

One woman reports a rape every 15 minutes in India



New Delhi, January 12 (RHC)-- One woman reported a rape every 15 minutes on average in India in 2018, according to government data released on Thursday, underlining its dismal reputation as one of the worst places in the world to be female.

The highly-publicized gang rape and murder of a woman in a bus in New Delhi in 2012 brought tens of thousands onto the streets across India and spurred demands for action from film stars and politicians, leading to harsher punishments and new fast-track courts. But the violence has continued unabated.

Women reported almost 34,000 rapes in 2018, barely changed from the year before. Just over 85 percent led to charges, and 27 percent to convictions, according to the annual crime report released by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Women's rights groups say crimes against women are often taken less seriously, and investigated by police lacking sensitivity.

"The country is still run by men, one (female prime minister) Indira Gandhi is not going to change things. Most judges are still men," said Lalitha Kumaramangalam, former chief of the National Commission for Women.

"There are very few forensic labs in the country, and fast-track courts have very few judges," said Kumaramangalam, a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The rape of a teenager in 2017 by former BJP state legislator Kuldeep Singh Sengar gained national attention when the accuser tried to kill herself the following year, accusing the police of inaction, and more recently, rape allegations against federal minister Swami Chinmayanand.

Five months before Sengar was convicted last December, the accuser's family had to be provided with security after a truck crashed into the car she was in, injuring her and killing two of her relatives.

A 2015 study by the Centre for Law & Policy Research in Bengaluru found that fast-track courts were indeed quicker, but did not handle a high volume of cases. And a study in 2016 by Partners for Law in Development in New Delhi found that they still took an average of 8.5 months per case - more than four times the recommended period.

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