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■ ALARM BELLS

4,585 cases of violence against women reported in 2012

Myra Imran
Islamabad

Reflecting an alarming rate of violence against women (VAW) in the country, a qualitative review of VAW statistics by the Aurat Foundation (AF) reveals that in the first six months of 2012, a total of 4,585 such cases were reported in the media across Pakistan.

By average, the prevalence of reported cases of violence against women in Pakistan has increased by 7 per cent as compared to the year January to June 2011. The monitored stories clearly revealed that younger and married women were more often a target of violence against women.

Around 1913 cases of VAW occurred with married women, 1,615 occurred to women who were unmarried, 38 victims were divorced and 71 were reported widows. The report identifies below 18 years of age as most susceptible to violence.

Around 59 per cent of the victims were below 18 years of age, 31 per cent were 19-36 years old and 9 per cent were over 36 years of age. The FIR has been registered for nearly 65 per cent of the reported cases of violence against women.

Shared exclusively with 'The News', the statistics show that 69 per cent of violence against women incidents were reported from Punjab with Lahore, Okara and Sargodha topping the list districts with highest reported cases. Apart from these districts, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Gujrat, D G Khan, Pakpattan, Muzaffargarh, Sahiwal and Sheikhpura are among the 15 top districts with highest number of VAW cases.

Despite extensive efforts to control honour killing incidents, 436 such cases were reported in past six months. The most reported crimes against women (24 per cent) were kidnapping and abduction. Among total, 17 per cent reported cases were of

murder. Sindh was marked for second highest number of reported VAW cases.

"It is important to consider here that women in Punjab are more able to reach law enforcement and media as compared to women in KP or Balochistan," said National Coordinator AF Rabeea Hadi while talking to 'The News'.

Among total number of VAW incidents, 3,153 cases were reported in Punjab, 1,027 in Sindh, 283 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and 78 cases were reported in Balochistan. Murder was the most prevalent crime against women reported in Sindh and KP. Around 15 per cent from Sindh and 55 per cent of the reported VAW cases from KP were of the murder.

According to the monitored data, suicide was also reported frequently with 349 such cases reported from all over Pakistan in past six months. Only in Balochistan 17 women reportedly committed suicide from

Jan-June 2012. Low number of total cases reported from Balochistan might be an indicator of the fact that it is more difficult for women to gain access to media or other sources to report this violence.

In Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), 44 VAW cases have been reported. The report terms 44 cases as disproportionately high. Abduction and kidnapping was the most prevalent crime against women in Islamabad and 33 per cent of the reported cases were of abduction or kidnapping.

Abduction and kidnapping was the most commonly reported incident of violence against women from all over the country. A total of 1,086 incidents of abduction and kidnapping were reported which amounts to nearly one fourth of all crime reported during the monitored period.

However, the report says that that families from conservative backgrounds tend to report

marriages of choice as kidnapping by the groom. So, these figures might include incidents where choice marriages have been wrongly reported to the police as kidnapping or abduction incidents.

A total of 435 rape and gang rape cases were reported in the first six months of 2012, honor killings were the fifth most frequently reported category of VAW (346 cases) and there were total 289 cases of domestic violence reported in last six months. There were 50 cases of sexual assault, 46 cases of acid throwing and 32 cases of burning were also reported. Another 1160 cases of VAW fell under the miscellaneous category.

Rabeea Hadi said that for the last 4 years, the Foundation has been releasing its annual report on status of VAW in Pakistan. "The reported cases represent only a fraction of the actual number of violent incidents against women in Pakistan," she said.