

Police in Pakistan Decline to Prosecute Rape Suspects

Police have refused to arrest Muslims accused of causing the miscarriage of twin girls by beating their mother, even though a judge cancelled the suspects' interim bails, according to the woman's husband.

Officers in Punjab Province's Narowal district are biased in siding with Muslims accused of causing the miscarriage and of gang-raping the mother's 13-year-old Christian niece, said Asher Masih, uncle of the girl and husband of the mother. The gang beat the mother, Nosheen Masih, and other relatives to pressure them into dropping the rape charges, Masih said.

Among those accused of beating Nosheen Masih, then five-months pregnant, and raping the girl, is Irfan Safdar. Police are protecting Safdar because of the influence of his father, retired police inspector Safdar Bajwa, Masih said by telephone from Dhamala village.

"Even though their bails have been cancelled, the police are trying to give a clean sheet to Irfan and haven't taken him into custody even once," Masih said.

He added that the accused, with police help, have continued to pressure the family for a "reconciliation agreement," under which they would drop charges.

Police also have already declared Safdar innocent in the rape case because of the influence of his father, Masih said. First Information Reports (FIRS) on both the alleged rape and beating crimes have been registered.

The alleged rape victim told Civil Judge Mansoor Ahmed Warraich that Irfan Safdar, an employee of Safdar identified only as Shahid, and an unidentified man had kidnapped her as

she walked past Safdar's house on March 29 while heading to the fields. She said they drugged her, took her to an outhouse in the fields and raped her.

The girl told the judge that she had not gone to school since the day of the attack and never wanted to return.

Sarwat Hakeem, the investigating officer in both cases, reportedly told the court that the girl had gone to the fields with the three suspects of her own will, that she had a "friendship" with Shahid and that she consented to sex with him. He also claimed that the family had not found the girl in the outhouse, and that she had gone home on her own.

He dismissed the family's claim that the twins had been lost to miscarriage due to the beating, claiming the stillbirth did not happen until 48 hours after the attack.

Muslim criminals believe police and courts will give little credence to the complaints of Christians in the country, which is nearly 96 percent Muslim.

Masih said relatives have lost hope of getting justice from police, adding that his family was "paying a huge price for being poor ... and for being Christian."

"What can we expect from the police when they are not paying heed even to the court orders?" he said. "They are distorting facts and have even gone to the extent of accusing a 13-year-old of committing adultery with three men."