

# Pakistani Muslims Rape Girl, Beat Relatives for Prosecuting

A band of Muslims this month severely beat a pregnant Christian woman in Punjab's Narowal district—causing her to lose female twins to miscarriage—in an effort pressure her family into dropping charges of raping her 13-year-old niece, the woman's husband said.

Asher Masih of Dhamala village told Compass by phone that the men attacked his home on May 8.

"All three male members of our family, including my father, brother and myself, were out for work when Irfan Safdar and his accomplices trespassed into our house and started beating up my mother, sister-in-law and my wife, who was in her fifth month of pregnancy, mercilessly," he said.

Masih's elderly mother said she pleaded for the attackers to spare his wife, but they did not listen.

"They murdered our children, they raped our daughter," she said. "We have nothing left with us."

In a country where Muslim criminals believe police and courts will give little credence to the complaints of Christians, the family accuses three Muslims of gang-raping the girl at an outhouse on March 29.

"She had gone to a nearby field to use the toilet when she was forcibly taken away by three men later identified as Irfan Safdar and Shahid. Their third accomplice remains unidentified as yet," Masih said. "At first we thought that she might have stopped at some neighbor's house, but when she did not return after a long time, we set out to look for her."

He said a villager informed the family that he had seen Safdar and two others taking the girl to an outhouse. The family rushed to the site, but Safdar and his accomplices fled, Masih said.

"We found [name withheld] inside the outhouse, raped and badly injured," he said.

Masih said the family tried to register a First Information Report (FIR) with local police, but officers turned a deaf ear, as Safdar is the son of former police inspector Safdar Bajwa.

"They also refused to register [the victim's] statement under Section 164, which is mandatory in such cases," he said.

Police refused to file their complaint for more than a week, during which time the suspects repeatedly threatened the family, he said.

"They told us we were poor and weak and could not face them no matter how much we tried," Masih said. "There are about four or five Christian families in the overwhelmingly Muslim village, but almost everyone is fed up with the Bajwa family because of their criminal activities."

Safdar Bajwa first denied that his son was involved in the case, but when several Muslim villagers started visiting the police station with the victim's family, the accused surrendered a servant identified as Shahid to police, saying he had raped the girl, Masih said.

"The police tried to give a clean sheet to Irfan in the initial investigation, because of his father's influence, but then registered FIR No. 145/12 under Section 376 against three men, including Irfan, when the villagers insisted," he said, adding that police still did not arrest Safdar. "In April, Irfan and his accomplices illegally grabbed a piece of land owned by us. They did this to pressure us into giving up the

case, but we stood our ground. We are poor, but we chose not to compromise on our honor.”

Masih said the Muslim family used various tactics to compel the victim’s family to drop the charges, and when all efforts failed, they attacked their house.

After neighbors informed the men at work of the attack, they took the injured women to a hospital.

“The doctors tried to save the babies, but Nosheen had a miscarriage because of the severe injuries inflicted by the attackers,” he said, adding that his wife was still in a state of shock and grief.

Masih said that the family has registered case No. 184/12 against Irfan Safdar and nine others, but the suspects managed to get pre-arrest bails with the help of police.

“Their interim bails end on May 22, and we know they will be able to influence their way out of this case as well,” he said. ‘There is no justice for the poor and helpless in Pakistan, especially if you belong to a minority community.”

Thus far, he added, they have received no assistance from any government or Christian organization.

“We cannot leave the village, because we don’t have any other place or means to go,” he said. “The villagers are giving moral support to us, but we need help in facing this situation. In villages, it is the police that matter, and in this case, the entire police machinery is working against us.”

Saddar Station House Officer Sohail Tariq was unavailable for comment.