

## **Forced conversion an issue in Pakistan's south Sindh province**

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**Karachi:** A leading Pakistani Hindu group has expressed concern over the forced conversion and marriage of young Hindu girls to Muslim men in the country's southern Sindh province.

The members of Pakistan Hindu Seva Welfare Trust (PHS) and the Sindhi Hindu Youth wing here told a press conference yesterday that forced conversion and marriage of Hindu girls remains a grave problem for the Hindu community in Sindh. "There were 15 cases of attacks against the Hindu community so far this year, five were reported as cases of kidnapping and forced conversion," PHS head Sanjesh Dhanja said.

"What is of concern to us is that in only 20 per cent of the cases can one claim that conversion was voluntary and not forced upon the girl after her abduction," Dhanja said.

He said Hindu community had no issues if someone voluntarily opted to convert and marry outside their religion but in most cases Hindu girls are forced to do what their abductors say.

According to the PHS, Hindu community here faced land grabbing, attacks and kidnappings while forced conversions, incidents of temple burning, rape and murders were reported from Sakrand, Ghotki and Nagarparkar districts in the year. "What is upsetting is that despite our best efforts the people who are involved in attacks on our community are released on bail after being arrested or caught," it said.

Hindus are proud of being Pakistanis in this country and should not be treated as second class citizens, the PHS said. Despite laws against forced marriages following abductions, cries against the crime mainly affecting the Hindu community - continue to increase in Sindh since the past decade, it added.

Earlier this week a draft bill on the issue of forced conversion and marriage was submitted to the deputy speaker of the Sindh Assembly for vetting.

- PTI