

Female Help Desks in Punjab Police Stations - Status Report

**Punjab Commission on the Status of Women
(June 2017)**



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Background

The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (hereinafter referred to as the 'Commission') is a statutory body established under the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2014 with a mandate to ensure that all laws, programs and policies of the government promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The Commission has a broad oversight mandate including, its functions under Section 9 (2)(h) of the above mentioned Act, to 'monitor the mechanism and institutional procedure for redressal of violation of women's rights.' To that end, since its establishment in 2014, the Commission has developed an integrated model of information gathering, data analysis and evidence-based policy-making.

Context

The Punjab Women Empowerment Initiative (PWEI) 2014 provides for the establishment of Female Help Desks in all Police Stations/*thaanas* in Punjab. The Action Plan developed under Punjab Women Empowerment Initiatives (PWEI) stipulates implementation of all provisions within 3-5 years. As one of the measures aimed at the social empowerment of women and girls, establishment of Female Help Desks was expected to result in '*quick response by the police force and ensuring access to justice for women.*'¹ The ultimate rationale behind the initiative was to facilitate women's access to the formal justice system, and in doing so, create a gender-sensitive, comfortable and more enabling environment for women and girls to report crimes against them.

Through one of the Commission's on-going projects, the Gender Management Information System (GMIS), the Commission collects gender dis-aggregated data from provincial departments/institutions and district offices. In addition to being accessible online, information thus collected is analyzed and findings are published in an annual **Punjab Gender Parity Report**. This report informs policymakers about the relative status of men and women across sectors, fields and industries. Recently, data was received from the Office of the Inspector General of Police, Punjab against a number of specific justice-related indicators. This included the total number of Police Stations with Female Help-desks. It was found that at the end of 2016, there were 709 Police Stations/*thaanas* in Punjab. As illustrated in Table 1, 3 out of the 709 Police Stations/*thaanas* are Women Police Stations in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad. Of the remaining 706 police stations, an overwhelming majority i.e. 696 (99%) Police Stations/*thaanas* were reported to have made the necessary infrastructural arrangements for the establishment and administration of Female Help-desks.

¹ <https://wdd.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/pwei2014.pdf>

Table1: Status of Female Help Desks

| Total No. of Police Stations (excluding women Police Stations) | No. of Police Stations with FHD | No. of Police Stations without FHD |
|---|--|---|
| 706 | 696 (99%) | 10 (1%) |

Cognizant of the fact that Police Stations/*thaanas* are often a female victim/complainant's first point of contact with official authority, the Commission has recently undertaken a monitoring exercise to review implementation of the PWEI policy pertaining to the establishment of Female Help Desks (Evaluation Form attached as Annexure I). The Commission, through its Divisional Coordinators stationed in all 9 Divisions of Punjab, has produced the present report on the basis of observations from **225 Police Stations** visited so far.

Overview of Visits to date

As illustrated in Figure A below, the Commission's Divisional Coordinators have visited 225 Police Stations/*thaanas* across 9 Divisions and 22 Districts. It is pertinent to note, however, that the process of monitoring Female Help Desks is an on-going activity and the present report is furnished on the basis of information collected to date.

Following initial coordination with the Office of the Inspector General of Police, Punjab, designated individuals within individual Police Stations/*thaanas* were notified of the Commission's intent to monitor the implementation status of Female Help Desks. Upon their visits, the Divisional Coordinators met, interviewed and questioned various officials, including Police Station Assistants ("PSAs"), Senior Stations Assistants ("SSAs"), Station House Officers ("SHOs"), Assistant Sub Inspectors ("ASIs"), Sub Inspectors, Lady Constables, Investigation Officers ("IOs"), Duty Officers, Deputy Superintendents of Police ("DSPs") and *Muharrars*.

Number of Police Stations Visited (May/June 2017)

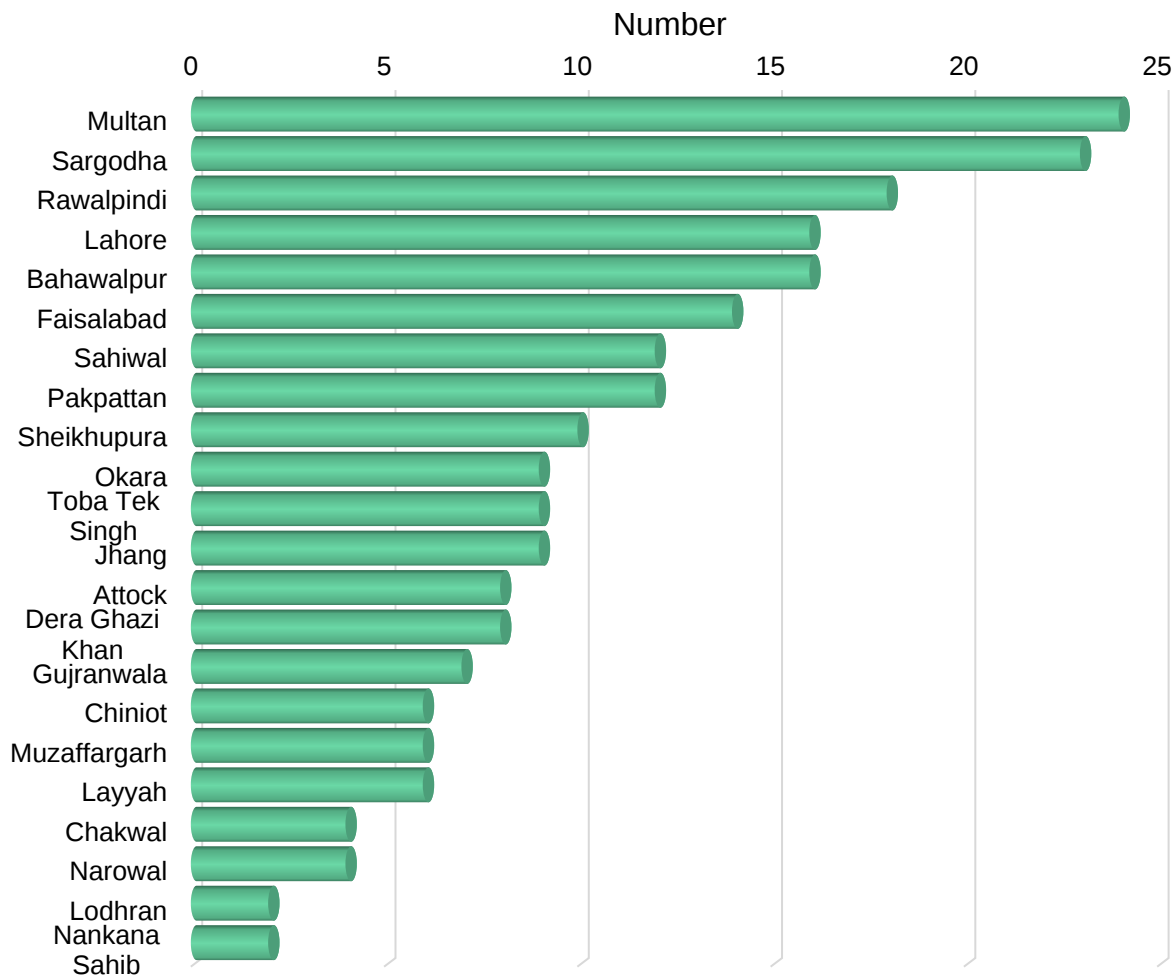


Figure A

Findings

A. Establishment of Front Desks

Female Help Desks, as envisioned under PWEI 2014, have not been established in the Police Stations/*thaanas* visited so far. Instead, in an overwhelming majority of Police Stations, Front Desks have been established for the purposes of registering complaints on behalf of individual citizens, regardless of sex. Front Desks are resourced with dedicated staff recruited to provide a civilian face to police establishments. In 181 out of 225 Police Stations visited, Front Desks were seen as fully functional units providing services to male and female citizens alike and without any training or orientation on gender sensitive service delivery. In the remaining 44 Police Stations, no Front Desk service was available.

B. Low Number of Female Staff in Police Stations

Literature focusing on women’s access to justice demonstrates that the physical presence of a female service provider encourages more women to participate in the formal justice system as it helps in creating a more friendly, comfortable and enabling environment, thus affording female complainants an opportunity to openly narrate their individual experiences of gender-based abuse, discrimination and violence, often sharing information of a highly sensitive and personal nature.

It is pertinent to note that two broad categories of female staff have been identified for the purposes of this report. These include the traditional police force and the non-traditional police force. While the former may be further divided into Police Officers (BPS Scale 17 and above) and Police Officials (BPS Scale 1 to 16), the latter refers to all non-permanent, contract based employees of the Punjab Police (including but not limited to PSAs and SSAs).

As illustrated in Figure B, out of 181 Police Stations/*thaanas* with Front Desks, 147 (81%) Police Stations/*thaanas* had female staff present at the time of visits. In the remaining 34 Police Stations, no female staff, whether part of the traditional or non-traditional police force, was present to guide and help incoming female visitors.

Female Staff in Police Stations/*thaanas* Visited that have Front Desks

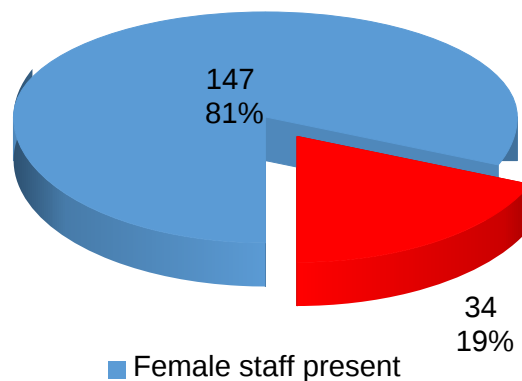


Figure B

A district wise breakdown of female staff members (See Figure C below) shows variations in the number of female staff. Out of the 181 Police Stations where females were employed, only 94 establishments have recruited female PSAs and/or SSAs to administer Front Desks.

Female Staff in Police Stations/*Ithaanas* Visited (District Wise)

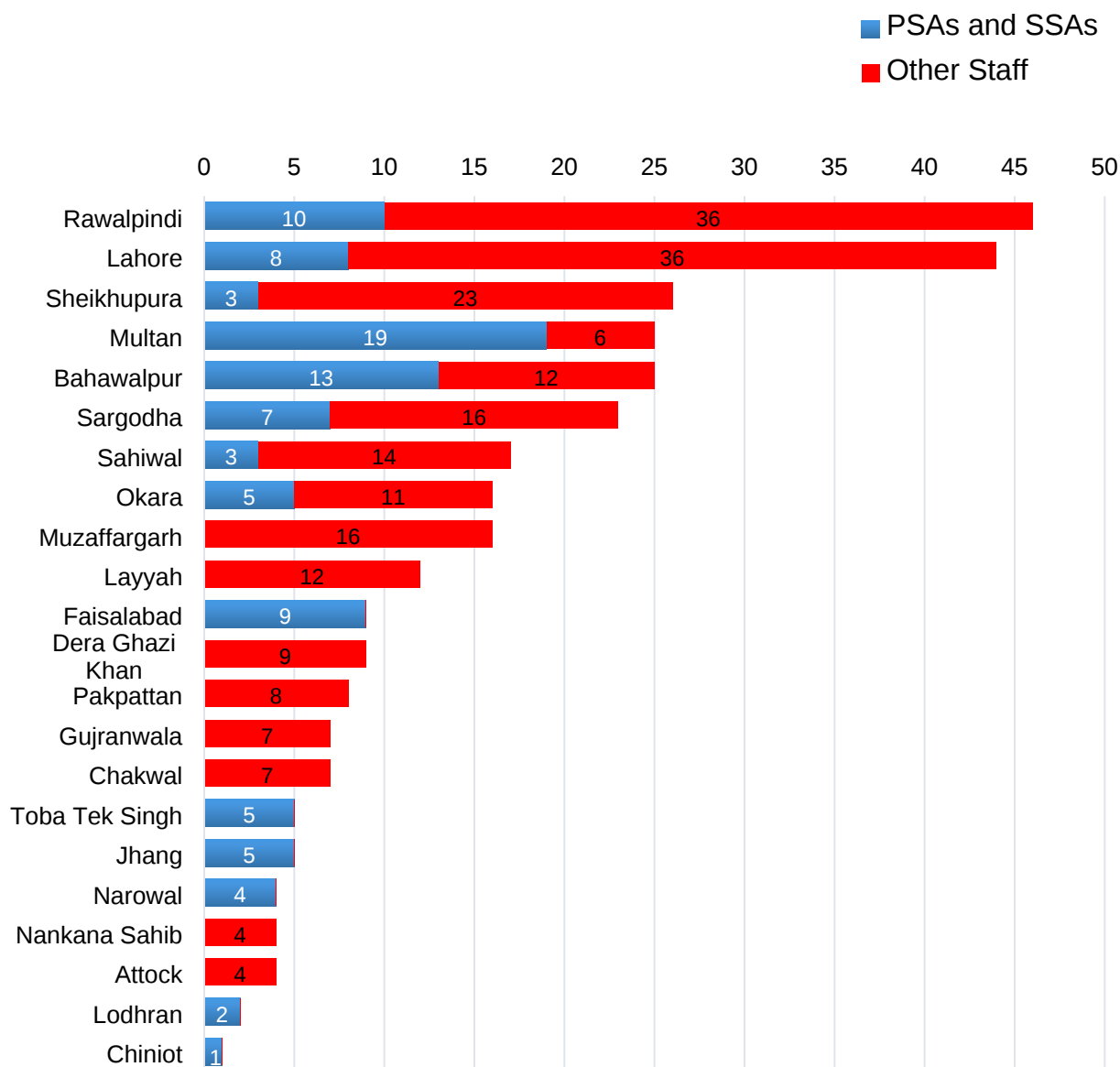


Figure C

C. Lack of Trained Human Capital

It was observed that the capacity of professionals, whose duties, directly or indirectly, bring them in contact with female visitors/complainants, is regrettably limited. It was found that training of PSAs and SSAs at the time of induction lacked a gender sensitivity component to equip newly recruited staff with the specialized knowledge and skill required to deal with female complainants beyond generating a computerized application on their behalf, and are therefore not adequately trained to deal and interact

with women, especially those who have experienced violence. In such cases of Violence Against Women, the need for women-friendly services is most pronounced and needs to be addressed accordingly. In addition to the above, lack of gender sensitive attitudes in the traditional Police force (i.e. Police Officials and Officers) is a further impediment to women who often face un-cooperative and hostile environments.

D. Number of Average Monthly Female Visitors

Within specific police establishments, it has been observed that the average number of female visitors varies to a considerable extent. Of the Police Stations/*thaanas* visited during May and June 2017, the highest number of female visitors was observed in P.S Multan Cantt (Multan), P.S Bhawana (Chiniot) and P.S Shalimar (Lahore) at 100, 100 and 80, respectively.

On the other hand, Police Stations with the lowest monthly averages were P.S Sadar (Sargodha), P.S Lohari Gate (Multan), P.S Saddar (Sargodha) and P.S Wahdat Colony (Lahore) with 3, 3, 3 and 3 visitors respectively. In three Police Stations within District Layyah (namely, P.S Chok Azam, P.S Karor Lal Esson and P.S Fateh Pur), there has not been a single female visitor to date. In those Police Stations where the influx of female visitors was negligible, it was found that social and cultural factors were largely responsible for restricting women's access to police establishments. This pattern was particularly discernible in remote and far-flung districts, especially in the Southern regions of the province where a conservative mindset and patriarchal social values act as major barriers to the empowerment of women at the grassroots level.

E. Insufficient Working Hours

During the Commission's visits, it was observed that 117 out of 181 Police Stations/*thaanas* provide Front Desk services to the public through single day-shifts (mostly between 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) whereas 23 Police Stations have Front Desk working hours for less than 8 hours (such as P.S Kot Addu, Muzaffargarh and P.S Fatehpur, Layyah). 41 Police Stations with Front Desks are operational for more than 8 hours (with 29 Police Stations having Front Desk services available around the clock (24/7). These include P.S Shahpur Sadar (Sargodha), P.S Yazman Sadar (Bahawalpur) and P.S Sadar Wah Cantt (Rawalpindi).

Front Desk Working Hours in Police Stations/*Thaanas* Visited

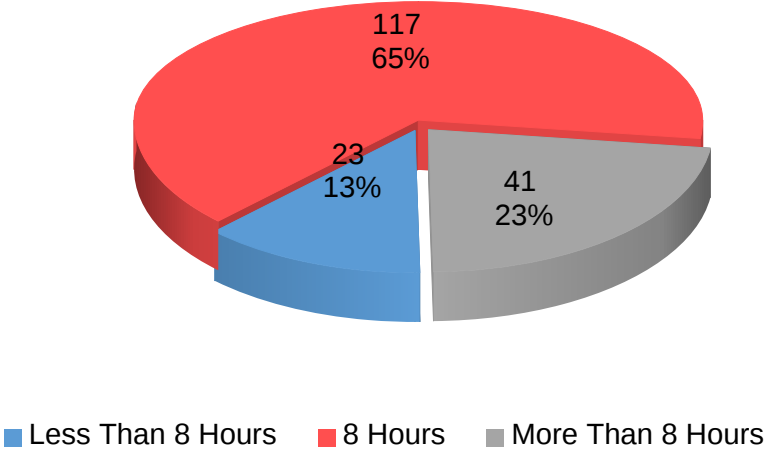


Figure D

F. Absence of Information Material

As illustrated in Figure E, it was found that only 27 (12%) of the 225 Police Stations/*thaanas* visited had informative material on women-related laws and procedures and support services, while 198 (88%) had no such material available. Informative material was available in 4 out of 24 Police Stations visited in Multan District (P.S Delhi Gate, P.S Pak Gate, P.S Daulat Gate and P.S Jalilabad).

Availability of Women related Information/Material in Police Stations Visited

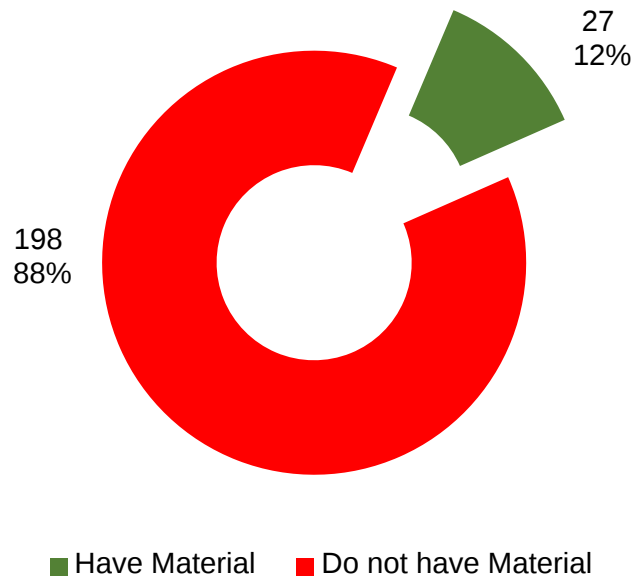


Figure E

G. Level of Public Awareness re: Women Empowerment Initiatives of the Government of Punjab

At the community level, it has been observed that there exists very little awareness among members of the public about the presence of Front Desks as well as female personnel in Police Stations/*thaanas*. By and large, the public also remains unaware of the presence of women-friendly services including separate record rooms, separate waiting areas and the recently institutionalized online process for the registration of complaints. This could be a major psychological barrier for women who fear Police Stations as a predominantly male-oriented space.

Model Police Station

P.S New Town, Rawalpindi

It is worth noting that exemplary practices were observed in a few Police Stations such as P.S New Town (Rawalpindi Division) where all required infrastructure as well as human resource was available. A separate waiting area and separate record room was also available to help create a comfortable environment for female visitors. Moreover, 1 female PSA and 3 Lady Constables were present at the time of the Commission's visit.

Recommendations

Under PWEI, the rationale behind the establishment of Female Help Desks was to create a safe and enabling environment for women within police establishments an institutional channel that offers legal advice and practical guidance as well as emotional support. However, as demonstrated by the Commission's observations above, Front Desks only carry out the functions of a reception facility with the sole responsibility of generating a computerized application on the complainant's behalf.

A number of women-friendly measures to sensitize local police to the needs and issues of women have been adopted in various countries. These include community-led policing mechanisms, women-friendly 24/7 helplines and capacity building measures. Based on our research as well as our monitoring exercise, a number of specifically tailored recommendations are put forth:

- (i) Currently available Front Desk facilities should be improved in line with the rationale behind the Female Help Desks initiative under PWEI. To this end, it is essential that Front Desks in all Police Stations/*thaanas* are equipped with necessary infrastructural arrangements as well as well-trained human resource. Moreover, it is recommended that in case of female complainants, FIRs should be registered by female officers. To this end, it is essential that rigorous efforts be undertaken to increase the number of female SHOs and *Muharrars*.
- (ii) The regrettable lack of adequate training prior to induction must be addressed at the institutional level. This may be achieved through specific capacity-building measures including training programmes, pre and post training exams and in-depth orientation sessions on women related laws and procedures at the time of recruitment. It is recommended to conduct gender-sensitivity trainings for traditional and non-traditional police staff, particularly for Investigating Officers (IOs), SHOs, Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, PSAs and SSAs. These trainings should be devised

with the aim of enhancing participants' knowledge and understanding of the following:

- a. Fundamental Rights under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973
- b. Police Order 2002
- c. Standard Operating Procedures for Medico-legal Examination of Women Victims of Violence
- d. SOPs for Front Desks
- e. Recent pro-women laws pertaining to cases of violence, marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance, violence and harassment at the workplace.
- f. Information pertaining to government-run social service institutions, temporary shelters, Violence Against Women Centers, *Dar-ul-Falabs* and Women Crisis Centers
- g. Communication and Interpersonal Skills trainings and workshops.
 - (iii) Ensure the practical enforcement of anti-harassment codes and Front Desk **Standard Operating Procedures** (SOPs) for gender sensitive service delivery. Furthermore, current SOPs should be amended to include gender-sensitive provisions. Additionally, periodic performance based reviews for employees must be regularized at the institutional level to monitor the level of gender sensitivity of police establishments.
 - (iv) The Punjab Women's Helpline (1043) run by the Commission should also be advertised as a free-of-cost means to not only inform female complainants/visitors about their rights but also provide an emotional support system, and a redressal mechanism in the case of institutional failures.
 - (v) To address the dearth of female staff in the Punjab Police, it is recommended that a rigorous and massive recruitment drive be launched, targeting local populations by concerting institutional and inter-departmental efforts through orientation sessions in colleges/universities, job fairs, public booths, electronic or press media, and door-to-door campaigns.
 - (vi) Display and disseminate Information material in the form of pamphlets/flyers/posters in all Police Stations. These should aim to cover all aspects of women's rights, especially with respect to cases of inheritance, marriage, divorce, custody and violence. Moreover, informative material should be prepared on women-related services offered by the government of Punjab through shelter homes, rehabilitation and crisis management centers. It is hereby brought to your attention that the Commission has been campaigning at the grassroots level through informative material on women related laws, procedures and services. The same material may

also be made available in Police Stations/*thaanas* to improve women's access to rights-based information.

Annexure I

Evaluation Form for Female Help-desks at Police Stations in Punjab

Police Station/Thaana: _____

District: _____

Date of Visit: _____

Time/Duration of Visit: _____

Official(s) met during Visit: _____

Any Other Information: _____

A. Is there any area, desk or booth in the Police Station designated as the Help Desk or Front Desk? [Y/N]

B. Please specify the working hours of the Female Help Desk or Front Desk.

C. Are there infrastructural arrangements, separate from the main reception, for the purposes of the Help Desk? If yes, please explain.

D. Please specify the number of female staff members, if any, stationed at the Help Desk during your visit. What is the rank of said police officer(s)?

E. Is there any informative material on laws, rights and procedures pertaining to women available at the Helpdesk? If yes, please specify (brochures, pamphlets etc.)

F. The average number of women visiting the Police Station in a month.

G. Please specify in detail the exact procedure/referral mechanism for complainant(s) following a visit to the Help Desk or Front Desk.

H. In the opinion of the Help Desk staff, has the Help Desk had the desired impact (i.e. making women more comfortable to come to a police station with a concern/complaint)?
