News | Human Rights

Pakistan stumbles upon its ‘biggest’ child abuse case

Shock and anger as police discovers 400 video recordings of more than 280 children being forced to have sex in Punjab.

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Officials in the Pakistani state of Punjab have called for a federal inquiry into what it called the largest-ever child abuse case in the South Asian country’s history involving nearly 300 children.

The government of Punjab state on Sunday ordered a judicial investigation into the case that came to light last week after discovery of about 400 video recordings of more than 280 children being forced to have sex.

‘Pakistan is failing its children.’

“Those involved in the case will be severely punished. They will not be able to escape their fate. The affected families will be provided with justice at any cost,” Chief Minister of Punjab Shahbaz Sharif was quoted as saying by Dawn newspaper website.

So far seven people have been reportedly arrested by the police over the case that has shocked the nation of 180 million.

Most of the victims were under 14, including a six-year-old boy, Rai Babar Saeed, district police chief of Kasur, where the incident happened, told reporters, adding that a 10-year-old schoolgirl was filmed being molested by a 14-year-old boy.

Videos of these assaults were filmed and thousands of copies are believed to have been sold in Hussain Khanwala village in Kasur district, the police said.

People have protested in the wake of the scandal calling for action against perpetrators [AFP]

One of the victims said he was injected in the spine with a drug before he was assaulted, they added.

Government in denial

The scale of the scandal emerged earlier this week after the victims’ parents clashed with the police during a protest against their failure to prosecute the men who orchestrated

the scandal.

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Pakistan experienced a similar tragedy in the late 1990s, when 100 children were sexually abused and murdered in Lahore by Javed Iqbal Mughal, a serial killer.

Al Jazeera's Nicole Johnston, reporting from Islamabad, said that a gang of 25 men were involved in the crime, coordinating it.

"Some of the victims' families started to speak up. This is creating a lot of controversy in Pakistan," she said.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Tahira Abdullah, a human rights activist in Islamabad, said that the government is "in denial" about the abuses.

"I think Pakistan is failing its children," she said, adding that the stigma about the cases, and the lack of trust in the court system, have prevented the arrest and persecution of abusers.

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