

Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces and Police Patrolling: Experimental Evidence from Urban India*

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We implement a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the impact of the world's largest street patrolling program targeting sexual harassment in public space on women's victimization in Hyderabad, India. Using a novel high-frequency observation exercise to collect measures of sexual harassment at 350 hotspots, we show that visible police presence reduces severe forms of sexual harassment by 27 percent and thus, improves women's mobility behavior. In particular, we find that women are less likely to avoiding a particular street to prevent sexual harassment. To explain the null effects on mild forms of sexual harassment, we exploit heterogeneity in police officers' attitudes towards sexual harassment and design an artefactual field experiment to understand police behavior and biases. We find that, on average, police officers' tolerance and willingness to sanction are lower for mild forms of sexual harassment. In line with this result, we find a reduction in less severe cases of sexual harassment only when the assigned police officers have better norms surrounding sexual harassment cases. Overall, addressing sexual harassment in urban places through the lens of policing poses a significant challenge due to the nature of the crime and police officers' potential biases.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, policing, female mobility, social norms

JEL Codes: J24, K42, J16, C93, C91

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