

1. **42% of rapes relate to elopement of minor girls with lovers in Karnal** **Bhanu P. Lohumi/TNS**

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While the State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB) data has put Karnal district on the top in the number of rape cases registered, it has come to light that more than 42 per cent of these cases pertain to the elopement of minor girls with their lovers and are not cases of forcible or gang rape.

Of the 40 rape cases registered in Karnal up to September this year, more than 17 are of elopement of minor girls with lovers.

So far as heinous crime was concerned, two cases of gang rape occurred in Karnal district this year, compared to four last year. Interestingly, in 15 cases, the girls later said that they had deserted their husbands as they were forced to marry or given some intoxicant. In most of the cases, the pressure of the parents on the girls was allegedly responsible for changing the statement.

Rape cases need a re-look as all the cases are not gang rape or forcible rape cases. Minors eloping with their lovers and having consensual sex cannot be treated on a par with rape, said AIDS activist Karan Sahu.

Superintendent of police, Karnal, Sushank Anand says that the numerical data might not present the true picture and nature of crime. In all cases, the accused is a person known to the girls. He said the women's helpline was in place to cater 24x7.

A large number of NGOs and civil grievance committees are functional in the area to educate masses about evils in society and the registration of cases indicates the awareness level about female rights in the district and women feel empowered to report crime, he added. The high acquittal rate in rape cases which was 82 per cent till September last year, has gone up to 92 per cent during the current year and it raises a serious question that whether all such cases be registered under Section 376 and no distinction is made between heinous crime and consensual sex with minor girls.

Highlights

- 17 out of 40 cases under 376 pertained to elopement of minor girls with lovers.
- Acquittal rate in rape cases which was 82 per cent till September end last year, has risen to 92 per cent in the current year.
- NGOs for change in mindset and self defense and serious action against witnesses turning hostile
- Registration of cases indicates awareness level of the district, women feel empowered to report crime