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Behind the Badge: How Perceptions of Women Police Officers Shape the Impact of All-Women Police Stations in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore how the perception of women police officers, fueled by gender norms, social stigma, and the patriarchal setting in India, impacts the effectiveness of all- women police stations (AWPS) in India. The Loksabha's assumption that this intervention will automatically lead to an increase in police legitimacy has proven to be untrue, with AWPSs failing to have a major impact on the ground level, especially in changing the views of individuals. Furthermore, AWPSs have caused an increase in reporting of gendered crimes, but no increase in arrests or charges relating to these crimes. This points to a more systematic issue in the working of these stations, with the hypermasculine sub-culture in the police force suppressing these charges and arrests from being made by dismissing gendered crimes. Additionally, policewomen's dissatisfaction with being assigned only gendered cases compounds the problem, by creating a lack of motivation in their work, and leading to them not valuing the work they are doing, or believing they are creating an impact.

Introduction

Women-only police stations focus on crimes against female victims, particularly violence like domestic abuse, psychological and family violence, specific threats, and sexual violence (UN Women). Staffed mainly by specially trained female officers, these stations aim to improve how police respond to women survivors' unique needs. Their legal mandates vary by location, either as part of police units or the justice system's executive branch. Strict guidelines dictate the types of cases they handle.

The goal of these stations is to provide specialised support for reporting crimes, pursuing legal action, and accessing medical care, counselling, and financial aid (Loksabha, 2012, p. 25). Karpowits and Mendelberg (2018) suggest that all-female environments help disadvantaged women develop their voices and preferences, offering psychological support and personal

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empowerment. By removing male authority figures, women's police stations foster a more responsive environment for addressing women's concerns (Jassal, 2020).

India has a variety of gendered crimes which are classified as crimes against women or VAW in government reports, with acid attacks, rape, sexual harassment, dowry harassment, and others all classified as gendered crimes under the Indian Penal Code. Furthermore, the law states that when various types of VAW are brought before the police, "then such information shall be recorded, as far as possible, by a woman police officer" (GOI, 2013). Numerous states have created "counseling" centres staffed by policewomen whose purpose is to reconcile victims of crimes like dowry and domestic abuse with perpetrators rather than pursue charges against male suspects (GOI, 2013; Satyogi, 2019; TISS, 2015). This shows that there is certainly a problem with VAW in the country, and the law has responded, but the intervention needs to be actioned better on the ground, setting the framework for the establishment of all-women police stations. A federal government policy of increasing the number of women in law enforcement has been in place since 2023. Most states have approved the 33% quota for women in forces, and are working to reach it, with over 500 all women police stations in operation.

India has the largest number of all women stations in the world, 745. However, this is paired with low levels of police legitimacy, with women being reluctant to approach law enforcement. Women Police Stations are staffed with female officers specialised in handling crimes against women, and the station chief is typically a woman (Amaral et. al, 2021). Women Police Stations (WPSs) specialise in crimes characterised as gender-based violence in the Indian Penal Code. This was expected to work well as the Loksabha believed including more women in the force would make it a more gender inclusive space, making it more conducive to hearing out the complaints of victims of violence against women. Despite their promised benefits for women, they are not resulting in significant changes. Most areas have recorded a 29% increase in reporting since the implementation of AWPS, but no increase in arrests of perpetrators of gender-based violence (Amaral et al, 2021).

AWPSs are not immune to the wider patriarchal gender norms and social stigma in India. The perception of women police officers by the public establishes how policewomen may, converse to the belief of policymakers and the government, not actually improve police legitimacy, and not widely be preferred over policemen to women victims (Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). The police system's perception of policewomen and their work as "soft" creates a hypermasculine subculture in the police force, forcing policewomen to mimic these biases and dismiss cases of gender based violence to "live up" to the standard set (Jassal, 2020, Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). As women police officers embody this hypermasculine organizational subculture, the core of this issue becomes that policewomen are dissatisfied by *only* being assigned cases relating to gender-based violence, leading them to also dismiss cases as unnecessary and considering these crimes

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as less weighted compared to what is considered to be mainstream police work (Jassal, 2020, Hautzinger, 2007).

In this paper, I argue that the reason the effectiveness of AWPSs are limited because the intervention does not tackle the underlying societal norms that govern gender-based violence in India and policing responses to it. First, I will analyze the policy behind women police stations to understand why they were implemented in the first place and what the initial goals were. In doing so, I also established the oversights when the intervention was implemented. Next, I will analyze the effectiveness of women police stations. Last, I will explore how the lack of effectiveness of AWPS is fueled by wider perceptions before turning to policy implications. I propose that policy must increase gender-based training in the police force, increase awareness in the public of the benefits of AWPS, and address institutional gaps in women police stations.

Section 1: Overview of women police stations

Global overview of women police stations

Research from the global north shows that gender representation in the police increases the likelihood of women approaching law enforcement (Riccucci, Van Ryzin, and Lavena 2014, Meier and Nicholson Crotty, 2006, Andrews and Johnston Miller, 2013, Miller and Segal, 2019, Amaral et al, 2018, Nataraja, 2008, Pruitt, 2016, Hautzinger, 2007, Jassal, 2020) The presence of policewomen was associated with higher rates of arrest for sexual assault, and this was found to be particularly true when policewomen are conferred front line authority, as seen in research conducted in the UK by Andrews and Johnston Miller (Jassal, 2020). This implies that women police are more likely to take cases forward of sexual assault compared to male police, and that victims are more likely to come forward to female police. However, this seems to only stand for settings in the Global North, as in India, the increase in reporting is not associated with an increase in arrests. This change could be attributed to policewomen sensitizing policemen to gender biases, and making women feel more comfortable. The public perceives policewomen to have higher legitimacy, and is more likely to report to them, according to these sources. In the US, the presence of women in policing is thought to improve general citizen attitudes toward officers and law enforcement, similar to general voter preferences for female candidates (Schwarz & Coppock, 2022). Furthermore, US scholarship shows that citizens perceive policewomen as more trustworthy, compassionate, and approachable than policemen (Barnes et al., 2018; Riccucci et al., 2014). This research reflects wider perceived gender norms on the difference between men and women, and has implications for reporting and registration of cases for violence against women cases (Miller & Segal, 2019).

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The topic remains understudied outside the global north, however, where women's rights are more insecure. It is unclear how policewomen would be perceived in many Global South patriarchal settings, where gender representation in male-dominated law enforcement agencies is a newer phenomenon than women's electoral participation (Dahl et al., 2021). There has been some research from the Global South on women police officers (see for example Amaral et al, 2018, Amaral et al, 2021, Jassal 2020, Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024, Cordova and Kras, 2020, Sviatschi and Trako, 2021, Karim, 2020), but it presents a more complicated picture about the impact of gender representation in policing.

The current literature surrounding this topic suggests that the geopolitical landscape of a country, as well as the social perception of women and the strength of the patriarchy, play a large role in the effectiveness of women police stations (Dahl et al, 2021). This suggests that in a developing country like India, where the patriarchal setting is still strong and societal bias tends to rationalise domestic violence, the assumptions made in the policy creating women police stations may fail to address how the perception of policewomen by the public, the police culture, and the inner monologue of policewomen impacts their ability to carry out their duty.

Women's interactions with the police in India

Indian women's interactions with the police are characterised by under reporting and under utilisation of the criminal system. This is driven both by the public perception of the act of reporting violence, as well as the fear that the police would dismiss their complaint (Jassal, 2020). The under utilisation is caused by women fearing male backlash, social stigma, economic hardship, and adverse consequences for their children, often rationalising the violence as justified by men being providers and protectors (Amaral et al, 2021). Additionally, police officers are also often hostile and dismissive of gender-based violence (GBV) complaints, with low rates of arrest and conviction for GBV undermining trust in the system (Amaral, Bhalotra, Prakash, 2021). Administrative data from India's national crime records, which are drawn from data submitted by police stations, reflect an alarming rise in GBV since 1995, accelerating from 2005, with an increase of 34%. This rise is large both in absolute terms as well as relative to other non-gendered violence and property crimes, meaning it is a spike in gender-based violence, not general crime, which could be accounted for in changes in policing arrest practices. Amaral, Bhalotra, Prakash, 2021).

Violence against women victims rarely turn to law enforcement (DHS, 2017), for example, in Rajasthan, only 3% of women have ever had contact with the police, despite staggeringly high gender-based crimes in the state, reporting the highest number of rape cases in the country, 5,399, in 2022 (Amaral, Bhalotra, Prakash, 2021). Additionally, officers are known to display a cavalier attitude towards such crimes (Shah, 2009). Since 2009, the federal government has

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pushed states to implement a 33% gender quota for incoming cadets to make the force more representative and accommodating, according to the Home Secretary (2009). Most states have approved this measure, with improvements in representation since 2009. Still, these improvements are far from the required 33% women in police quota. Maharastra, for example, has 12% of its force comprising of female officers (Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). India as a whole still has only 6% of the police being women. Notably, the share of female officers varies considerably by rank, with the smallest share in the middle. Amaral et al. (2021) have shown that in their study period, from 2002 to 2018, the share has increased most rapidly among police constables. This shows that there is an increase in the lower levels, but not in the management, which could contribute to the lack of institutional change occuring, and the frustration of creating specific policies or bills targeted towards improving women's interactions with the police, because there is not enough attention on these problems as the people in power have never experienced the issues, tying back to the idea that a lack of representation in policymaking groups could lead to flawed policy interventions for marginalised groups (Crenshaw, 1991).

The increase in gender-based violence being observed in India, as well as the decline and stagnation of improvement in women's interactions with the police, calls for a critical analysis of why women police stations, created to specifically target this issue, are failing to perform their duty.

Women police stations in India

In India, law enforcement is divided between the elite bureaucracy, the Indian Police Services (IPS), and state and provincial officials. Policing on the ground, such as responding to citizen complaints, registering crimes, and carrying out investigations is done almost entirely by provincial ranks that serve at local police stations. Police institutions are run by inspectors, called station house officers, who are supported by sub inspectors, assistant sub inspectors, and constables. The station house officer hears a victim's complaint, and lodges a crime report called a First Information Report (FIR), which is then assigned to an officer for investigation and eventually forwarded to a magistrate, who decides whether the individual is charged for the crime. In a fine-grained report of WPS opening in Harayana, Jassal (2020), reveals that women were drawn from the existing police force to staff WPS, and therefore there was no increase in police capacity.

Due to the interpretation of laws relating to AWPS, specifically the classification of certain crimes as gendered crimes by the Indian Penal Code, as well as the expectation that these crimes should be tackled as far as possible by a woman police officer, there are cases in which women police stations act as an impediment to women victims fight for justice, with standard police stations deflecting cases of gendered violence and forcing victims to travel further, reinstilling a

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sense of dismissal from the police. The top 20 of approximately 1100 police stations across Uttar Pradesh that had crimes transferred to them happened to be the all women stations. It is crucial to realise that the interdistrict transfer of cases, done without the victims' consent, also increases travel costs and distances for victims. There is a negative association found between proximity to all women stations and particular notions about policewomen (Jassal, 2020). The WPSs are usually located in administrative headquarters of districts in states that adopted the policy, meaning they are typically in more urban centers, increasing travel costs and distances for victims from rural backgrounds or impeding them from accessing the facilities, which hinders the potential for their effectiveness. Furthermore, women police stations may also not focus on pursuing charges against the offender, instead providing counselling to the women and rationalising the violence to encourage redressal, echoing how "counseling" centres have been created with the goal of reconciliation (GOI, 2013). Examples of this can be seen in the personal interviews conducted by Jassal in 2020, including quotes from policewomen saying "the main piece of advice we give is to stay in the family" (Jassal, 2020, Personal interview, AWPS Sonipat, November 22, 2017).

AWPSs are supposed to *increase* police legitimacy, with the creation of group specific arrangements being expected to lead to more substantive outcomes, with minorities being unconstrained by the majority (Jassal, 2020), with the removal of members of an authoritative identity, men. However, this is contended by literature suggesting segregation can ghettoise rather than facilitate women's substantive representation, by pushing gender issues away from the mainstream and into the periphery (Jassal, 2020). This suggests that women police stations could end up reinforcing gender norms and suggest gendered violence is a problem only women must contend with, relieving men of the duty.

When discussing Women Police Stations in India, it is relevant to mention that Indian law states that when various types of VAW are brought before the police, "then such information shall be recorded, as far as possible, by a women police officer" (GOI, 2013). This specifically outlines that the bureaucratic deflection of cases relating to gendered crime from standard police stations to AWPS was not an expected consequence of the intervention. AWPS are additive in nature: a victim may register the crime in the standard police station near where the crime occurred, or at the all women station in the district headquarters. There is no obligation that women must register crime at all women stations, nor that they are referred to these stations.

Section 2: Effectiveness of Women Police Stations

The scholarship surrounding the effectiveness of AWPS in India is largely conflicting, simultaneously displaying an increase in reporting while also showing little progress in actual arrests and charges (Amaral et al, 2021, Jassal, 2020, Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). This suggests

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that the stations are making some progress towards improving women's perception of and interaction with the police, but lack the autonomy or power to translate these reports into actual charges.

Jasasl (2020) has examined Harayana for the effect of women police stations using individual level crime data before and after the implementation of the policy. Harayana is known for high levels of violence against women, honor killings, and a skewed sex ratio due to female infanticide Jassal, 2020). According to survey data, 88% of women in the state express being afraid of their spouse, 10% more than the national average (Jassal, 2020). Despite this concerning context, there was no particular demand from citizens for all women police stations, and the 33% gender quota in police has not been implemented. This suggests that women in the state do not perceive the police as being a particularly helpful institution or fear their spouse to the point where they cannot take action against them. It also suggests that men in the state are more controlling of what policy changes are made and possibly opposed the women police stations. Additionally, some NGOs and feminist associations also expressed concern about such a top down effort, at the expense of hiring more policewomen to work in standard police stations (Gilmore et al. 2015).

Even though Haryana is a smaller state with most residents living near an AWPS, and over half of the population aware of their existence, access remains hindered by internal barriers like controlling husbands or family members (Jassal, 2020). In the week following the creation of all-women stations, 32% of registered VAW crimes were tackled at AWPS (Jassal, 2020). However, in aggregate terms, the total number of cases registered remained virtually identical across both weeks, with the absolute number of gendered crimes registered and investigated for each day showing no level change Jassal, 2020). Overall, all women stations did not have an impact on the count, rate, or proportion of registered crimes.

Despite no overall change in reported crimes, there was a clear drop in the absolute number of gendered crimes recorded per day and a steep decline in the rate of gendered crimes registered from standard police stations. This suggests that the caseload of gender-based violence was merely being shifted from regular police stations to AWPS, as opposed to AWPS causing more crimes to be reported. Either female victims of violence began visiting AWPS out of their own volition overnight, or they were being deflected and dismissed from standard police stations, which means the AWPS could be instantly overloaded (Jassal, 2020). The large numbers of gender-based violence tracked in Harayana and fear of domestic violence expressed by spouses could mean that the impact of WPS was low because women were unable to gather the autonomy required to access these special units, due to the fear of male backlash.

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Unlike the 32% of VAW registered at AWPS in Harayana, the numbers are lower overall in India, with gendered crimes registered at all women police stations representing just 2.7% of gendered cases in Bihar, and 1% in Uttar Pradesh. When excluding crimes related to dowry harassment or section 498-A numbers drop to 1% and 0%. These almost exactly match the ratio of women police stations to total police stations in Bihar, with their being 40 WPS and 1434 total police stations. This provides some evidence that there are simply not enough women police stations in existence today to create a tangible impact, suggesting that because there aren't enough AWPS, they do not have the manpower to support registering more crime, and certainly don't have the resources to move forward in charges and arrests due to the overwhelming volume of cases. Additionally, this suggests that gendered crimes are not handled solely by women police stations across India, and in fact, they have quite a minor impact on the registration of such cases, contrasting data from Harayana (Jassal, 2020). Similarly, Sukthankar et al (2022) also reported that police desks staged by women increase neither the likelihood that female complainants come forward to report VAW, nor arrest rates.

On the other hand, research more broadly across India suggests that women police stations record a 29% surge in recording of gender-based violence (Amaral et al. 2021). The overall result is driven by an increase in the reporting of domestic violence which records a 33.5% increase. This is thought to reflect reporting rather than incidence, as there are no changes found in femicide or in survey reported domestic violence. Female homicide tends not to be under reported, and scales with domestic violence. Had the incidence of gender-based violence been increasing due to male backlash against women police stations, an increase in violent crimes like female homicide would have been observed, but there was no impact of WPS opening on female homicide, suicide, or murders associated with love affairs (Amaral et al. 2021).

Additionally, the Demographic and Health surveys for India show that there was no increase in reported domestic violence (DHS, India, Amaral et al. 2021). Using state year variation on the module for women who mention they have been victims of intimate partner violence, which asks if they have reported the incident to police or social support organisations, lawyers, families, or others, the DHS found that victimised women are more likely to report the incident following the opening of a women police station.

Furthermore, this increase in reporting does not seem to be simply a result of increased police capacity, because the women police stations consist of women collected from pre-existing standard stations (Jassal, 2020). Additionally, increased police capacity would reduce the incidence of crime, however an increase in reported gender-based violence was found. If capacity was driving results, there would probably be increased reporting, however there was no change in reports to the police of economic crimes or non-gendered violence. This points to the

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result being driven by women police stations existence encouraging women to report, as opposed to male backlash or police capacity (Amaral et al. 2021).

When considering how perception drives the impact of effectiveness of women police stations, contrasting scholarship complicates the conclusion. Amaral et al. (2021) show that 80% of female commuters in Hyderabad feel safer when female officers are present. 73.75% believed policewomen were better able to understand the situation, another 19.73% found them to be more comfortable to approach, 4.21% thought they provided better advice, and 2.3% believed they were more likely to take action. Building on the idea that women felt safer once the costs of reporting violence fell, due to women police stations, there was also some evidence of women's labour supply increasing following WPS opening (Amaral et al. 2021).

However, Jassal and Barnhardt (2024) conducted the first nationally representative survey on policing (n=1500), which demonstrated high levels of bias against policewomen and VAW complainants. In their experiment, Jassal and Barnhardt presented a large sample from Maharashtra with video bulletins from NDTV in which the gender and caste type of an officer were manipulated, to parse out the effect of gender on officer evaluations and determine if ratings increased or decreased in the context of violence against women. The results do not indicate that policewomen are, on average, preferred to policemen, including by female respondents. In effect, female officers are less favoured when seeing tackling VAW versus non-VAW cases - an effect driven by women respondents. This undermines the notion that WPSs are premised on, which is that women favor female officers, especially in the context of tackling violence against women.

The current literature surrounding the effectiveness of women police stations is highly contrasting, with some accounts claiming they have had a negligible impact, while others contend that they have resulted in a large increase in reporting of domestic violence. These contrasts correlate to one important variable not being taken into account: the perception of policewomen by the public, the police force, and themselves. The perceived viability of these initiatives would be heavily shaded by the hope women held for their own ability to redress the violence they have faced and in a place like Harayana, infamous for gender violence, the overwhelming social stigma and daily pain endured by women would make them less hopeful, making it unlikely that they would approach women police stations. Additionally, this would also explain why policewomen have had varied impacts on women's perceived safety in an area. In areas where policewomen are portrayed and seen as strong, comforting, and approachable, there would be a marked rise in reporting of domestic violence. However, when they are seen as propagators of gender norms, dismissing of gender based violence reports, and unlikely to pursue arrests and charges, their impact would be lessened as women would be less motivated to

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approach them, as they would not believe it would result in charges or arrests, and the status quo would remain.

It would be imperative to conduct more standardised research across all states of India, using the same methodology, to be able to collect research from a variety of states. This would allow us to parse out the impact of perception and human bias, and weigh the impact of women police stations from an impartial bias. However, no policy will be successful when based on this same impartiality, as women police stations in different areas will have to take vastly different measures to portray themselves in a way that encourages victims to approach and trust in them. This increase in perception of policewomen legitimacy would also come in case of an increase in the actual impact of women police stations, for example if they were seen as more likely to result in an arrest or charge of a male perpetrator. This makes the improvement of women police stations a circular process, with their improved effectiveness increasing their perceived legitimacy and vice versa.

Section 3: Perception of women police officers

Perception of women police officers by the public

Globally, scholarship on "representative bureaucracy" suggests a dynamic of character valance advantaging women's participation in administrative jobs such as education, civil service, and policing (Andrews & Ashworth, 2015; Keiser et al., 2002; Meier and Nicholson-Crotty, 2006; Riccucci et al., 2016). For example, in the US policewomen may be preferred to policemen due to being perceived as more honest, less corrupt, trustworthy (Barnes et al., 2018; Riccucci et al., 2014), and approachable (Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006; Singer & Singer, 1985). Policewomen are associated with characteristics which imply a more legitimate police force (McCarthy, 2013), such as increased cooperation and compassion.

Seeing women carry out law and order duties could also be an empowering experience for women, as they violate stereotypical assumptions of feminine traits (Cassese & Holman, 2018).

However, these perceptions also have a flip side which suggests they are detrimental to the believed effectiveness of women in law enforcement. While character traits of affection, sympathy and sensitivity could be assets in politics (Funk et al., 2019; Hernson et al, 2003), these could be construed as a liability in more regulation-oriented agencies like law enforcement, where workers like police officers deliver obligations, associated with more "masculine" traits (Boer, 2020; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Lawless, 2004). This belief that the police force is inherently masculine could lead to policewomen being paternalistically discriminated against, where they are discriminated against to protect them from an occupation perceived as dangerous (Bindler and Hjalmarsson, 2020).

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Additionally, the police force's hypermasculine subculture could mean their way of policing, in which they provide counseling or do not proceed to arrests and charges as often, and are less likely to use force could be seen as "soft", leading people to believe they are not "real" police officers (Schuck and Rabe-Hemp, 2005).

It is also important to consider the theory of role congruity when discussing how the public perceives the tasks policewomen carry out. Role congruity predicts that policewomen are rated favorably, but only whilst engaged in certain stereotypically "gendered" tasks, like tackling VAW (Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). This means policewomen engaged in tackling VAW could be seen as an endorsement of traditional norms, reinforcing the belief of women doing "women's work" being most suitable (Beaman et al., 2012b). However, this theory is undermined in reality, with women victims frustrated with the typecasting of policewomen (Klar, 2018).

Steele (1977) argues that minorities are sometimes typecast in ways that they are frustrated by, or seek to overcome. Additionally, common identities can at times increase mistrust with citizens using ascriptive characteristics to make inferences about politicians and front lines bureaucrats like police officers, especially when groups are typecast in specific roles (Klar, 2018, Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). Seeing policewomen tackle cases of VAW could in fact be a norm that citizens reject, with the juxtaposition of policewomen with VAW or cases settled informally might affirm stereotypes about female officers as less "tough". This makes women police stations utilising informal counselling to recommend "patching up" as opposed to pursuing arrests and charges a major issue in their performance, as policing being equated with the utilisation of brute force could lead to women holding female officers to a higher standard in terms of being able to deploy "justice" against perpetrators of VAW (Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024).

The incorrect counselling given by women police officers is a major factor in their perceived, and in fact, their factual ineffectiveness. Jassal (2020) shows that women police officers at AWPS in India often encourage reconciliation with abusers at the expense of arrest of suspects, or registration of cases. The intervention is not associated with an aggregate change in registered crime, because all women police stations emphasise counselling, whereby policewomen patch up female victims with abusers (Jassal, 2020). This is mainly due to the biases held by policewomen themselves, discussed later in the paper. The policy of women police stations would only have a positive outcome if it leads to penalties for men and deters subsequent crime, which would in turn make women feel safer. However, there is no evidence of WPS opening impacting arrests (except for female kidnapping), or charge sheeting, consistent with the finding of no decrease in incidence (Jassal, 2020).

However, there was a significant and persistent increase in female employment after WPS opening, averaging at 6.5% (Jassal, 2020). Typically, when women feel safer, it's expected that

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there will be an increase in women in the labor force (Amaral et al, 2021). This suggests that women police stations didn't cause an increase in prosecutions for GBV, but still made women feel safeguarded, as seen by the increase in women employment in the labor force. This is consistent with the fear of GBV victimisation on the streets constraining women's participation at the baseline.

Police women serving in these institutions being told to prioritise informal resolution for VAW (Hautzinger, 2007; Jassal, 2021; Nelson, 1996; Santos, 2004) reinforce the perception of women taking "soft" approaches to crime. It's important to note that they are doing what they are told, making the problem less of the women working at AWPS and more regarding the policy behind them being based on broken assumptions and biases. This could subsequently be seen as policewomen giving leeway to offenders (Lizotte, 2017; Martin, 1982; McCarthy, 2013). There is no evidence that officers posted at all women stations are more likely than policemen to facilitate victims' access to the formal justice system. This suggests that victims would be dissuaded from reporting their experience to women police stations because of doubts regarding their impartiality or ability, due to the intervention being associated with an increase in reporting but no increase in arrests or charge sheeting rates.

The fact that women citizens, of who's perception of women police stations is most important, are often disheartened by the typecasting of policewomen being assigned to only gendered cases suggests that representation corresponding with distributional equity in assignments is actually detrimental to women police stations (Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024).

The impact of police culture on the perception of women police stations

Women police stations could have a detrimental impact on how the police institution as a whole handles gendered cases, by making gender-based violence seen as purely a female issue. The opening of women police stations lowers the caseload at standard stations, by justifying the deflection of gendered crimes (Jassal, 2020). While if gendered reports are deflected from general police stations to women police stations, then general stations may be better placed to handle non gendered violence, this benefit is heavily outweighed by how the deflection of cases hinders victims from speedily accessing justice. Additionally, the deflection of gendered cases to AWPSs are specifically recommended against by the law enforcing them.

The opening of women police stations may provide standard committees an excuse to disregard or ignore gender issues entirely, by enabling them to turn away victims of sexual violence by using institutions to lighten their own caseload, and improve their numbers. This implies that women police stations cause a decline in gendered crime reported at standard police stations not

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necessarily because complainants felt empowered to visit enclaves but because they were told to go there, thus making women feel dismissed and unheard by the police force as a whole.

Banerjee et al. (2021) investigated whether pre-existing reports are simply reassigned to new WPS stations. They found that police station level data for the state of Rajasthan shows presence of women police stations is associated with a small decrease in reporting of gender-based violence to mixed gender stations, but this is overwhelmed by a larger increase in reporting to WPS. Conversely, Jassal, 2020 found that in Uttar Pradesh from 2015-2017, 28% of approximately 8000 cases forwarded were to WPS. These were all examples of bureaucratic deflection, where interdistrict transfer of cases occurred not due to territory but simply because it was a gendered crime, as can be seen in case records from the area, which include justifications like "The case concerns dowry," "She mistakenly came to this station," and "The case concerns a woman" (Jassal, 2020, Uttar Pradesh Police Logs, 2015-2017).

Overall, despite contrasts in scholarship, there is convincing evidence that the opening of WPS has enabled standard police stations to deflect and turn away victims of gendered violence. This implies that the WPSs have reinforced gender norms in the police culture, making it seem like the issue of gendered violence is a burden that lies solely on the shoulders of policewomen. This, in turn, has a detrimental impact on the quality of interactions between victims at standard police stations and the policemen, with WPS causing and worsening the very problem they were created to solve. Furthermore, if policemen are led to believe that gender-based violence is seen as purely a female issue, they may weigh the violent act as less of a crime. Additionally, male police officers may feel threatened by policewomen taking positions of power, and react by limiting cooperation and frustrating the progress of cases put forward by women officers.

Another major way in which the perception by the police force, specifically the view of the male police officers, of WPS impacts their effectiveness is through the police culture. Policewomen sometimes overcompensate in an attempt to match a norm set by a hypermasculine subculture, meaning they may be particularly dismissive of complaints related to gender-based violence, (Jassal, 2020). Qualitative research shows that policewomen sometimes subscribe to rape myths of victim blaming as a result of socialisation into a masculine sub-culture to be seen as worthy by colleagues (Jassal and Barnhardt, 2024). This means that at its core, the police institution is an environment closed off to the problems of women. Women are already isolated on committees related to social welfare or women's issues, and marginalised from those related to national security or foreign policy. The creation of these enclaves perpetuates such occupational segregation (Jassal, 2020).

With respect to the police force as a whole, the creation of women police stations creates representation through separation, closing off the problem of gender-based violence from the

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mainstream police stations. While in theory this creates a safe environment for women to share their stories without the authoritative identity of men, on the ground level, excluding men from what has to be a societal change undermines and limits the scope of the initiative's impact. It is imperative that the problem of gender-based violence victims' interactions with the police is approached from all angles, not just from an angle which pushes it into a corner, away from the mainstream view.

Policewomen's perception of themselves and their jobs

Unless and until policewomen working in women police stations believe they are of value, the intervention will never truly create an impact. Research shows that women police officers often encourage reconciliation with abusers, at the expense of the arrest of suspects or registration of cases (Jassal, 2020). There is no evidence that officers posted at all women stations are more likely than policemen to facilitate victims access to the formal justice system, as they spend time counseling victims at the expense of investigation of crimes and may harbour similar biases as policemen. The intervention may not be associated with an aggregate change in registered crime because women police stations emphasise counselling, whereby policewomen choose to reconcile female victims with abusers (Jassal, 2020).

The strategy of "women handling women's problems" fails to acknowledge that policewomen and victims may have opposing interests. In fact, policewomen repeatedly underscored how they were unlikely to register cases regarding gender-based violence at WPS. The motives for this lay deeply entrenched with social stigma and gender norms in India: they believed patching up was more effective than registration, because formal action taken in these cases would embolden women to bring frivolous cases or weaken victims' social standing in community (Jassal, 2020).

Policewomen especially deter cases of marital rape, or torture from a spouse, believing such an act would protect the victim from destitution, additional violence, or retribution from her community. A driving cause for this belief could be that there is no law against marital rape in India, once again pointing to problems in the policy itself. Quotes collected from Jassal's personal interviews conducted in AWPS in India reveal that policewomen are often hesitant to register the case, saying "if the girl has no family…there's a good deal of torture going on, then we *may* register a case" (Personal interview, AWPS Varanasi, September 26, 2017). Additionally, a policewoman from Harayana noted that victims often fabricate stories, saying "In my point of view, 70% of the cases are lies…most of the cases that come from here women say, "look, I was beaten up." But that happens in everyone's house" (Jassal, 2020, Personal interview, AWPS Kaithal, January 16, 2019). These quotes point to violence being highly normalised and rationalised in the Indian environment, leading to even policewomen dismissing cases of gender-based violence as frivolous, unnecessary, and untrue.

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One major reason behind this bias is the lack of specialised gender training provided to women police officers working at these institutions. A veteran policewomen and administrator said "they are not trained counselors", pointing to the lack of training and guidelines provided, and also mentioned that "once you don a uniform, your thinking and cultural background is still the same" (Jassal, 2020, Personal interview, Meeran Borwankar (IPS), Bureau of Police Research and Development, July 20, 2017.) This is an important point to note: unless policewomen (or any police officer) go through targeted awareness building programs, it cannot be assumed that they are fit to interact with victims of GBV.

However, this requirement of training for police women has been ignored. In fact, the establishment of all women stations is an implicit acknowledgement that law enforcement can be dismissive of sexual violence, as they have realised policemen are viewed as dismissive of victims of violence against women and are thus attempting to make the police force seem more legitimate and sympathetic towards women's concerns. The intervention is based on Indian policy presuming policewomen are fairer and more empathetic towards other women (Sabha, 2012). Politicians have normatively tied representation to gains, assuming that victims will automatically trust in and be comfortable with women officers and argued that female officers are innately suited for accommodating women's complaints (Khanikar, 2016). Policymakers argue that "the presence of women in police stations would help in creating confidence and trust in the police…[policewomen] should be able to perform their special role in relation to women and children" (Vira and Krishnaswamy Reddy, 1980, 58), establishing the logic of why AWPS were set up. The Ministry of Home Affairs notes that "recruitment of women in the police forces will inevitably lead to the improvement of the image of the force and make the police station a gender sensitive place for grievance redressal and a catalyst for an improved community" (Home Secretary, 2013, Advisory Women Police: RK Singh). This view that policewomen automatically elevate the perception of police forces is also held by the Loksabha (2012, p. 25), saying "the visibility of women police would dispel negative sentiment or distrust against the police force". These assumptions are tragically far-fetched on the ground level, because without policewomen being trained to achieve these goals, they will never be achieved. The separatist strategy must acknowledge that policewomen and victims do not always have the same interests, and that policewomen are not, simply by virtue of their gender, trained counsellors in handling these sensitive cases.

Additionally, policewomen's unhappiness with the cases they are provided could also lead to a lack of motivation in their career, causing the dip in registration of cases. The Loksabha (2012, p. 25) stated that "In practice…policewomen are frequently used for 'specialised' or select tasks for which they are considered to be more suited by nature than man". In India, policewomen are disproportionately assigned cases involving domestic violence, leaving female officers could

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have few opportunities to display ability (Jassal, 2020). If female police officers are tasked with handling GBV cases, and by design, most of these do not lead to charges or arrest, their career progression is inhibited (Jassal et al, 2020). This would naturally feed back into their motivation as well as into the quality of female applicants to the police forces.

In fact, rather than improving policewomen's professionalisation, women police stations may associate them with specific roles, thereby reinforcing stereotypes that women do not have the skills to carry out tasks that are not gendered (Jassal, 2020). Female officers may be frustrated that they are associated with crimes perceived as "minor", with "women's work" often seen as a "soft" approach to policing due to the lack of usage of brute force, leading to lower job performance, with policewomen channeling their dissatisfaction regarding the separation from mainstream police work toward complainants (Jassal, 2020).

In conclusion, women police officers are often disappointed by the distributional inequity in being only assigned gendered cases. This dissatisfaction is fueled by gender norms characterising gender-based violence as a less weighted crime, compared to what is considered mainstream police work. Furthermore, this dissatisfaction and these gender norms impact the policewomen's psyche, leading to them also instilling these biases into their minds and considering their work as less valued. This directly impacts the effectiveness of women police stations, with the officers dismissing cases, or providing incorrect counselling to victims as opposed to pursuing charges or investigating an arrest.

Conclusion

First and foremost, there must be fewer downsides to ensuring representation corresponds with distributional equity in assignments, in such a way that female officials are not relegated to stereotypically gendered tasks at the expense of diverse roles within an organization. Instead of reassigning policewomen from standard police stations and sending them to WPS, policewomen must be specifically hired for this task. However, if this does not allow for a large enough police force working in WPS, women police officers reassigned to WPS deserve some sort of motivation for the switch in style of working, such as a raise.

This is only a short-term solution, however. While this will ensure that for a time period, the women working in WPS are motivated, in the background, the overarching goal of the intervention must be to change how gendered crime is viewed by society: instead of being dismissed as frivolous, or rationalising the violence, the style of thinking has to be changed to believe that gendered crimes are just as, if not more, important than mainstream police work. This can be achieved through large scale awareness programs, targeting not only the public, but also the police force, to change the hypermasculine sub-culture and remove the stereotype of

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police officers behaving in a cavalier manner towards victims of gender-based violence. Once gendered crime is viewed as a true offense under the eyes of the law and law-enforcing forces, it will naturally follow that police officers pursue charges and arrests for perpetrators more often.

Furthermore, WPSs are based on a flawed assumption that policewomen are innately suited to handling gendered tasks, reinforcing gender norms of the suitability of women doing "women's work" and making the problem of gender-based violence seem like solely a women's burden. This needs a two-pronged approach: first, it cannot be assumed that policewomen somehow know how perfectly to interact with victims of GBV. Instead, trained counsellors and psychologists must be present in all women police stations, to prevent incorrect counseling from policewomen. Additionally, training seminars must be held for any policewomen being reassigned to a standard police station, to ensure her thinking does not lead to a dismissal of victims and an undue focus placed on mediation and counseling. Instead, the basis of the work must be to not only provide a safe environment for the reporting of gender-based violence, but also a motivated focus on pursuing these cases and ensuring they result in registration of cases and arrests.

Secondly, there must also be interventions targeted towards standard police stations and male police officers to ensure they do not participate in bureaucratic deflection where they toss away gendered cases to WPS, making the victim feel unheard. Instead, they should also be trained to interact with the victims in a respectful manner, valuing their case and believing that what they have experienced is worthy of justice.

Finally, action should also be taken to improve the perception of the police force, especially WPS to the public. It is not enough to assume that only the inclusion of women in the force will lead to an improved view of the force. On the one hand, if the other initiatives are put into place, WPS will be seen as more effective, as they will be able to take gendered cases more seriously and result in more arrests being made, decreasing the incidence of gender-based violence. However, this could also be achieved by opening more WPS, as WPS may make no discernible difference until they reach a threshold density at which most victims can access a station. By opening more WPS, more victims will be aware of the initiative and be able to access help even if they are facing difficulties at home accessing aid, for example, due to controlling spouses or families. Additionally, the perception of policewomen would be improved if victims say WPS treating their cases with seriousness, and pursuing charges and arrests to truly redress the crime, instead of just "patching up" the issue.

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