

Why Women's Police Stations in India Fail to Mitigate Violence Against Women

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March 2021



This research was made possible through the Reach Alliance, a partnership between the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy and the **Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth**. Research was also funded by the Ralph and Roz Halbert Professorship of Innovation at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy. We express our gratitude and appreciation to those we met and interviewed. We are also grateful to Professor Raji Jayaraman for her mentorship through this research project.

This research was vetted and received approval from the Ethics Review Board at the University of Toronto. Research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in compliance with local public health measures.



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Executive Summary

Violence against women (VAW) is a persistent problem in India because of the country's long history of rigid gender roles that are ingrained in cultural norms. When women are subjected to VAW crimes, they are hesitant to contact the police for fear of societal retaliation, social stigma, low conviction rates and maltreatment of female victims by the predominantly male police force. To address this, women's police stations (WPSs) — staffed by only female police officers — were established. WPSs intend to provide a safe space for women to access formal legal services. They also aim to play an important role in shifting the prevalent attitudes and behaviours within both Indian women and the society at large regarding victims of VAW. Although WPSs have contributed to increased reporting rates of VAW crimes, our analysis of national surveys and statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau revealed that these strides in increased reporting rates are overshadowed by the societal and judicial context within which WPSs operate.

In their objective to reach women, WPSs have failed to make justice accessible to women of lower classes and castes. Contrary to

their motivations, WPSs exclude a significant proportion of the public, leaving women without formal avenues to manage their grievances or improve situations of violence in their homes. Even for women who access WPSs' services, the outcomes remain bleak. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 32.3 per cent of reported VAW cases in 2016 were not investigated during the year and were transferred to the following year instead.¹ In 2017, 89.6 per cent of VAW cases in the court systems were still pending adjudication at the end of year.² The sheer volume of cases overwhelms the law enforcement and judicial systems, creating an excessive backlog that persists year after year. Given the delays in police investigations and court hearings, the increases in reporting rates fail to translate into substantial increases in the court-mediated resolution of VAW cases.

The reality of this fractured system has ripple effects across Indian society. In 2015, only 3.5 per cent of women who experienced domestic violence reported seeking help from the police, which suggests an inherent distrust of the policing system. Furthermore, 35 per cent of women surveyed believed that wife beating is justified under some circumstances, which speaks to widespread endorsement of VAW in Indian culture.

1 *Crime in India, 2016* (New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2017).

2 *Crime in India, 2017* (New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2019).

To address the barriers that prevent women from accessing their services, it is imperative that WPSs consider the underpinnings of VAW as well as the broader societal and judicial context. Until then, the increase in reporting rates alone *will not* put an end to the brutality that women experience throughout the country.

Violence Against Women (VAW) in India

The European Commission defines gender-based violence (GBV) as any form of a violent act that targets individuals from a particular gender disproportionately by violating their human rights and resulting in physical, sexual, psychological and/or economic harm.³ GBV is a well-known and widespread problem in India, with violence against women (VAW) being its most prevalent form.⁴ In the Indian context, VAW is justified as a punishment for women's actions. While men are "entitled" to commit violent crimes against the women in their household,⁵ any member of the household can commit domestic VAW.⁶

A population-based study on the prevalence of domestic VAW in eastern India demonstrates the association of women's socioeconomic characteristics such as education level, residence (urban versus rural), age, occupation and family income with the occurrence of domestic violence — whether physical, psychological or sexual

violence.⁷ Women who live in rural areas typically rank at the lower hierarchical level of these socioeconomic statuses and are more vulnerable to domestic violence.

Another study about domestic violence across generations in northern India found that men with lower education levels and socioeconomic status are more likely to be violent toward their wives. The study concluded that "non-violence in the earlier generation was strongly predictive of non-violence in the second generation, in that a third of the cases of wife abuse in the second generation would have been prevented if inter-parental violence had not occurred within the earlier generation."⁸ Consequently, domestic VAW remains a persistent problem in Indian society as a result of socioeconomic characteristics and the cultural environment's input.

Although governmental and nongovernmental support services are available to victims, many women are unaware of these resources or lack knowledge about how to access them.⁹ This lack of awareness contributes to an underreporting of VAW crimes, low conviction rates and the persistence of VAW.¹⁰ Despite the low reporting rates, the Indian government is responding to the high incidence of domestic violence against women by enforcing laws and opening institutions that offer legal support to victims.

The federal Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 aimed to provide legal

3 "What Is Gender-based Violence?" European Commission, 2020. [↗](#)

4 George Joseph, Syed Usman Javaid, Luis Alberto Andres, Gnanaraj Chellaraj, Jennifer L. Solotaroff, and S. Irudaya Rajan, "Underreporting of Gender-Based Violence in Kerala, India: An Application of the List Randomization Method," Policy Research Working Paper no. 8044 (2017): 1–33. [↗](#)

5 International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), *Men, Masculinity and Domestic Violence in India: Summary Report of Four Studies* (ICRW and USAID, 2002). [↗](#)

6 Bontha V. Babu and Shantanu K. Kar, "Domestic Violence Against Women in Eastern India: A Population-Based Study on Prevalence and Related Issues," *BMC Public Health* 9, no. 1 (2009): 1–15. [↗](#)

7 Ibid.

8 Sandra L. Martin, Kathryn E. Moracco, Julian Garro, et al., "Domestic Violence Across Generations: Findings From Northern India," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 31, no. 3 (2002): 569.

9 "India: Violence Against Women, Including Domestic Violence, Homelessness, Workplace Violence; Information on Legislation, State Protection, Services, and Legal Recourse Available to Women Who Are Victims of Violence (2013 – April 2015)," Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (European Country of Origin Information Network, 2015). [↗](#)

10 B.L. Himabindu, Radhika Arora, and N.S. Prashanth, "Whose Problem Is It Anyway? Crimes Against Women in India," *Global Health Action* 7, no. 1 (2014): 23718. [↗](#)

protection to married women, female live-in partners or any female relative in a household from violence committed by the husband, male live-in partner or their relatives.¹¹ The government also designed various intervention programs to tackle VAW. This included opening women-run police stations (WPSs) in all states and recruiting “women help desks” in conventional police stations. These projects intended to increase the reporting rate of VAW crimes by minimizing the time the police force spends responding to them. Because they provide a female-friendly environment and female officers who are trained and equipped with the skills to deal with VAW crimes, WPSs

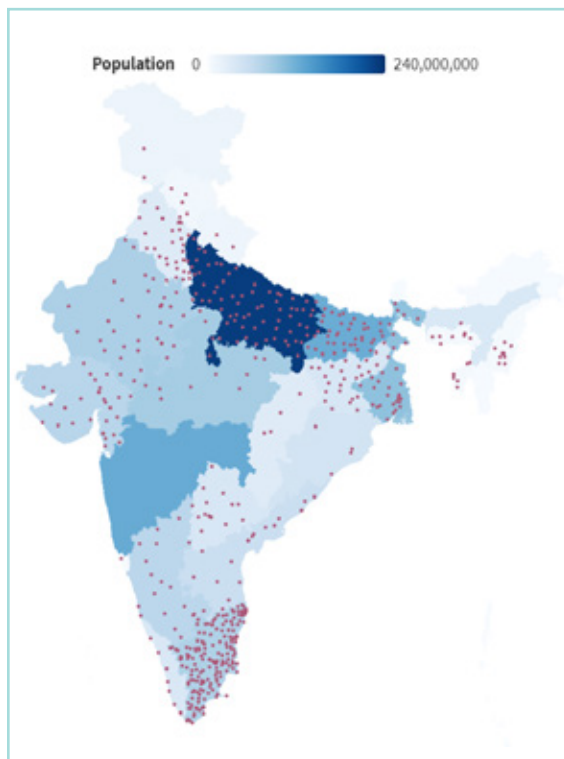


Figure 1. Distribution of WPSs across India.
 Note: each red dot represents one WPS in its respective state.

are thought to be more approachable for female victims. From the numerous initiatives that have been designed to address the widespread persistence of VAW, WPSs’ longevity and successes are outstanding for their contribution to putting an end to VAW in India.

The Intervention: Women’s Police Stations

Male officers dominate the police force in India. The profession was historically seen as a masculine field — women were thought to be incapable of properly carrying out police duties.¹² The need for female police officers arose when police stations increasingly dealt with female and juvenile offenders.¹³ The rationale behind establishing WPSs was primarily to provide a safe space for women to access police services. When women are subjected to gender-based crimes, they are hesitant to contact the police for fear of retaliation, social stigma, inadequate conviction rates and maltreatment by male police officers.¹⁴ WPSs create a safe space where victims can report without judgment and develop trust in the justice system. This can, in turn, be translated into increased reporting rates for VAW crimes. Seeing women in charge of police stations and investigating potential crimes that most affect women reinforces positive attitudinal shifts toward women in the society at large.

The government of Kerala established the first WPS in Kozhikode in 1973 to address the different crimes committed against women. Tamil Nadu currently boasts the greatest number of WPSs, the first of which was established in 1992.¹⁵ Initially, WPSs mainly handled road traffic and assisted the policemen in the search, interrogation and escort of female offenders.

11 “India: Violence Against Women.”

12 V. Rajeswari and A. Alagumalai, “The Origin Role of Women Police in India,” *Shanlax International Journal of Management* 5, no. 1 (2017): 10–13. [↗](#)

13 Ibid.

14 Sofia Amaral, Sonia Bhalotra and Nishith Prakash, “Gender, Crime and Punishment: Evidence from Women Police Stations in India,” Boston University Department of Economics, The Institute for Economic Development Working Papers Series (2019): 1–63. [↗](#)

15 Rajeswari and Alagumalai, “The Origin Role of Women Police in India.”

Since then, they have been implemented in many other Indian states, with their functions and roles evolving over the years. These stations handle fewer duties than traditional police stations. WPSs mostly handle registration and investigation of all dowry-related cases as well as crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that involve women. WPSs provide guards and escorts for female prisoners, make inquiries into all petitions referred by or on behalf of women, trace runaway female children and provide counselling in domestic disputes.¹⁶

Violence associated with dowry is a major problem that affects many women's lives in India.¹⁷ Endowments including money, property and expensive goods are gifted by the bride's family to the groom's family during the marriage. This dowry conveys critical symbolic weight, implying the family's status and the value of the woman's looks and education status. But dowries also

commodify women, comparing their value as individuals to the value of the dowry. Dowry-related cases are instigated when the groom or his family demand more, or continuous dowry payment and the bride's family cannot or are reluctant to make such payment. As a result, the brides are at risk of getting blackmailed by their new in-laws starving them, denying them clothing, evicting and bogusly detaining them.¹⁸ They are also subject to physical violence, marital rape, acid attacks and murder.

WPSs have attempted to increase the reporting rate in response to the rising rate of VAW crimes by providing a female-only, stigma-free and friendly environment. All-women police staffing in these stations encourages other women to use these facilities, improving the quality and quantity of WPS.¹⁹ Because of the high prevalence of VAW crimes, WPSs play a vital role in supporting female victims of violence.

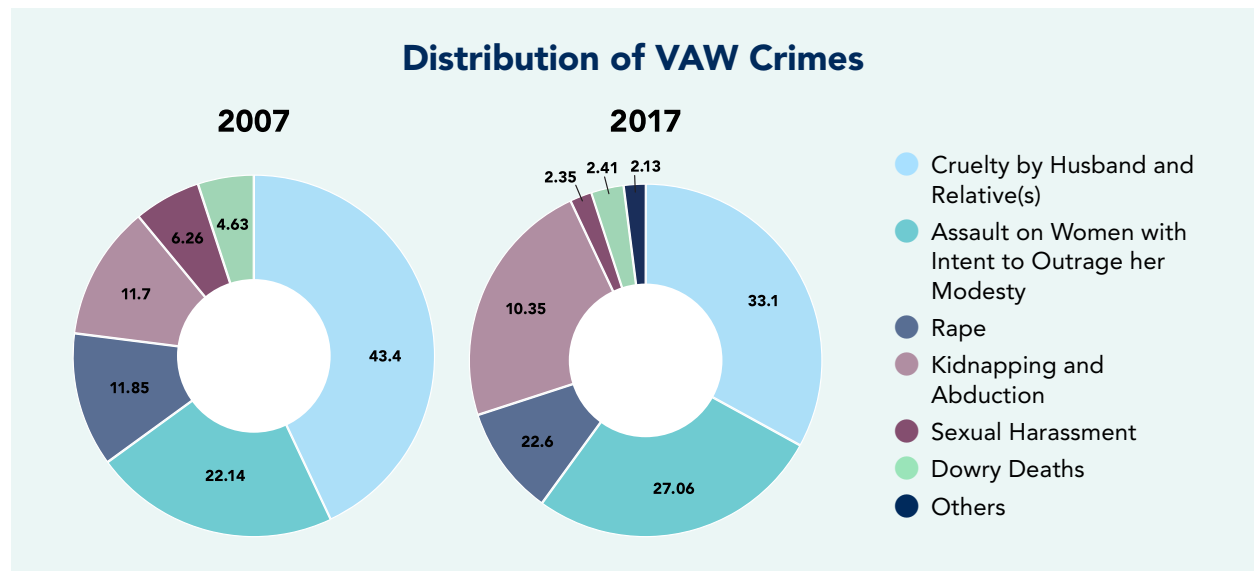


Figure 2. The distribution of VAW crimes has remained similar between 2007 and 2017, with over half the crimes involving cruelty by husband and relative(s) and assault with intent to outrage women's modesty. *Source:* National Crime Records Bureau

16 P. Varatha Pandian, "Organization of the Police Department with Reference to Tamil Nadu," PhD diss., Madurai Kamraj University, 2011, chapter 8.

17 Sadia Gondal, "The Dowry System in India: Problem of Dowry Deaths," *Journal of Indian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 37–41.

18 Varsha Ramakrishnan, "A Broken Promise: Dowry Violence in India," *Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Magazine*, 2013. [↗](#)

19 Amaral, Bhalotra and Prakash, "Gender, Crime and Punishment: Evidence from Women Police Stations in India."

WPSs' Case Load and Management

WPSs handle cases directed specifically against women. The persistence of VAW crimes is likely rooted in the social hierarchy that views women as being inferior to men. Of the VAW crimes reported in 2007 and 2017, the majority consisted of cruelty by husband and relatives, assault with intent to outrage women's modesty and dowry deaths.²⁰ These crimes are governed by sections under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and are categorized separately from crimes that fall under Special and Local Laws (SLL).²¹ VAW crimes categorized under SLL include trafficking, dowry crimes, cyber-crimes, rape of female children and child pornography.

Following IPC and SLL crime complaints, the female police officers attempt to initiate a

resolution, which typically entails facilitating negotiations among the conflicted parties. The police schedule a time for the accuser and accused parties to be present. In the absence of the accused party, the police retain the right to arrest them. If reconciliation is not reached through negotiation, the parties are either referred to another jurisdiction or other solutions are recommended, which may include temporary or permanent separation, criminal charge(s) and/or case withdrawal.²²

To handle domestic violence cases specifically, WPSs use one of two primary methods: filing either a First Information Report (FIR) or a Community Service Register (CSR).²³ If the cases are serious, typically in instances of suspected dowry deaths and/or murders, an FIR is filed.

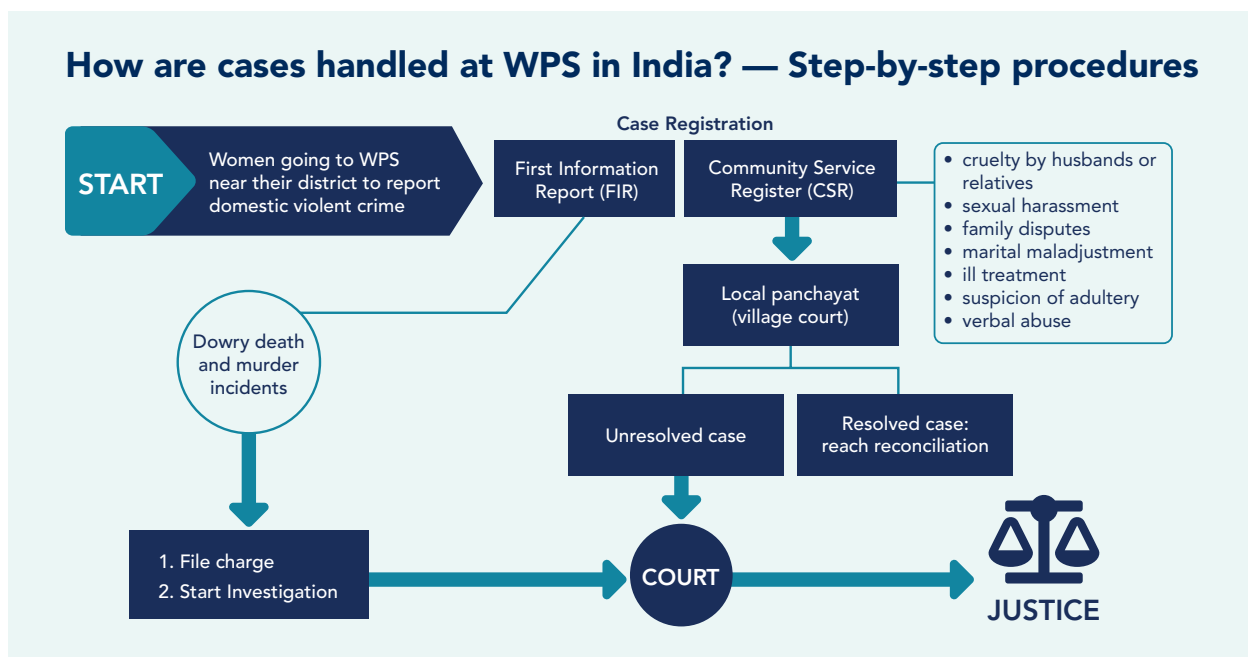


Figure 3. This flow chart illustrates a step-by-step procedure that shows how cases are handled in the women's police stations. It briefly shows the types of crimes and how each type will be treated in WPSs.²⁴

20 *Crime in India, 2007* (New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2008); *Crime in India, 2017*.

21 *Crime in India, 2017*.

22 Mangai Natarajan, "Women Police Stations As a Dispute Processing System: The Tamil Nadu Experience in Dealing with Dowry-Related Domestic Violence Cases," *Women and Criminal Justice* 16, no. 1–2 (2005): 87–106. [↗](#)

23 Sessa Kethineni and Murugesan Srinivasan, "Police Handling of Domestic Violence Cases in Tamil Nadu, India," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 25, no. 2 (2009): 202–13. [↗](#)

24 Source: Ibid.

These reports enable the police to press charges and launch an investigation. However, other charges such as cruelty by husbands or relatives, sexual harassment, family disputes, marital maladjustment, ill-treatment, suspicion of adultery and verbal abuse are filed under the CSR. These cases reach reconciliation through the local panchayat (village court consisting of respected members of the community). If a resolution is not attained through a CSR, the cases are forwarded to the courts.

VAW Crime Reporting, Police Investigations and Court Outcomes

The reporting rate of violence-against-women (VAW) crimes has been steadily increasing since 2001. National reporting rates have nearly doubled between 2002 (14 crimes reported per 100,000 residents) and 2017 (27.6 crimes reported per 100,000 residents).²⁵ Although it is difficult to correlate national trends in reporting rates with the rise in prevalence of women’s police stations (WPSs) within specific regions, there is some evidence to demonstrate that locales with WPSs boast greater VAW crime reporting rates. To this end, Amaral, Bhalotra and Prakash have demonstrated a causal link between reporting rates and WPSs, showing a 22 per cent increase in the reporting of some VAW crimes (like female kidnappings and domestic violence) in cities that had instituted WPSs compared to cities that had none. The study attributed the increase in reporting rates to women’s greater willingness to report crimes to WPSs.²⁶

In increasing reporting rates for VAW crimes, WPSs have accomplished a laudable goal. However, the reporting of a crime constitutes

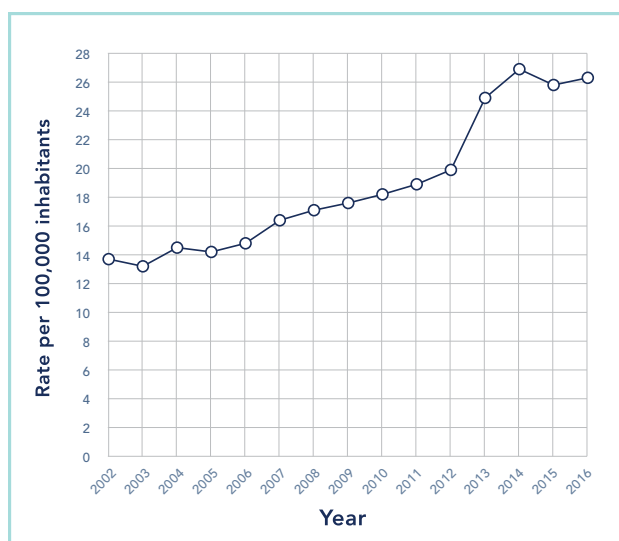


Figure 4. Reporting Rates for VAW Crimes

only the first step in what could be a lengthy process in achieving justice. Because there is a lack of studies on the matter, it is difficult to know whether the WPS-mediated increase in reporting rates is actually followed by a consequent increase in investigations launched into VAW crimes. Even assuming that greater numbers of investigations were undertaken, the backlog of cases within the Indian policing systems impedes timely investigation for the registered reports. Over a quarter of Indian Penal Code (IPC) cases were pending police investigation at the end of 2016. Of VAW cases within these IPC cases, an even larger proportion — 32.3 per cent — of reported cases had not been investigated by the end of the year.²⁷

In cases where criminal investigations were conducted, one of two outcomes typically resulted: either the perpetrator(s) were identified and charged for the crimes, or a final report was compiled explaining the reasons behind no charges being laid. Typical reasons for filing final reports in 2017 included finding mistakes of fact or of law or civil dispute (34.7 per cent

25 *Crime in India, 2001* (New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2003); *Crime in India, 2017*.

26 Amaral, Bhalotra and Prakash, “Gender, Crime and Punishment: Evidence from Women Police Stations in India.”

27 *Crime in India, 2016*.

of cases) or finding insufficient evidence to lay charges (31.7 per cent of cases). At the end of 2017, an average of 85 per cent of VAW cases investigated by police resulted in suspect(s) being charged.²⁸ Although this statistic encompasses conventional police stations as well as WPSs, it indicates a significant likelihood of perpetrators being identified and charged in VAW crimes.

The cases when perpetrators were charged were later adjudicated in court, either through a trial or through nontrial means. Only about 1.63 per cent of all cases at court were resolved through nontrial means in 2017, which included cases that were abated by the court, withdrawn by the prosecution, deemed to be compromised or resolved through plea bargaining. The majority of cases addressed by the courts were resolved through a trial. However, for the cases that reached this stage, the likelihood that they would be sent to trial in a timely manner is low, largely due to the backlog of cases waiting to be addressed from previous years. For instance, 80.8 per cent of IPC VAW cases at the end of 2016 were pending trial from previous years; 89.6 per cent of IPC VAW cases were pending trial at the end of 2017.²⁹

Although preliminary evidence suggests that WPSs increase reporting rates of VAW crimes, their ability to provide timely justice to victims is constrained by the volume of backlogged cases in the policing and judicial systems.

Gender Equity and a Culture Shift

Although initial reporting is one of the many components involved in the prosecution and deterrence of crimes, it also contributes to a cultural shift toward attaining gender equality. However, any potential improvements in crime outcomes because of an increase in reporting is

lessened by dysfunction in other realms within social and cultural hierarchies.

Despite the fact that the first WPS was formed almost 50 years ago, many of the same gender inequities rampant in the 1970s persist in India today. The true test of a cultural and societal transformation is the lived experience of women: a true culture shift would mean that women have the same expectations for how other women are treated as they do for themselves. Women's responses to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) paint a stark picture of women's reality in India — the social stigmas that reinforce gender inequity continue today in homes and across communities.

To explore the nature of these social stigmas, we analyzed questions in the survey to identify whether differences exist across castes, social class and geographical location. The questions focus on women's lived experience within the context of seeking help, which provides insight into the factors involved in the increasing reporting rate. They also explore women's lived experience at home, which provides context about the factors that might play a role in their decision on whether, and to whom, they report the injustices they face, as well as the difference between their expectations for themselves and for other women, which may indicate how gender inequities have been internalized.

Does increased reporting rates of VAW crimes signal that women feel comfortable seeking help when they experience physical and sexual violence?

Despite an observed increase in reporting, the responses to the NFHS in 2015–2016 show that across demographic groups, over 70 per cent of women never seek help or tell anyone about the violence that they experience.³⁰

28 *Crime in India, 2017.*

29 *Crime in India, 2016; Crime in India, 2017.*

30 "National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015–16" (Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF, 2017).

Are women seeking help from the police?

Even women who seek help do not necessarily turn to the police. According to current survey data, only 3.5 per cent of women who experience domestic violence approach the police seeking help.³¹ Although WPSs emerged to resolve the concern that women would not feel comfortable approaching male officers at traditional police stations, most victims are still not approaching WPSs staffed exclusively by female officers.

Why are so many women who experience violence not seeking help from the police?

Women don't trust the police to take the steps necessary to protect them and prosecute the crime appropriately. Although there are several factors that affect one's decision to seek help, a dominant factor is maintaining trust in the people and/or institutions with sensitive information. According to IHDS, in 2011–2012 no more than a third of households had "a great deal of confidence" in the police to enforce the law — across all castes.³² While a lack of confidence in the police is consistent across the country, these sentiments are the strongest among the Scheduled Tribes and Castes who, throughout Indian history, have been some of the most marginalized communities.

What is the power dynamic at home?

Most women do not seek help or even tell anyone when they experience physical or sexual violence. One explanation for their reluctance may involve their lived experiences at home. In both the NFHS and the IHDS, women were asked about autonomy in their decision-making process and about power within their household and in their community. Since decision making is involved in maintaining specific power dynamics, a cultural shift would show a move toward equality in the responses to these questions.

WPSs and other crime-deterrence mechanisms might have a secondary impact on shifting these cultural elements.

In the IHDS, 70 to 80 per cent of women across income quintiles, geographic areas and education levels report that they have a final say in making decisions for themselves.³³ Those who feel they have the least control are in the lowest income quintile, live in a rural setting and have the lowest educational attainment.

While experiences are similar across women's demographic positions, when assessing WPSs' efficacy it is important to consider distinct groups of women. Almost three quarters of women feel they have autonomy in their home. However, what women say about their position in their homes is not necessarily a sign of what they feel about women's position in society as a whole. Exploring perceptions and belief systems around how other women are treated is an equally important indicator in understanding the social and cultural reality that contribute to both equitable power dynamics and VAW crimes.

What is the difference between what women believe for themselves and what they believe about others?

While the responses to questions about individual power dynamics and decision making are promising, the responses to questions about social norms regarding other women are bleak. When asked whether wife beating is justified, at least 35 per cent of women, regardless of income bracket, agreed that there is at least one specific reason that would warrant beating.³⁴ If more than one-third of women feel this way about themselves and others in the community, they have little reason, when experiencing domestic-based violence or another violent act, to seek help from any source, and certainly not the police.

31 Ibid.

32 Sonalde Desai and Reeve Vanneman, "India Human Development Survey-II (IHDS-II), 2011–12," *Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research*, 8 August 2018. [↗](#)

33 Ibid.

34 "National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015–16."

Moving Forward

If women's police stations (WPSs) wish to effectively mitigate the effects of violence against women, they need to reach the most vulnerable women. This need is particularly urgent if WPS services are to provide justice to women who have long been excluded from it. However, the identification of a *need* does not translate into its immediate *reach*. Translating need to reach is an active process that needs to be in line with community desires.

If WPSs are to reach the most vulnerable women, we must ask who these women are and what intersectional inequalities ground their existence. Research tells us that poor, lower-caste and rural women face violence not only because of their gender but also over, across and through multiple forms of oppression.

Have WPSs been able to reach the country's hardest-to-reach women? The glaring reality is that on a broad scale, over 70 per cent of women do not seek help from legal infrastructure when it comes to the domestic violence they live through. Within this scale, WPSs have been able to reach rural women, but not lower-caste, racialized and/or poor women who face different institutional barriers that prevent them from accessing legal redress.

Given the geographic spacing of WPSs and their implementation in almost every state in India, the disparities between urban and rural women are not easily explainable by geographic location alone. Here, we recognize that socio-spatial divides exist. Across the world, urban residents have a greater "right to the city," including greater access to the city's services such as legal infrastructure. Their rural counterparts hold rights to the city too, but the extent of these rights both in regional demarcation, and physical, social and economic access is far from equal.

Inequalities between people's right to the city and its services are only further exacerbated

when variables like class, caste and gender oppression come into play (and they are always at play, even if not explicitly). WPSs have been able to bridge the rural versus urban divide solely within a geographical context. Rural counties and areas have been equipped with WPSs, but geographical access (as a sole variable) has not been an issue in WPSs' reach as much as social, political and economic variables have. For instance, in a small neighborhood, a WPS may be situated in the middle or the "hub" of the locale. In such areas, where rural culture is generally more conservative than urban, and where community bonds are amalgamated in social visibility, a woman may see, walk past and be in close proximity to a WPS, but social and cultural barriers, such as the repercussions of "what if they tell my parents?" or "what would the neighbours think of me?" produce certain (understandable) obstacles. These hurdles are invisible to the naked eye, even though the realities of these barriers are heavy and explicit.

A woman might walk up to a WPS and still not go in because she knows she does not have the money to afford legal fees. Likewise, women may hesitate to use WPS services because of their fear about facing negative social perceptions of them coming forward about domestic and/or sexual assault. For instance, because lower-class Dalit women are viewed in derogatory ways, characterized as the "untouchables" and "dirty," many women from this caste are not believed when they report cases to WPS services. While such barriers are not easily measurable, they heavily shape access and decision making, and have power-laced implications for the multiple systems of oppression in women's daily lives. While it is easy for WPSs to address the geographic differences women may hold, they do little to address how those differences intertwine with other variables that present their own unique set of challenges to access justice.

While WPSs operate as an overarching system to end violence against women, they ignore how they are just one spoke in a wheel that

turns through women's lives. Having a woman police officer fill out the first information report (FIR) does not negate the multiple other discriminations the officer may hold, especially when it comes to violence against Dalit, poor rural women. Discrimination does not occur solely because of gender or sex, but often includes multiple other oppressions, providing an apt explanation for why only 3.5 per cent of women go to the police when seeking justice for domestic violence.

Criminal justice systems themselves often perpetrate violence. Both individual officers and the broader institutional legal structure perpetuate the status quo of violence against women. WPSs must address these multiple forms of difference if they are to reach (and not criminalize) the women who need their services the most.

Evidence clearly suggests that WPSs have not reached a majority of the women who need their services. The lack of reach ranges from visible problems such as geographic barriers and poor operations, to invisible power dynamics such as warped gender norms, cultural dynamics and other forms of domination that intermingle with gender such as class, caste and religion. This lack of reach occurs on a structural level because when violence occurs, WPSs put a metaphorical band-aid on the consequences and after-effects of violence. However, band-aids do not deter violence. The judicial process is not prepared to handle reported cases and provide justice to survivors, and strengthening the criminal justice system (which often criminalizes women who

use it) does not reach women who experience violence in racialized, gendered, classed and caste forms, and instead further exacerbates violence against them.

There are engrained patriarchal, ethnic-racial, religious and class hierarchies that grant mostly men permission to commit acts of violence. To end violence against women, we must unearth and challenge misogynist structures. This requires a systematic interrogation that WPSs have not yet done (and may never be able to do).

Lessons Learned

Although women's police stations (WPSs) have been successful in increasing reporting rates, India's criminal justice system has failed in substantially improving conditions for women. The backlog in the policing and court systems overshadows the strides made by WPSs in increasing reporting rates, since the majority of crimes that are reported fail to be investigated or resolved in a timely manner. The lack of trust in the Indian justice system and the societal attitudes toward violence against women worsens attempts to shift to a more gender-equitable future. Until WPSs' operations adapt to the realities of the larger justice system and societal underpinnings of gender-based violence, their goal of creating a safe space for women to come forward in reporting crime will remain unaccomplished.

Research Team

Kanishka Sikri is a post-de-colonial feminist writer, formally trained as an international development specialist from the Centre for Critical Development Studies at the University of Toronto. Her creative work aims to unsettle the slow making of raced-sexed-gendered violence as a mundane language of our dominator culture in order to imagine pluriverse worlds without its genocidal bounds.



Ayushi Thakur has a Master of Science degree in immunology from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. Her graduate research assessed the interplay between gut microbiota, antibody production and autoimmunity. She also holds a Bachelor of Science degree in human biology from the University of Toronto, where her research spanned rodent social behaviour, tumour biology and autoimmune conditions. Ayushi mooted competitively throughout her undergraduate career and enjoys applying critical thinking skills to legal and policy issues.



Betelhem Araya Tadele is a MasterCard scholar from Ethiopia, pursuing her Bachelor of Science degree in cell and molecular biology and global health at the University of Toronto. She wants to pursue her career in public health and global health research, especially in the development and implementation of programs that improve the marginalized and resource-scarce population's healthcare system. She interned at the Toronto Centre of Learning and Development as an assistant and program facilitator for the Immigrant Women Integration Program. She was also part of the International Course Module for Global Health Research 2020, focusing on organizations working in Athens to resolve the refugee crisis and its effects on food security and the nutritional health of refugees. She is currently interning at the World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA) as an assistant in the strategic partnerships and resource mobilization department.



Daniel Cowen has an MBA from the Rotman School of Management. He is a principal at In Nova Consulting, where he enables impactful practices across organizational contexts that help organizations develop a more equitable, inclusive culture within their systems, structures and strategies. As the deputy director of economic inclusion for the largest regional chamber of commerce in New York, he implemented initiatives that helped the organization's business membership identify and act on opportunities and barriers to creating a more diverse and inclusive culture. He also leads evaluation and resource development for the Build from Within Alliance.



Raji Jayaraman (faculty mentor) is associate professor of economics at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, with a cross-appointment in the Department of Economics at the University of Toronto. Her research in development and labour economics examines the role of incentives and social preferences on the decisions and performance of students, workers and consumers. Much of her empirical work in development has focused on India, with an emphasis on the welfare of women and children. Her work has been published in top economics journals including the *American Economic Review* and the *Journal of Political Economy*. In addition to academic research, Raji is actively involved in public discussions on Indian economic policy.



The Reach Alliance began in 2015 at the University of Toronto as the Reach Project, a student-led, faculty-mentored multidisciplinary research initiative. Reach's unique approach uncovers how and why certain programs are successful in serving the world's hardest-to-reach populations. Research teams, composed of top students and faculty from across disciplines, spend twelve months investigating each case study. Once the data collection process is complete, teams write case reports that are published and disseminated across the Reach Alliance's diverse network of policymakers, practitioners, academics and business leaders.

Inspired by the United Nations' call to eliminate global poverty by 2030 as part of a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our mission is to pursue the full achievement of the SDGs by equipping and empowering the next generation of global leaders to create knowledge and inspire action on reaching the hardest to reach.

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Published by the Reach Alliance, March 2021
Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy | University of Toronto

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