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## WOMEN POLICE STATIONS AS CATALYSTS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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### Abstract

Women's Police Stations (WPS) have emerged as transformative institutions aimed at advancing gender equality and combatting gender-based violence. This systematic review critically examines a comprehensive body of research on WPS and their role in addressing gender violence and empowering women. Through a thematic analysis of 22 studies conducted across diverse global contexts, this review identifies recurring themes, highlights pivotal findings, and uncovers critical research gaps. The studies collectively underscore WPS's significance in empowering victims, challenging patriarchal norms, and reshaping policing practices.

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## 1. Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) is a deeply entrenched and global issue that transcends cultural, social, and economic boundaries, perpetuating physical, sexual, and psychological harm that undermines women's well-being and societal advancement. Despite its widespread repercussions, VAW often remains unreported due to cultural norms, fear of repercussions, and societal acquiescence. In India, this issue is particularly pressing, given deeply ingrained gender norms and a distressingly high incidence of violence. Evidential data underscores the gravity of the problem, with studies by Duvvury et al. [11] and Aizer [1] revealing that nearly one in three women globally experiences intimate partner violence. Within India, the overwhelming prevalence of gender-based violence is compounded by underreporting owing to societal pressures, stigma, and a lack of trust in the justice system [5], [4]. Addressing

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VAW is not only essential for the well-being of individual victims but also pivotal for fostering gender equality and social justice.

Women's Police Stations (WPS) have emerged as a specialized and transformative response to the multifaceted challenges posed by violence against women. These specialized units were conceptualized to provide women with safe havens for reporting crimes devoid of fear of reprisal or judgment. Originating in Latin America in the 1980s, Brazil pioneered the establishment of specialized police stations known as Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento das Mulheres (DEAMs) in 1985. The success of DEAMs spurred the adoption of similar models in various countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Ghana, and India [25].

While WPS have garnered public support for empowering victims and cultivating gender-sensitive environments, scholarly discourse has raised pertinent queries regarding their effectiveness [22]. Acknowledging their importance in addressing gender-based violence and ensuring access to justice for women, the United Nations has endorsed these units. In India, the inception of WPS dates back to 1992, with the establishment of the first unit in Tamil Nadu [20]. These units were strategically designed to tackle crimes against women, encompassing issues like domestic violence and dowry disputes, which are prevalent in Indian society. Research suggests that the establishment of WPS contributes to an escalation in the reporting of violence against women, potentially discouraging such crimes and enhancing female employment [22].

This literature review sets out to comprehensively scrutinize the role and influence of Women's Police Stations in tackling gender-based violence, fostering women's empowerment, and reshaping societal attitudes. By subjecting a diverse range of studies to critical examination, both qualitative and quantitative, the review offers illumination into the multifaceted dimensions of WPS and their latent capacity to incite transformative change within law enforcement paradigms.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology underpinning this literature review involved a meticulously executed systematic search across scholarly databases, aimed at identifying pertinent studies concerning women's police stations and their pivotal role in countering gender-based violence. The process of data extraction encompassed crucial aspects such as authors, year of publication, research aims, employed methodology, principal findings, and concluding insights. The analytical dimension of the extracted data was executed through the rigorous application of a thematic analysis approach. This approach, constituting the crux of the systematic review, is predicated upon the systematic examination of findings emanating from 22 distinct studies, undertaken between 2004 and 2022. By effectively weaving together an array of diverse studies, this review contributes substantively to the deepening of insights within the realm of women's police stations and their transformative impact on gender-based violence mitigation.

**Justification:** Women's police stations and women-led policing have gained prominence as strategies to address gender-based violence and promote gender equality within law enforcement. However, the existing literature remains dispersed across various studies and geographical contexts. This systematic review aims to provide a consolidated overview of the

research landscape, highlighting trends, identifying gaps, and synthesizing key findings. By doing so, it offers valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to advance gender-sensitive policing and improve the effectiveness of women's police stations.

## **Institutional Dynamics and Effectiveness of Women Police Stations**

**Amaral et al.** [4] in their study investigated the impact of establishing women police stations (WPS) on the reporting of gender-based violence in India. Leveraging administrative crime data and the staggered implementation of WPS across Indian cities, the study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of this policy initiative. The study reveals a significant 29 per cent increase in police reports of crimes against women following the opening of WPS. This effect is primarily driven by an uptick in reports of domestic violence cases. Interestingly, the surge in reporting of gender-based violence does not seem to correspond to an actual increase in the incidence of such crimes. The study finds no statistically significant changes in femicide rates or in survey-reported domestic violence cases.

**Amaral et al.** [2,3] provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the expansion of 'all women police stations' in India on reported crimes against women and the overall deterrence effect on crime. These studies offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of gender-based violence reporting and its interaction with the criminal justice system. Both studies consistently find that the establishment of women police stations led to a substantial increase in reported crimes against women, with a notable 22 per cent increase. The research suggests that the reported increase in crimes against women is driven by a greater willingness of women to report these crimes, likely due to the increased presence of female police officers in women police stations.

**Carrington et al.** [8] provide a thought-provoking examination of how gender-based violence is addressed in different countries and offer a compelling case for the establishment of women-led police stations as a more effective response to this issue. The study emphasizes the need to shift from a punitive approach towards a preventative, victim-centred model of policing. The paper acknowledges that criminalizing domestic violence in countries like Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom was seen as a milestone in acknowledging state responsibility for addressing violence against women. The authors draw inspiration from Latin America's innovative approach, particularly women-led police stations established in Argentina during the 1980s. Women-led police stations, staffed by multi-disciplinary teams comprising police, social workers, psychologists, and lawyers, prioritize offering survivors a gateway to support and recovery rather than funnelling them into the criminal justice system.

**Carrington et al.**[7] present a groundbreaking study that explores the exceptional role of Women's Police Stations in combatting gender-based violence. Focusing on the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the article sheds light on how Women's Police Stations empower women, enhance their access to justice, and act as a preventive force against gender violence. The research is significant as it addresses a gap in knowledge regarding this multidisciplinary policing model. The authors' comprehensive analysis highlights the unique features of Women's Police Stations, such as their 365-day emergency response service, specialized training, and a holistic approach involving social workers, lawyers, psychologists, and police

officers. A crucial aspect emphasized in this study is the profound impact of Women's Police Stations in increasing women's willingness to report gender violence incidents, thereby broadening their access to support services and justice—a point corroborated by prior reviews.

**Córdova and Kras[9]** contribute to the literature on public opinion and policy feedback effects by examining how the presence of Women's Police Stations in Brazilian municipalities influences citizens' attitudes toward gender-based violence. This study provides a fresh perspective on the impact of local policies on societal attitudes, particularly focusing on men's attitudes towards violence against women. The research convincingly argues that the existence of WPS is associated with a greater condemnation of VAW among men in municipalities where these stations have been operating for an extended period. Importantly, the findings are robust, ruling out potential biases, and highlight a correlation between improved attitudes toward VAW and reduced rates of intimate partner violence. This article makes a valuable contribution to the field by highlighting the potential of WPS not only in providing support to survivors but also in shaping societal attitudes, thereby advocating for the importance of local policies in preventing VAW.

**França et al. [12]** in their research explore the intriguing question of whether the existence of Women's Police Stations (DEAM) increases the costs associated with committing intimate partner violence (IPV). The study utilizes data from the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN) of the Ministry of Health, spanning the years 2010 to 2019, employing a fixed-effect model for analysis. The results suggest a complex relationship between the distance to the nearest women's police station and the reporting of IPV incidents. Specifically, the findings indicate that the further away a woman resides from the police station, the fewer complaints are made, potentially suggesting that the aggressors may be less likely to face legal consequences for their actions. However, when municipalities are divided into those with DEAM and those without, a fascinating contrast emerges. Women living in municipalities with DEAM report more incidents compared to those who also live at a considerable distance but must travel long distances for support.

**Jassal's study [13]** examines the concept of gender-based "enclaves" in law enforcement, specifically focusing on all-female police stations in India. The research seeks to understand whether group-specific institutions like these facilitate women's access to justice and how they impact female officers in law enforcement. The analysis is based on Indian police reports and leverages the opening of all-women police stations in Haryana state to estimate their causal effect. The findings challenge conventional assumptions. Rather than increasing registered crime, the creation of enclaves in law enforcement appears to have nuanced consequences. The study suggests that these institutions might lead to a lower caseload at standard police stations by justifying the deflection of gendered crimes. This potentially reduces responsibilities for policewomen and increases travel costs for victims seeking redress. Furthermore, the study highlights that the existence of all-women police stations may formalize the "counseling" of victims, encouraging reconciliation with abusers at the expense of arrest. Survey evidence also raises questions about whether these stations are associated with positive perceptions of policewomen.

**Jubb's research article [14]** provides a comprehensive overview of Women's Police Stations (WPS) in Latin America, focusing on their role in addressing domestic and sexual violence against women. Since the inception of the first WPS in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1985, their numbers have significantly increased across the region, with notable presence in countries like Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru. The article highlights the primary purpose of WPS, which is to offer specialized services to women survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Importantly, it recognizes the diversity of models and approaches among these stations. The study concludes that WPS have emerged as crucial entry points for women seeking access to the justice system and specialized services. They serve as safe spaces for survivors to report incidents and seek assistance, contributing significantly to addressing violence against women.

**Kakati [15]** conducts a case study of the All-Women Police Station in Panbazar, Assam, the sole women police station in the region. The study sheds light on the complex realities faced by women police officers in the workplace, despite being theoretically regarded as equals within the police force. These challenges and barriers to their advancement are assessed and analyzed. One notable finding of the study is the significant increase in the number of registered cases in the Panbazar women police station. This increase may be attributed to rising crime against women and children or heightened awareness among women about their rights. The research aims to scrutinize the intricate relationship between women, gender roles, and the police, providing insights into the dynamics of gender within law enforcement.

**Kumar [16]** investigates the structural and functional aspects of the Indian police system, highlighting its historical roots in the colonial Irish constabulary and the Indian Police Act of 1861. The author acknowledges that the image of the police force in India has faced challenges, particularly due to the often-perceived hard-core nature of male police Investigation Officers (IO's). The article focuses on a significant development in the state of Haryana, where the government has initiated vital police reforms by establishing All Women Police Stations in each district. These women police stations aim to instill confidence among women victims, providing them a safe space to register complaints without hesitation. One notable aspect of these stations is that the reported incidents are investigated exclusively by women Investigation Officers (IOs). This approach is particularly crucial in semi-urban and rural areas, where women police officers traditionally have limited involvement in investigations.

In their research article, **Natarajan and Babu [23]** explore the role and effectiveness of Women Police Stations (WPS), particularly in addressing domestic violence (DV) and enhancing gender-sensitive policing. These stations have been established in various developing countries with dual objectives: to improve responses to crimes against women and to offer a fulfilling career for women police officers. The study critically examines whether Women Police Stations have met these expectations and aims to provide insights for countries considering the introduction of WPS. The research employs a multi-faceted approach, including interviews, a review of relevant studies, and an analysis of official data, to assess the structure and functioning of these stations. The research's findings and analysis hold theoretical, policy, and research implications. It provides valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of Women Police Stations, shedding light on their effectiveness in addressing gender-based violence and improving women's access to justice. As countries

worldwide contemplate the establishment of similar stations, this research serves as a valuable resource for informed decision-making in the realm of gender-sensitive policing.

**Natarajan's [20]** research article examines the unique role of Women Police Stations (WPS) as dispute processing systems in the context of dowry disputes in India. Dowry-related issues have long been a societal concern in India, often leading to disputes and sometimes resulting in physical and mental ill-treatment of young brides, and even tragic outcomes like death. The research examines how Women Police Stations serve as effective dispute processing systems for handling dowry disputes. It assesses the stations' role in mediating and resolving conflicts within families and marriages. It describes the services provided by these specialized police stations to victims of dowry disputes and highlights the support and assistance offered to victims, including legal guidance and psychological aid.

**Natarajan's [21]** book offers an intriguing exploration of the evolution of women police over the past two decades, drawing from extensive research conducted in India. The book delves into how the Indian experience presents a valuable alternative to the Anglo-American model of policing. It not only holds significance for traditional societies but also offers insights for women in law enforcement in the Western world. The book extensively examines the Indian experience, with a particular focus on the establishment of all-women police units in Tamil Nadu in 1992. This unique experiment is highlighted for its remarkable success in boosting the confidence and professionalism of women police officers.

**Natarajan's [19]** research article provides a comprehensive overview of the establishment of twenty-nine all-women police units in South India, specifically Tamil Nadu, in 1994. While their primary focus is on addressing family-related disputes and cases involving women and children, they also undertake general police functions. It highlights the dual objectives of building trust among women victims and providing career opportunities for women officers. The article emphasizes the importance of further evaluation to understand how these units align with the requirements of women police officers in culturally diverse contexts.

**Perova and Reynolds' [25]** research paper explores the effectiveness of women's police stations in Brazil in addressing intimate partner violence (IPV). The study focuses on quantitatively evaluating the impact of these stations on the incidence of female homicides, which are considered the most severe form of IPV in the absence of comprehensive IPV data in Brazil. The paper underscores the limited quantitative evaluation of women's police stations' effects on IPV, emphasizing the need for empirical evidence to support their efficacy as a measure to combat IPV. The study employs a difference-in-differences approach, utilizing location and timing as key variables. It examines a panel of 2074 municipalities in Brazil from 2004 to 2009 to estimate the impact of establishing women's police stations on the municipal female homicide rate. While the study does not find a strong association on average, it reveals that women's police stations are notably effective among young women residing in metropolitan areas.

The research paper by **Perova and Reynolds [24]** investigates the effectiveness of women's police stations in Brazil in addressing domestic violence, particularly focusing on their impact on female homicides, which are considered the most severe form of domestic violence. The paper underscores the lack of quantitative evaluations of women's police

stations' impact on domestic violence and gender equality. It emphasizes the need for empirical evidence in assessing the effectiveness of these stations in combating domestic violence. The study utilizes a panel of 2,074 municipalities in Brazil and takes advantage of the gradual rollout of women's police stations from 2004 to 2009. It uses female homicides as a proxy for severe domestic violence due to the scarcity of comprehensive domestic violence data. While the analysis does not find a significant association on average, the study reveals that women's police stations exhibit considerable effectiveness among specific groups of women. Notably, women living in metropolitan areas and younger women experience a substantial reduction in the homicide rate when a women's police station is established. In metropolitan municipalities, the reduction in the homicide rate amounts to approximately 17 per cent.

The research paper by **Santos [26]** explores the evolving and intricate interplay between women and the state, with a particular focus on the construction of gendered citizenship through the lens of women's police stations in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The study centres on women's police stations in Sao Paulo, which are exclusively operated by female police officers and are dedicated to addressing crimes against women, including domestic violence, assault, and rape. The research highlights the significance of these unique police stations in reshaping the relationship between women and the state. It offers valuable insights into the evolving relationship between women and the state, highlighting the significance of these stations in addressing gender-based violence and contributing to the construction of gendered citizenship in the country.

**Sikri et al. [27]** in their research paper examine the challenges faced by women's police stations (WPSs) in India in mitigating violence against women (VAW). It provides a critical analysis of the social, cultural, and judicial factors that hinder the effectiveness of WPSs in addressing VAW. The paper recognizes the deeply rooted issues of VAW in India, stemming from rigid gender roles ingrained in cultural norms. It acknowledges the societal challenges, including fear of societal retaliation, social stigma, low conviction rates, and maltreatment of female victims, that discourage women from reporting VAW crimes to the police.

**Brown and Silvestri [6]** This research paper provides an insightful overview of the current trends and transformations affecting the police service in England and Wales. It specifically examines how these changes impact the employment and deployment of women in policing and whether these transformations lead to a more gender-balanced and caring approach to policing. The paper acknowledges various significant changes in the policing landscape, including resource reduction due to austerity measures, shifts in crime patterns such as the rise of cyber-related offenses, a greater focus on victims, the introduction of graduate entry programs, and changes in political accountability through Police and Crime Commissioners. The research aims to assess how these changes have influenced the employment and roles of women in the police

**Dhal [10]** in her paper sheds light on the role of women within the police force in India, aiming to foster a more gender-inclusive approach to law enforcement. It highlights the challenges and opportunities women face when pursuing careers in policing and discusses the importance of gender diversity within this field. The paper acknowledges that the police force has traditionally been male-dominated, perpetuating gender discrimination. It identifies

various factors contributing to this, such as cultural norms, societal expectations, systemic exclusion, and challenges related to women's recruitment into policing. The paper provides an analysis of the current status of women within the policing culture of India. It also highlights the challenges and barriers women face in this profession, including social constructs, cultural norms, and recruitment issues.

**Miller and Segal [17]** in their research paper delve into the impact of the integration of female officers into U.S. policing during the late 1970s to early 1990s on the quality of law enforcement, specifically focusing on violent crime reporting and domestic violence (DV). The study seeks to ascertain whether the presence of female officers enhances the overall quality of policing. The research paper reveals that the integration of female officers positively influences law enforcement quality. It establishes that in areas where there is a higher representation of female officers, there is a significant increase in the reporting of violent crimes against women, particularly domestic violence cases. Importantly, these effects are not observed for violent crimes against men. The study further indicates that an increase in the share of female officers is associated with a decline in rates of intimate partner homicide and non-fatal domestic abuse.

**Nalla and Nam [18]** investigate the factors influencing citizen support for female police officers in India, a society marked by strong patriarchal norms and gender role stereotypes. The study explores how citizens' perceptions of police effectiveness, corruption, general satisfaction with the police, and their contact experiences relate to their support for women in law enforcement roles. The research findings indicate that citizens who perceive higher levels of corruption are more likely to express support for women in law enforcement. Interestingly, the study reveals a negative relationship between citizen support for female police officers and their perceptions of police effectiveness and general satisfaction with the police.

### Research Gaps:

Despite the valuable insights provided by the studies on women's police stations and their role in addressing gender violence, several research gaps and avenues for further exploration remain:

1. While the body of research on Women's Police Stations (WPS) and their role in combating gender-based violence and promoting gender equality is substantial, several research gaps remain that warrant further investigation. One notable gap lies in the realm of cross-regional comparative analysis. While numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of WPS within specific regions, a comprehensive examination of variations in outcomes, challenges, and successes across different socio-cultural and legal contexts would provide valuable insights into the adaptability of these initiatives.
2. Qualitative exploration of success factors is another avenue for future research. While studies have outlined challenges faced by WPS, there is a lack of comprehensive research that examines the factors contributing to the success of these initiatives.
3. The interplay between local and national policies is another area ripe for exploration. While many studies have focused on the localized impact of WPS, understanding how



these initiatives interact with broader national policies on gender violence prevention, law enforcement, and gender equality is still lacking.

4. While existing studies predominantly focus on the experiences of women officers and victims, an exploration of the perceptions and experiences of male officers working in WPS could offer a unique angle. This would shed light on gender dynamics within these institutions and contribute to a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities they present.
5. Finally, a critical research gap pertains to the ethical and cultural considerations surrounding WPS in conservative or traditional societies. As these institutions challenge established norms, an examination of their ethical implications and potential cultural challenges would provide insights into their feasibility and effectiveness in various cultural contexts.

Addressing these research gaps will not only contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of WPS but also provide practical insights for refining and enhancing their impact on combatting gender-based violence and promoting gender equality.

**Limitations:** While this systematic review strives to encompass a diverse range of studies, it is subject to certain limitations. The language barriers and accessibility limitations could affect the comprehensiveness of the included studies. The review's thematic analysis approach inherently involves interpretation, which may introduce subjectivity to the synthesis of findings.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the comprehensive synthesis of 22 distinct studies elucidates a multifaceted panorama of Women's Police Stations (WPS) and their intrinsic role as potent agents in propelling gender equality while combating the scourge of gender-based violence. Through a meticulous process of thematic categorization, this review unearths the profound significance of WPS initiatives in empowering victims, orchestrating transformative shifts in societal attitudes, and daringly challenging deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Concurrently, these studies shed an illuminating light on the nuanced challenges confronted by women officers within these specialized units, while simultaneously unveiling critical gaps within the existing research landscape.

The cumulative effect of this synthesis extends well beyond its scholarly dimension, serving as an invaluable repository for further inquiry. By pinpointing these research gaps, the review lays down the groundwork for future investigations that hold the promise of enriching our comprehension of gender-sensitive policing paradigms.

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