

Rape Victims Suffer in Silence

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The threat of honour killings means most sex crimes go unreported in Iraq.

Having survived the trauma of being raped and beaten by a family friend, Dilzar then narrowly escaped death at the hands of her father.

Although her attacker agreed to marry her and pay 250 million dinars (170,000 US dollars) in compensation, Dilzar's father felt the shame brought upon the family was too great and planned to murder her in an honour killing.

Dilzar, not her real name, escaped and was rescued by Asuda, a Sulaimaniyah-based NGO that protects women who have faced sexual violence or mental abuse.

Although there are no accurate statistics available, women's groups say rape is increasing in Iraq - because of the lawlessness that is plaguing the country and the male-dominated nature of society.

Kawsar Hasan Nadir, who heads the social section at the government-linked Kurdistan Women's Union, documented more than 50 rape cases in 2004.

However, because women like Dilzar are often threatened by their families if they admit they've been raped, most sex crimes go unreported.

Rezheen, 18, became pregnant after being sexually assaulted by her neighbour but kept the attack secret from her parents.

During the early months of her pregnancy, she was taken to Sulaimaniyah Hospital with pains in her stomach and when a doctor revealed her secret, her father and brothers tried to kill her. Thinking quickly, the doctor said he had made a mistake and Rezheen was not pregnant. "My family went crazy so the doctor hid the baby from them," said Rezheen.

Asuda got involved, arranging a marriage between Rezheen and her neighbour and travel to Iran where they'll stay until after the child is born.

Some from outside Iraq's borders also come to Asuda for help.

Nigar, 35, ran away to Iraqi Kurdistan from her native Iran after she quarreled with her husband. She was raped by her taxi driver "because I had no money" and when she became pregnant turned to Asuda.

"I stayed with Asuda for nine months and then went back to Iran to have the baby there," she said. "My husband doesn't know that the baby isn't his."

Deedar Bahadeen, a social worker at Asuda, thinks education programmes in schools to promote equality between the sexes would help overcome society's attitudes to rape victims. "The parents lack awareness in raising girls so the girls have problems," said Bahadeen.

Sieran Rostem, of the Saya Organisation, which combats gender discrimination and violence against women, agrees women need to be educated about their rights. "They also need sex education and information about women's health," said Rostem.

Ismael Osman is an IWPR trainee in Iraq.

Location: Iraqi Kurdistan
Iraq
Iran

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