

# INDIA

## Engendering Policing: Evaluating Reforms to Increase Women's Access to Security and Justice

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### BACKGROUND

Citizens' ability to access a responsive police force is central to efforts to both prevent and mitigate the effects of crime and violence. Poor and marginalized populations often lack, not only access to but also basic trust in a responsive police force and, consequently experience diminished security and high levels of crime and violence. When citizens, particularly women, are hesitant to turn to the police, as evidenced by universally low levels of reporting of crimes against women, their access to security and justice is diminished. Moreover, deterrents to future crime are weakened by under-reporting and a resulting culture of impunity. Efforts to address such issues often include gender-targeted policing interventions, but the underlying assumptions as well as impacts of such interventions have not been rigorously studied to date. Whether women are more likely to approach the police given specialized gender services, and whether they are more likely to do so when those services are delivered by women, are thus open questions. The project studies these questions in the context of India, a country plagued by rising rates of gender-based violence (GBV) coupled with low rates of reporting of such crimes.

### PROJECT AIM

This project tries to examine interventions that aim to increase the accessibility and responsiveness of the police to women and, by extension, increase the rates at which women turn to the police to report crime and seek assistance. The intervention, developed in partnership with the Madhya Pradesh Police (MPP), aims to promote and sustain women-centred policing practices through the establishment of Women's Help Desks (WHDs): dedicated spaces in local police stations staffed by officers trained to assist women in registering cases and pursuing other forms of assistance, coupled with sustained police training and community outreach programs.

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The unit of randomization is the police station: treatment police stations mandated to start WHDs will be compared to a control group with no WHDs. The intervention, through establishment of Women's Help Desks (WHDs), represents a treatment bundle that combines four elements:

1. the creation of physical spaces within police stations mandated to assist women
2. the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and training to guide officers assigned to the desks
3. outreach to local women's networks with the aim of socially-embedding the WHDs in their surrounding communities
4. the allocation of additional female officers to the WHDs—this component is randomized as a separate treatment arm. This will allow to gain leverage on the question of whether or not the presence of additional female officers has an independent effect, above and beyond the effect of the WHD.

MPP selected twelve districts across the state to be representative of geography, demographics, and socio-economic conditions. Within each district, the police stations were stratified by geography (urban and rural) and by the first principal component of a vector of police station characteristics (number of assigned officers; number of registered cases; population served); the two treatment and control arms were randomized within these strata.

To assess the impact of the WHD, the project plans to examine five sets of primary outcomes:

1. Citizen perceptions, including satisfaction with and trust in the police
2. Women contacting the police
3. Change in the number of crimes registered
4. Action taken on these crimes
5. Police officer perceptions on the importance of GBV, crimes against women within policing and reported actions

A range of data will be collected, including baseline and end-line surveys of women and men, sampled from the police station jurisdictions using GIS maps; footage from police station closed circuit television (CCTV) feeds; Crime and Criminals Tracking and Networking System (CCTNS) data; police officer surveys; and data from the state's Dial100 emergency response system.

### STUDY CONTRIBUTION

The treatment design seeks to overcome weaknesses that have limited the success of other interventions in women's policing in India. First, prior reform attempts have been stymied by issues of scale and last-mile barriers to access. The specialized Mahila Thanas (women-only police stations), for example, exist at the district level and in urban centers, effectively putting them out of reach for many women—particularly in remote rural settings. By creating WHDs in local stations, MPP seeks to mainstream and scale up gender-targeted policing practices. Second, prior interventions have taken women's ability to access services for granted, despite well documented information gaps. Third, fear of public shaming or violent retaliation also present formidable social barriers that inhibit women from approaching the police. The sustained community outreach program seeks to overcome the above obstacles by building regularized channels for communication between the police and women community leaders—thus providing victims with information, as well as both social and legal support. Preliminary results from our pilot suggest that women are indeed approaching the WHDs, with an average of 20 cases registered per station per month. If successful, the potential for scale-up is very large—the intervention will be directly relevant to policy initiatives in similar states in northern India's poverty belt, including Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh (with a combined population, including MP, of over 500 million).

