

DAWN

Over 823 women fall victim to violence in six months

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI, Jan 10: More than 823 women fell victim to violence in 712 incidents, including custodial ones, in Sindh during the last six months — from July to December 2010 — says a report prepared by the Aurat Foundation, a non-governmental organisation.

The report launched here on Monday says that the people's confidence in the police had declined so much that of these over 712 incidents, FIRs of only 341 were registered. Over 320 incidents were not reported to the police, while the status of the remaining over 51 incidents regarding the registration or non-registration of FIRs was not known.

The report says that though the Sindh High Court had declared the holding of jirgas as illegal, at least 24 jirgas were held in which at least eight women were handed over from one party to the other party in the dispute to settle old enmity etc.

The report said that 119 incidents of karo-kari (honour killing) occurred in which 137 people — 98 women and 39 men — were killed. In at least one instance, four persons were killed in a single incident. In 34 incidents the police took 105 women into custody when male members of their family, wanted by the police, could not be traced.

Some 159 women were killed in 148 incidents owing to domestic disputes, old enmity, matrimonial disputes, and resisting robbery attempt. It said 109 women were kidnapped, while 66 women, including young girls, were sexually assaulted in 62 incidents. Of them 44 women were raped and 22 gang-raped in 43 and 19 incidents of rape and gang-rape, respectively.

The report said that 61 women committed suicide and 30 others tried to take their own lives owing to poverty and domestic disputes. As many as 99 women were injured in domestic violence. More than 420 women victims were married while 141 were unmarried while the marital status of the rest of the victims could not be ascertained, says the report the Aurat Foundation staff prepared with the help of news items published in nine newspapers — three each published in English, Sindhi and Urdu.

Speaking at the launch of the report, MPA Marvi Rashdi of the PML-F said that while new and more specific laws with stringent punishments to counter violence against women were always required, there already existed sufficient laws on the statute books but the real problem was the non-implementation of those laws. She said that since the implementation of laws was not efficient, everybody suffered, and women being the most vulnerable section of society suffered more.

She also criticised the attitude of the police owing to which people did not go to the law enforcers to get their incidents recorded, and said that even this report showed that of the 712 incidents, only 341 were reported to the police and the FIRs were registered, while the rest of these had not even been reported to the police. She demanded that police personnel be sensitised to issues relating to women.

She deplored the attitude of certain politicians, particularly some women parliamentarians, and said that when they were in the opposition they always came to this kind of gatherings and issued statements expressing their

solidarity with the victims and saying that when they came to power, they would improve the conditions of poor women, particularly victims of violence, and empower them. But now when they were in government, they had even stopped attending these programmes, fearing that the media might ask them what they had done for women while they were in government. She urged the women parliamentarians to rise above party politics and forge unity whenever a piece of legislation relating to women came under discussion.

Aurat Foundation's Mehnaz Rehman said that though violence against women was a global phenomenon, it was no excuse for doing nothing to improve the status of women in the country. She said Pakistan was a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and had to make its laws in conformity with the convention, but very little had been done in that direction.

Citing an example, she said though the bill regarding domestic violence had been passed by the National Assembly, owing to the opposition by certain parliamentary figures, it could not pass through the senate in the specific time limit, and lapsed. Now the entire process would have to be started all over again.

She said another bill on the same issue had been submitted by MPAs in the Sindh Assembly sometime back, but it was not being taken up in the assembly. She urged the women parliamentarians to take a joint stand whenever a women's issue came up through the legislative process.