

'Crime against women grossly under-reported'

Seema Singh

BANGALORE: In a curious paradox to increasing literacy and awareness, crimes against women in Bangalore and the rest of Karnataka have been steadily increasing over the past five years with the crimes in rural areas being grossly under-reported.

According to a study done by a group of researchers at the Women's Policy Research Advocacy Unit (WOPRA), part of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), crimes against women in rural areas are "gravely misinterpreted and unreported". The study has indicated that the cases of dowry and physical torture are on the rise in rural areas with women often going to the perpetrators of crime for redressal.

Stressing the non-reporting of crimes, Fellow at WOPRA N. Shantha Mohan said, "Statistics of the police and researchers do

not match. We've found that only one in four cases gets reported." The police, on the other hand, plead lack of initiative on the part of women for not lodging complaints.

"Absence of women constables in the villages, flawed reporting mechanisms where the complainant or the authority considers only severe beating as crime and sometimes the distance between the redressal forum and the village lead to neglect of crimes against women," Ms Mohan added.

Sadly, the figures from the home department and city police are not encouraging, either.

Statistics available from the home department show that the crimes against women in the state have gone up steadily: from 3,260 cases in 1994 to 6,223 in 1997 and 4,583 cases till September, 1998.

Ironically, dowry harassment has been increasing both in urban and rural areas. While

in 1997, there were 161 registered dowry deaths, with an additional 36 deaths by burning, so far this year (till November) in Bangalore city alone, there have been 43 deaths along with 182 registered cases of dowry harassment.

Commenting on the proposals to set up mobile courts and neighbourhood societies for redressing such grievances, put up at the recent colloquium at NIAS, Home Secretary (II) S. Mariswamy said the department had been pushing the concept of mobile courts to the high court but it had not materialised.

"Given the fate of such courts for scheduled castes and tribes and traffic, it is quite unlikely that such a court for women's issues is possible in the immediate future," Mr Mariswamy observed.

Actively involved in the Ford Foundation study on police intervention in such crimes in Karnataka, Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat,

Asha Ramesh from NIAS said the solution lies in sensitising officers at the middle rungs — head constables, sub-inspectors and inspectors. "In Maharashtra, more women have been inducted into the police force and that has worked wonders. I believe Maharashtra module can be followed in Karnataka too."

Pointing out the lacunae in all-woman police station in Ulsoor, Ms Ramesh said it was not adequately staffed though it was receiving a number of cases. "At the lower rung, they have not been properly trained and sensitised about the issues. If recruitment is done on humanitarian grounds, quality is compromised."

While the Bangalore police plan to set up a centre to provide counselling over the telephone to women victims and utilise the Hoysala mobile squad to get in time to the distressed, much more obviously requires to be done.