



LAC Gender Impact Evaluation Initiative

Building Agency through Practical Interventions

The Maria da Penha Law in Brazil: Ending Domestic Violence through Women's Police Stations and Political Plans

This study seeks to measure the effectiveness of the *Lei Maria da Penha* and of all-women's police stations in decreasing the rate of domestic violence in Brazil. In 1983, Maria da Penha's ex-husband attempted to murder her twice, but due to lax laws regarding domestic violence he was not imprisoned until 2002. The injustice of this event marked the need for reform in Brazil. In 1983 São Paulo opened the first all-women's police station, with female officers working to protect women against crimes like rape and domestic violence. Over the next two decades other municipalities started similar programs and in 2006, the *Lei Maria da Penha* was signed into law, creating harsher penalties to those charged with any form of intra-familial violence and protection for their victims.

Program Design

Starting in 1983, various municipalities throughout Brazil implemented the use of female police officers or DEAMs (Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento das Mulheres) for crimes that were specifically targeted towards women. These stations became codified into law in 2006 with the passage of the *Lei Maria da Penha*. This law further implemented legal protections for women against domestic abuse and encouraged the development of women's political plans at the municipal level. The penal code was altered to better protect victims of domestic abuse. Pre-trial detainment of an aggressor now became a judicial option to protect the woman and that Courts on Family Violence and Violence against Women be implemented specifically for domestic abuse cases. Also, a woman can now only retract her charge in

Intervention Period: Implemented beginning in 1983, Codified by law in 2006

the presence of a judge, under mediation women often felt pressured to retract charges since they would be returning home with their husbands. This issue was also addressed through the creation of safe houses that were available to women if they felt unsafe to return home. The law also promoted Women's Reference and Assistance Centers, social agencies where women would be provided with information on what social and legal services were available for their protection. Furthermore, domestic violence became a criminal offense under the law. Under the *Lei Maria da Penha*, political plans were developed at the municipal level to better serve the needs of their communities. These plans sought to improve the options available to women outside of the home, allowing for increased bargaining power that, in theory, should further reduced incidents of domestic violence.

Evaluation Design

Although the Lei Maria da Penha was codified in 2006, the implementation of the various elements of the law has been heterogeneously implemented in the various municipalities in Brazil. These variations allow for a differences-in-differences approach to be used to analyze the effects of the DEAMS and the political plan on domestic abuse within this study. Female homicide rate were used as a proxy for overall domestic abuse due to the fact that changing cultural norms and views of domestic abuse can drastically change the reported rate of abuse despite little to no change in actual rates and that approximately 70% of all female homicides (Brazil's results are consistent with international rates) are committed by a partner or

Sample Population: Women Ages 15-49;

Identification Method: Differences-in-Differences

ex-partner and that there is no errors due to self-reporting with homicides. Furthermore, these numbers were limited to women within the ages of 15-49 to correlate with past studies of domestic abuse and that beyond the age of 50, children account for a higher rate of murders. Using these statistics, it is possible to examine the rate of change in the female homicide annually and correlate these changes to all women police stations and to political plans. Then a robustness test was performed to using nearest neighbor methodology and correcting for overall trends in the national homicide rate.

Findings

Female police stations are correlated with a lower female homicide rate in the Northern region of Brazil and in larger cities. The women's political plan has a similar result in large cities, but seems to be more effective in the South and for women ages 25-49. We find evidence that overall the woman's political plan is associated with reduced female homicide rates of approximately 1.5 women per 100,000 women.

In no case do we find a reduction in male homicide rates that corresponds to the intervention implementation, indicating that these drops are not related to overall declines in crime. These policies are correlated only with violence against women which indicates that the mechanism at work is effective at reducing domestic violence rather than a reduction in overall violence.

Publications

Perova, Elizaveta and Sarah Reynolds. *Women Police Stations and Political Plans: Fighting the Most Violent Domestic Violence in Brazil.* August 2013

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