

# Why is child-rape on the rise in India?

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*Priya Kale reflects on the current wave of reported child-rapes in India and asks why tougher rape laws have failed to stem the incidence of sexual assault.*

Just when it seemed that gender violence could not get more brutal than after the 16 December 2012 gang-rape of a student in Delhi, [it did](#). This time, a five-year-old girl was kidnapped, brutally assaulted and raped allegedly by her neighbour and his friend. Her ordeal lasted 40 hours. Following the attack, the familiar show of administrative apathy and insensitivity was on display: the police refused to lodge a complaint at first, then allegedly told the victim's father he was 'lucky' to have found his daughter alive and offered him 2,000 rupees to not pursue the matter further.



What is horrific is that this isn't an isolated case. In the past week alone we've heard of another (abandoned) five-year-old in the same hospital battling rape injuries, a four-year-old who was raped in the central state of Madhya Pradesh and is now on life support following brain injuries, and an eight-year-old who was raped in Uttar Pradesh by her neighbour. The list goes on. The Asian Centre for Human Rights notes that the number of reported child-rapes [has jumped](#) from 2,113 in 2001 to 7,112 in 2011. According to the report, this may just be the 'tip of the iceberg', as a majority of cases go unreported.

In the aftermath of the December attack, there was [rage, anger and frustration](#), but there was also hope. Hope that after the release of the [Justice Verma Commission report](#) on sexual assault and the introduction of tougher anti-rape laws, things would change. On Monday, Justice Verma, the lead author of the commission report [passed away](#). But the work he started continues. Even now, people have taken to the streets and Delhi has seen massive protests. Yet despite people actively displaying their anger and media attention being focused on the issue of sexual assault, attitudes towards gender violence haven't changed. There are two probable reasons why.

Firstly, genuine reform isn't on the government's priority list. If all goes to plan, India goes to the polls in May next year. The governing coalition, the United Progressive Alliance, is too preoccupied with completing its term amid controversies surrounding a 2G spectrum allocation scam and a contentious coal mining license report to bother with real measures to stem gender-based violence at this point in time.

This relates to the other need of the hour—police reforms. Even the toughest law will cease to have a deterrent effect if law-enforcers cannot be bothered with implementation. The path to reforming and sensitising the police is long, arduous and runs uphill. Policemen are ultimately drawn from the same patriarchal society that has fostered a culture of rape and changing the seriousness with which they view crimes against women is going to be as

challenging as changing social perceptions. Nilanjana Roy, a well-known writer, [makes the excellent point](#) that we have to confront the violence children are exposed to on a day-to-day basis before the current wave of reported child-rapes can be properly addressed.

Unfortunately, this time around, the Indian public's anger seems to be mixed with fear and helplessness that a five-year-old could be subjected to an assault so unspeakable. Girls and women can be told to carry pepper spray and learn self-defence. They can be taught to fight back and not fall prey to the (almost) globally prevalent culture of sexism. But when a four-, five- or eight-year-old is involved, you think of her as a child first and a female later. That's where the helplessness seeps in. It is her parents and society's responsibility to keep her safe. And it is that very society that has failed her.

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