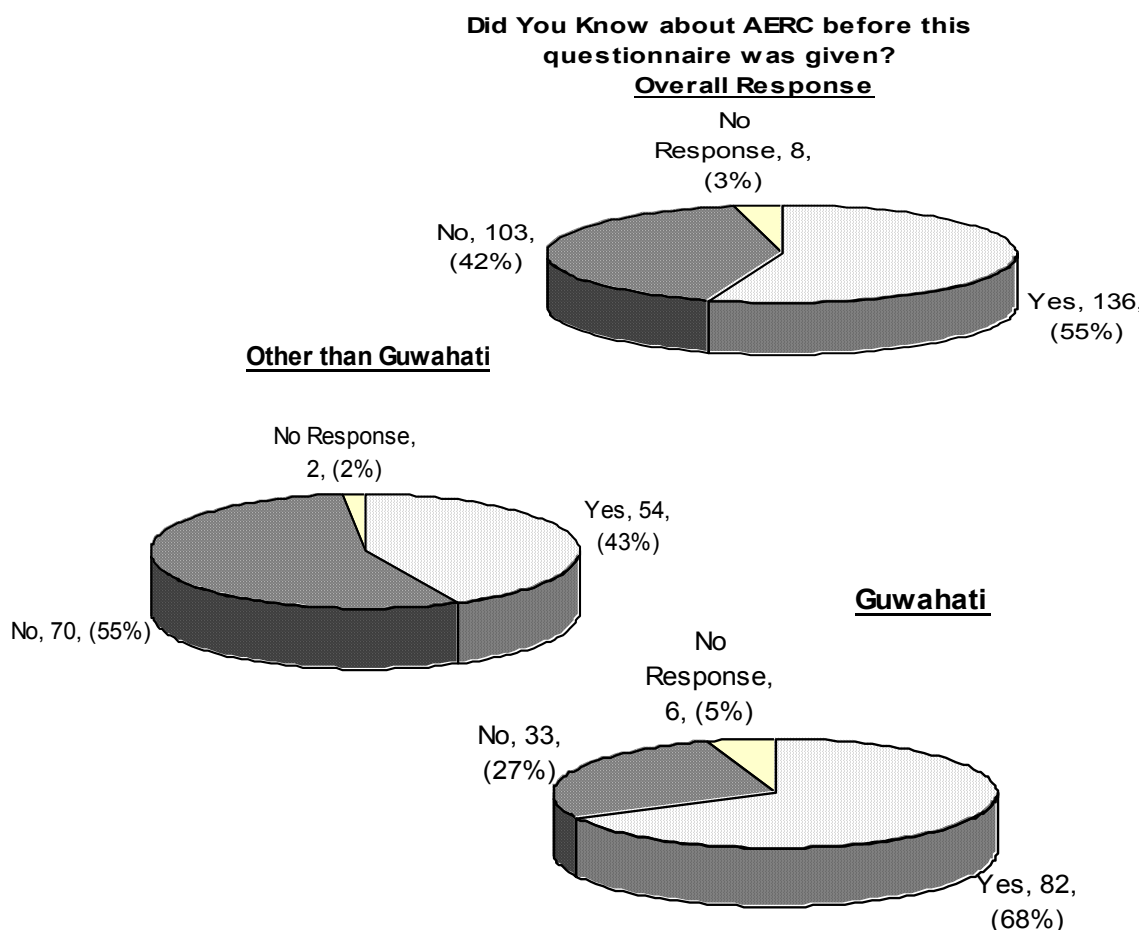


Observations: On the query, as to why they do not want to replace energy meters by electronic meters, 14% (20) respondents stated the reason as faster recording of energy and 79% (114) respondents stated the reason as unnecessary cost. In case of Guwahati city where more electronic energy meters are already installed only 8% (5) respondents said that it records energy faster. Obviously there I need for greater consumer awareness and education in this regard.

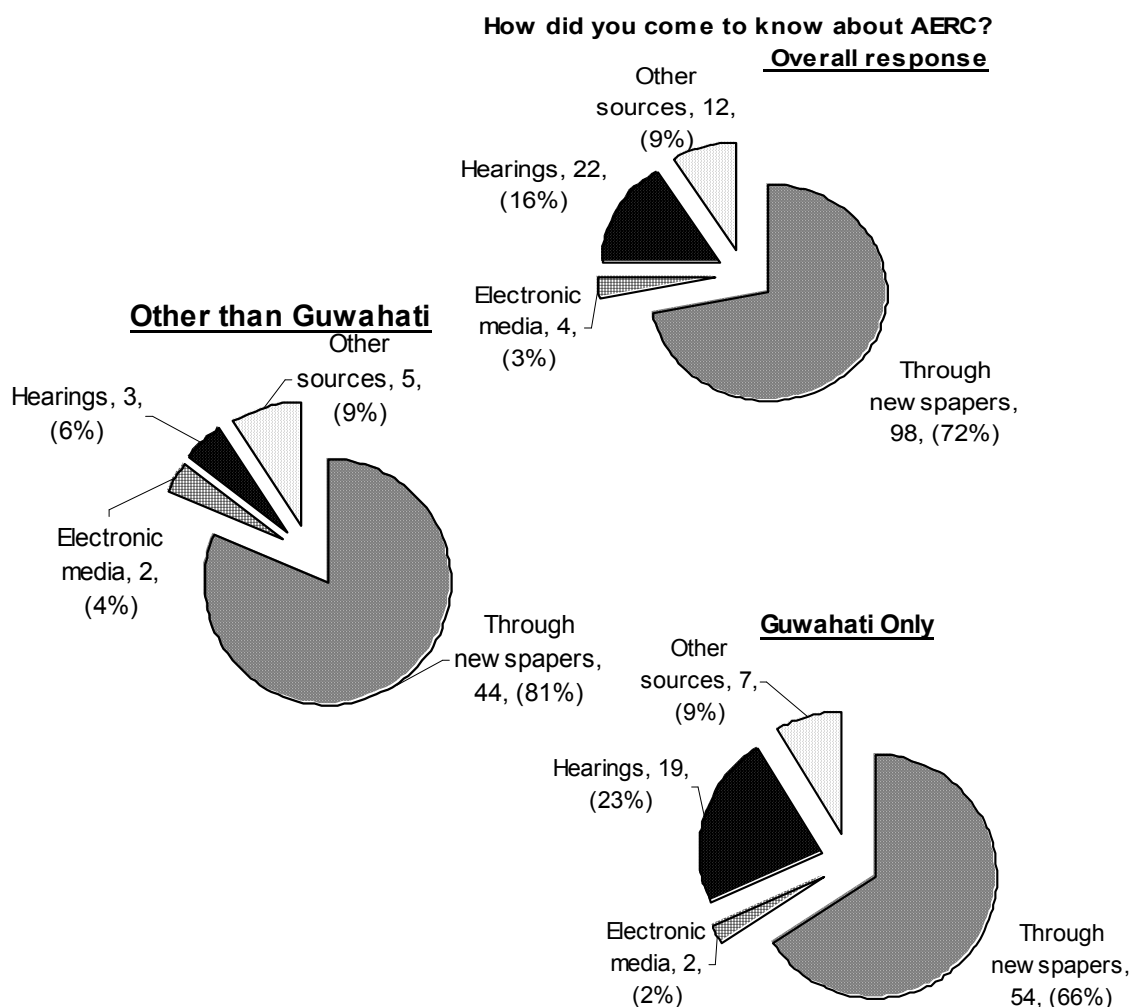
2.5 CONSUMER AWARENESS;

The respondents were asked a few questions to estimate the level of awareness regarding the various changes that have taken place as an outcome of the power sector reforms.

A. Existence of AERC

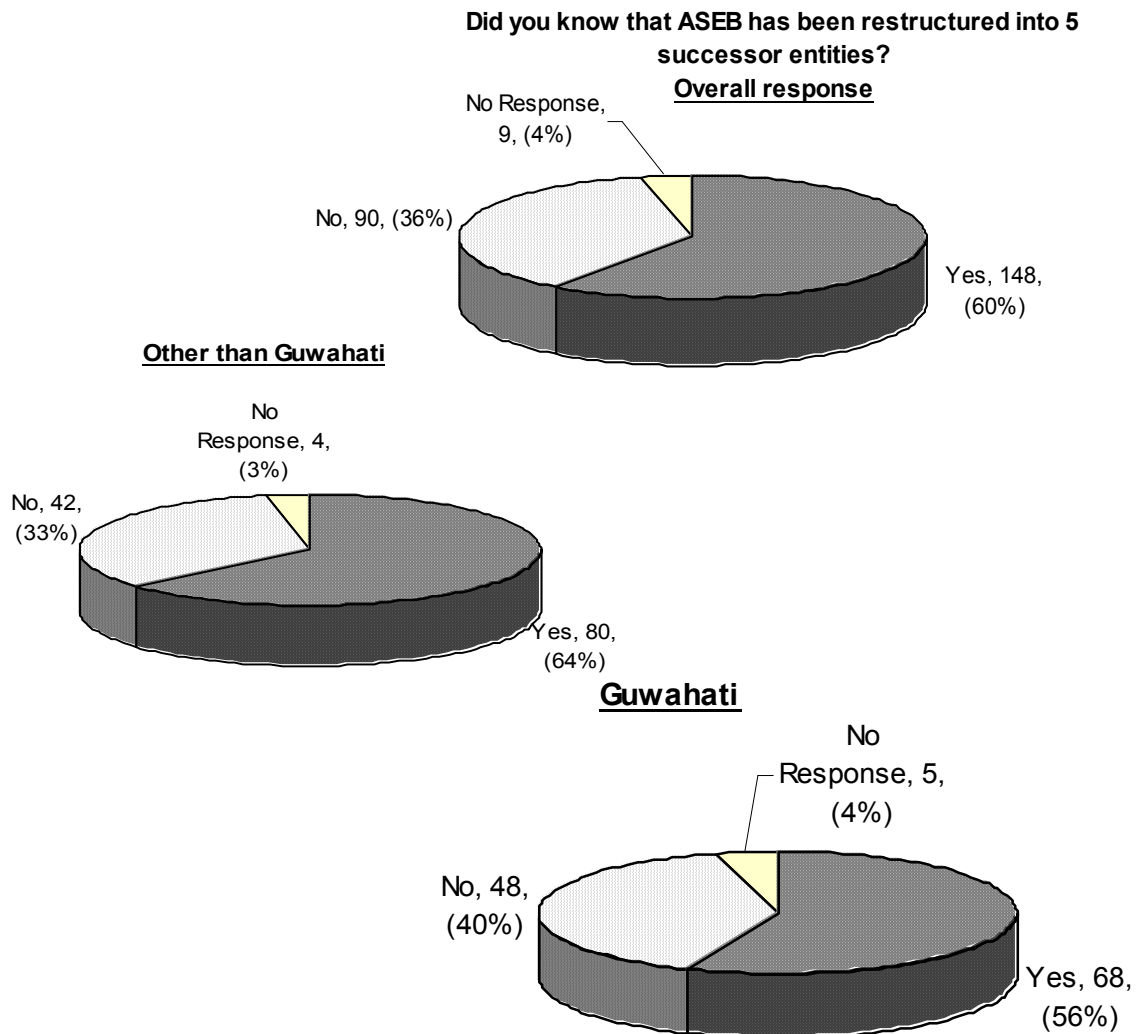


Observations: It appears from the study that even after four years of the formation of AERC only 55% (136) of the respondents had knowledge of the AERC before the survey was conducted. Although a greater number of the respondents 68% (82) in Guwahati seem to be aware of its existence, 27% (33) respondents did not know. In regions outside Guwahati, 55% (70) respondents replied in the negative.

B. If yes, how did you come to know about AERC?

Observations: The study indicates that the press (newspapers) have played an effective role in making consumers aware of the existence of AERC. More than 70% (98) of the respondents have come to know of the Commission through the press. In regions outside Guwahati, this figure stands at 81% (44). Only 6% (3) of the respondents have said that they came to know of the Commission through hearings. In Guwahati, 66% (54) respondents said that they came to know of the Commission through newspapers and 23% (19) respondents said it was through hearings. A total 3 % (4) respondent said that it was through the electronic media. The CAC of AERC needs to reach out to larger number of consumer groups and through them, greater number of consumers. Proper functioning of the District level Coordination Committees would also be helpful in improving the situation in this regard.

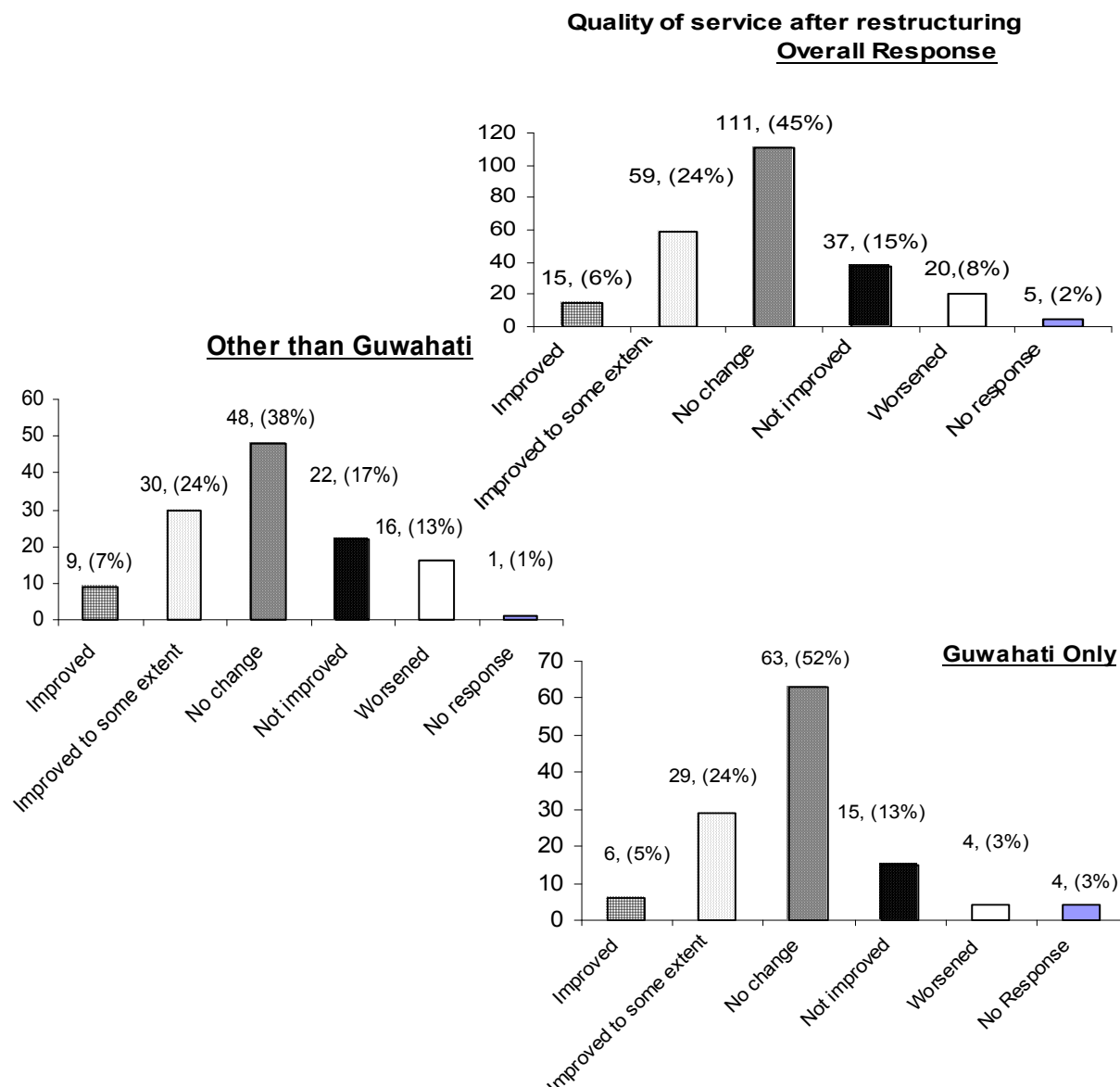
C. Restructuring of ASEB into 5 successor entities in December 2004.



Observations: The study shows that 60% (148) respondents have knowledge of restructuring of ASEB. It is interesting to note that against 56% (68) respondents in Guwahati who are aware of the restructuring of ASEB, 64% (80) of the respondents outside Guwahati know this fact.

D. Quality of service after unbundling

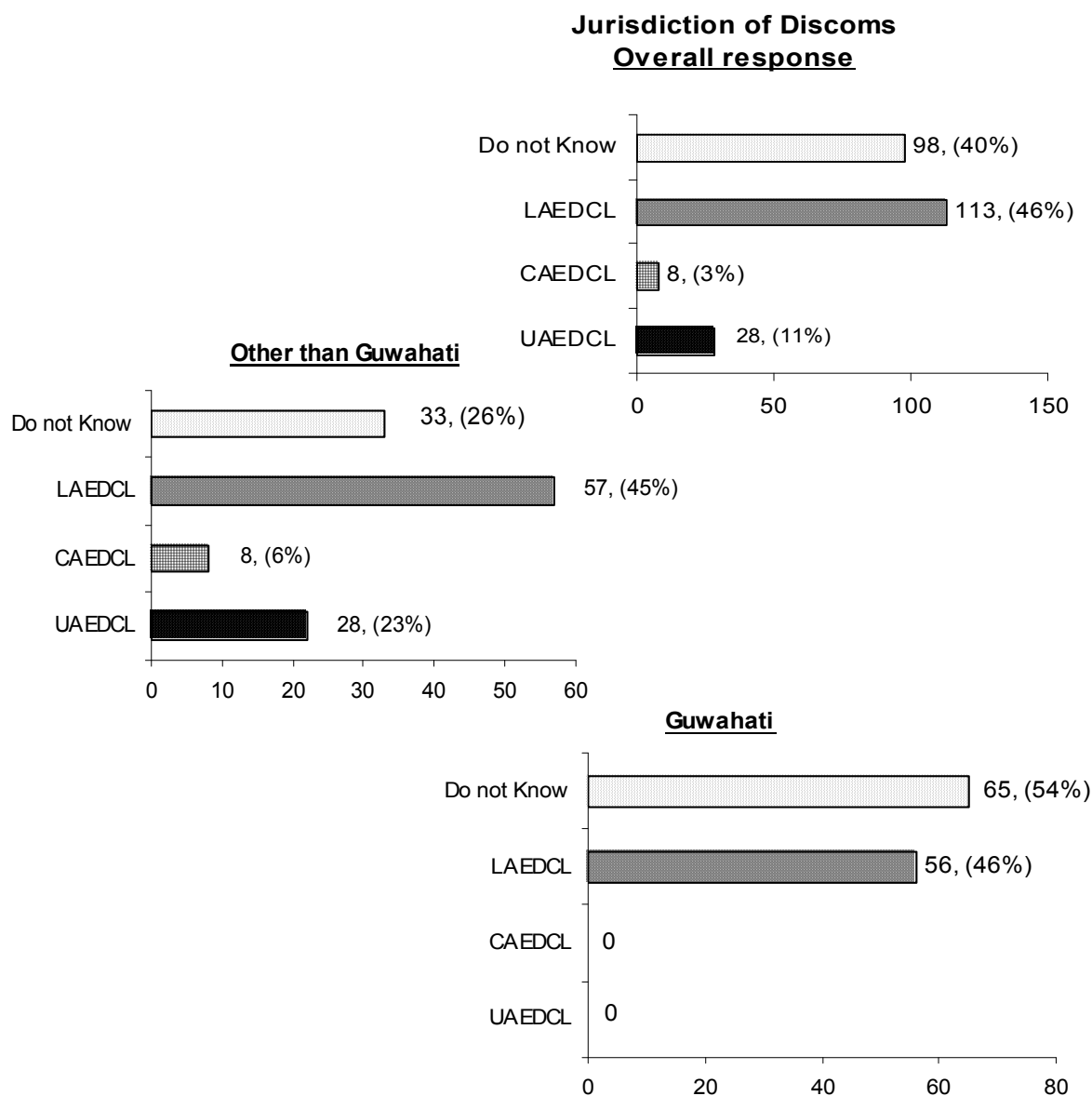
The three Discoms were formed with effect from December 2004. Hence it would be too early to assess the performance of the electricity supply companies. However, respondents were asked to indicate whether the quality of service have improved in the past eight months.



Observations: While 15% (37) respondents feel that the quality has not improved, 24% (59) said it has improved to some extent. 45% (111) respondents said that there has been no change in the quality of service. On the other hand, 8% (20) respondents feel that the quality has worsened and most of these (16) are from regions outside Guwahati. Out of the total respondents, 30% (74) have indicated that quality have improved, while total 23% (57) have indicated that quality have not improved / worsened after restructuring.

E. Jurisdiction of Distribution Company

The respondents were asked to indicate the Discom under which they are located.



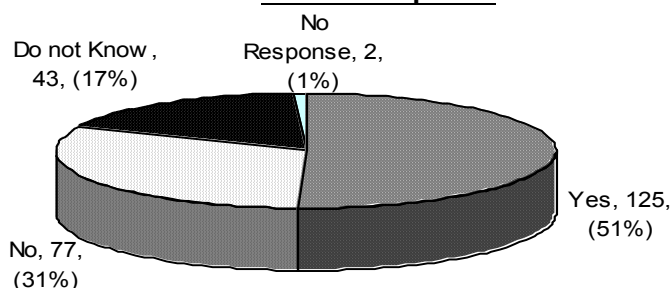
Observations: Most of the respondents (40%) have no knowledge as to the Discom under which they are placed. Actual number of respondents from different Discoms is given in page two of the report. ***The Discoms must take necessary action to educate the consumers in this matter through proper indication in the electricity bills.***

F. Privatisation of power sector for improvement

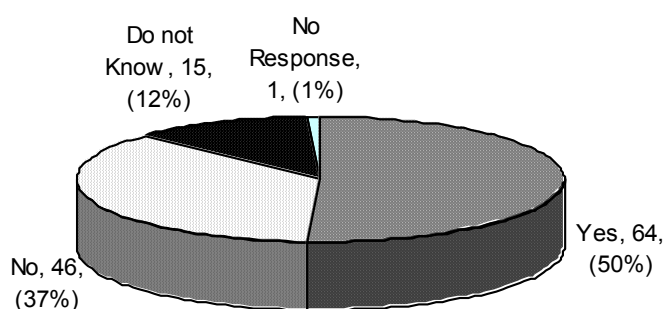
Keeping in mind, the on going process of restructuring of electricity sector and privatisation of electricity distribution in India, a question was included to assess the perception of the consumers on this matter.

Privatisation of power sector necessary for improvement

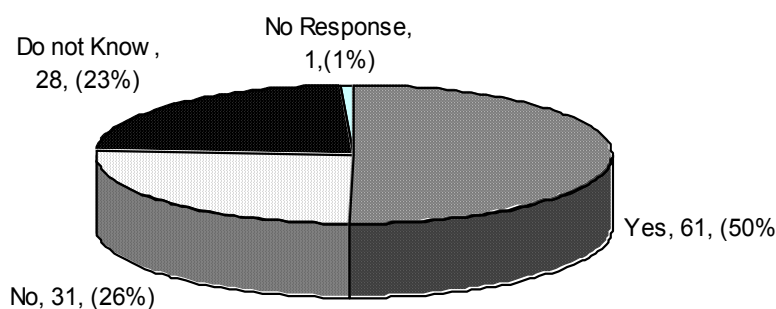
Overall response



Other than Guwahati



Guwahati



Observations: A majority of the respondents (51%) who answered this question said they think privatization will help improve the power sector as against 31% who do not think so. 43 (18%) respondents said they did not know the answer of which 28 respondents are from Guwahati and 15 from outside the capital city.

Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Some of the important findings of the study regarding different aspects of electricity service and recommendations for improvement are briefly dealt with below.

☞ It is observed from the study that availability of sufficient power supply is a problem all over the state even if the situation is somewhat better in Guwahati. Also, frequency of power cuts and bad quality of power supply create problems for the general consumers. A massive programme for upgradation of sub transmission and distribution network is an urgent requirement at this juncture for Guwahati City and other areas. Generation capacity must also be increased at the same time. There are reports that some new power projects are likely to be commissioned within the next one-three years and initiatives for upgradation of sub transmission and distribution network are being undertaken with loans from ADB and Central Government under APDRP schemes. An assessment needs to be undertaken whether; once these activities are completed, power supply is likely to improve. The supply will improve only if concerned authorities ensure that these projects are implemented within the scheduled time, avoiding time and cost overruns.

☞ The study indicated that there is presence of illegal use of power. It is a known fact that the utilities are losing substantial revenue due to non-technical or commercial losses. It can be inferred from the study that power supply of only a marginal number of consumers is disconnected due to illegal use of power. This clearly calls for greater vigilance on the part of the

Discoms. Consumer groups can also play a crucial role in this regard by launching a serious campaign against illegal use of power and educating consumers on the negative aspects of such activities. This will not just help to reduce/eliminate illegal use of power but also help in supplying better quality power to consumers.

- ☞ Two respondents said that their power connection was withdrawn without any valid reason. Even if the incidence of such cases may be rare, the concerned Discom officials are to make sure these types of occurrences are not repeated in future and adopt more consumer friendly attitude while dealing with such matters.
- ☞ The study reveals that there is low billing efficiency across the state. The time required for rectifying mistakes in bills was more than the time stipulated in the regulations notified by AERC. There is also scope to improve the service at the bill counters. Quick completion of the scheme of computerization of billing system, already done at some locations in Guwahati can bring about improved billing. The Discoms should take initiative to computerize the billing system all over the state on a war footing to ensure faster service and also to avoid mistakes in bills owing to wrong calculations and wrong application of tariff due to manual processing.
- ☞ Most of the respondents said that they wanted bill counters to remain open during holidays. Discoms should either reduce the number of holidays when bill counters are closed or extend the

working hours of the bill counters. It is reported that the utilities have already reduced the number of holidays this year.

☞ The study indicates that although Cheque Drop Boxes have been introduced by the Discoms, these are not popular among the respondents. Perhaps, there is a need to educate and encourage consumers to pay through these new systems that are being introduced. The utilities may also make an attempt to study whether payment of bills by cheque have increased after the introduction of drop-box facility in more areas of Guwahati and other regions outside Guwahati. The provision of Electronic Clearing System (ECS) for bill payment may also be introduced for convenience to consumers by Discoms once computerised billing is in place. It is reported that Spot Billing Machines (SBM) have already being procured. Use of SBMs coupled with spot collection of cheque payments may be tried out as an experimental measure. This will lead to increased billing and collection efficiency at one go.

☞ In the matter of replacement of defective meters, the study indicates that in many cases time taken for this is much higher than the specifications in AERC regulations. These findings reflect one of the reasons for high non- technical losses in the system. The management needs to take adequate measures to reduce losses due to defective meters by enforcing quicker replacement of defective meters by good ones. This will also help to enhance satisfaction of consumers.

☞ It is observed from the study that most respondents do not like to replace their present electromagnetic meters with electronic meters mostly because majority of them think that it is an

unnecessary cost rather than because of the believe that electronic meters records faster. The Discoms may make suitable arrangements to reduce the impact of higher cost of electronic energy meters in order to encourage replacement of electromagnetic meters with electronic ones. Electronic meters not only help to project energy consumed accurately but also store useful information leading to efficiency gains in system management.

- ☞ It is seen from the study that the level of awareness among the consumers is very low regarding the developments that are taking place in the power sector. It is essential for the consumer advocacy groups to interact more effectively with the Discoms and the AERC and disseminate information to the consumers. Similarly, the Discoms should also make serious efforts in giving wide publicity through print and visual media about the various changes that are taking place after restructuring.

This study is the first attempt to understand the consumers' perceptions on various issues related to the power sector that concerns them. The findings provide ample scope to the service providers to understand their strengths and weaknesses and work on those to build goodwill and enhance consumer satisfaction. The study also highlights the responsibilities of consumer groups, the press and the electronic media and the important role that they have to play in the process of power sector development in Assam.

গ্ৰাহক অভিযন্ত

অসম বৈদ্যুতিক নিয়ন্ত্ৰক আয়োগৰ
‘গ্ৰাহক সন্তৰ্থক কোষে’ উপক্ৰান্ত শিতানত
অসমীয়া ভাষাত গ্ৰহীত্ৰিমাণিক
বাতৰ্ণানোচনীৰ আতিৰিক্ত অধ্যায় আৰম্ভ
কৰাৰ প্ৰয়াসেৰে উপক্ৰান্তাসকলৰ
আভিযন্ত সন্তলিত চমু বৰঙনি পাঠিয়া-
বলৈ অনুৰোধ জনাইছে। আপোনালোকৰ
বৰঙনি অহা ৩০/৩/২০০৬ৰ স্থিতকত
নিম্নলিখিত ঠিকনাত পাঠিয়াবলৈ অনু-
ৰোধ জনোৱা হৈল।

গ্ৰাহক সন্তৰ্থক কোষ
অসম বৈদ্যুতিক নিয়ন্ত্ৰক আয়োগ
ছয়মাৰ্হল, গুৱাহাটী-স্থিলা°ক্ৰোড
গুৱাহাটী - ৭৮১০২২