

Christian Girl Charged with Theft After Escaping Abuser

A Muslim businessman in Pakistan has falsely charged a 15-year-old Christian girl and two of her relatives with theft in retaliation for leaving his employ following his attempt to rape her, her father said.

Javed Masih, a Catholic vegetable vendor in Dera Usman area of Okara District, Punjab Province, said that his daughter, Muskaan Javed, worked as a maid in the house of Muhammad Kamran Haider.

“Haider attacked my daughter on Oct. 17, when his wife and children were not at home,” Masih told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. “Fortunately for us, timely arrival of my wife, Nasira Bibi, at his house saved Muskaan from getting raped.”

He said that Muskaan was in a state of shock when she came out of the house, tears flowing down her cheeks.

“Upon inquiring, Muskaan told Nasira that Haider had attempted to sexually assault her, taking advantage of being alone in the house. My wife was shocked to hear this, but instead of confronting Haider at that time, she decided to first inform me about the incident,” Masih said. “Muskaan told us that Haider had made sexual advances and harassed her from the time she began working in his house in September, but she was too scared to tell us.”

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Masih said he and local elders went to Haider’s house, and that the Muslim admitted the attempted rape and apologized, pleading with them not to go to police.

“Following his apology, the elders pressured me to pardon him, telling me that pursuing the matter would only bring dishonor to my family and compromise my daughter’s reputation,” Masih said. “Fears for Muskaan’s future forced me to surrender to their demand.”

Masih said that his daughter stopped working for Haider, who then on Nov. 16, registered a case with police alleging that she had stolen gold jewelry worth 1 million rupees (\$3,583 USD) from his house during her employment.

“He has also named me and my son in the First Information Report, alleging that we had confessed to Muskaan’s crime and also promised to compensate his loss,” he said.

The FIR was baseless and an attempt to punish them for refusing to send Muskaan back to work in his house, he said.

Masih said that his family had remained tightlipped about the attempted rape, but that when Haider implicated them in a fake case, they decided to seek protection from the law.

“We obtained pre-arrest bails and joined the investigation, but the police’s attitude was very hostile towards us,” he said. “The investigating officer was influenced by Haider, because of which he wouldn’t even listen to us.”

A Christian provincial lawmaker in Okara District, Ejaz Augustine, contacted a senior police officer and demanded a fair and transparent investigation into the charges, he said. The lawmaker’s intervention resulted in investigation of the case by a senior police officer.

“More than 50 locals of the area have given statements in our favor, vouching for our honesty and integrity,” Masih said. “We may be very poor and needy, but we are not thieves. We are being subjected to such false allegations because Haider believes we can be pressured with such tactics.”

Masih said that the theft allegation and subsequent appearances before the police have left his daughter traumatized.

“Muskaan is still recovering from the shock she suffered at the hands of Haider on Oct. 17, but this theft allegation has left her devastated,” he said. “Our hearts weep when we see our minor daughter in this situation, but we are helpless and are looking to God to rescue us from this problem.”

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Augustine, a former provincial minister for human rights and minorities affairs, said he was monitoring the investigation.

“Before this matter was brought to my notice, the police’s attitude was very hostile towards the Christian family,” Augustine told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. “However, after I intervened, the investigation was handed over to a senior police officer who has assured me that he will ensure a fair probe.”

He said that it was not uncommon for influential or moneyed people in Pakistan to misuse the law to intimidate their victims, especially vulnerable minorities.

“Christians in Punjab are often targeted with fake allegations if they dare to take a stand against their powerful oppressors,” Augustine said. “These false accusations range from serious charges such as blasphemy to demeaning allegations of theft.”

Christian women and girls who work as domestic workers or at brick kilns are often targeted by their employers, he said.

“This is mainly because the perpetrators think that they can get away with anything since their victims are too weak to

oppose them,” Augustine said. “Moreover, there is no easy access to justice for poor Christians, which discourages many to suffer in silence.”

Pakistan ranked seventh on Open Doors’ 2024 World Watch List of the most difficult places to be a Christian, as it was the previous year.

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