

The crime story

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Introduction:

The latest edition of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report reveals disturbing trends.

About National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):

1. NCRB is responsible for collecting and analyzing crime data as well as maintaining national databases related to crime and criminals.
2. It was established in 1986 based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task Force (1985).
3. It operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
4. Before the establishment of the NCRB, crime data in India was collected and maintained by individual states, leading to variations in reporting formats and standards.
5. The NCRB acts as a repository of information on crime and criminals so that law enforcement agencies and policymakers can use this data for better planning and decision-making.

The findings in NCRB data:

1. There is an Increase in Crimes against women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), children, cyber-crimes, and offences against the state in 2022 as compared with 2021.
2. There was a 4% increase in the number of cases registered under the crimes against women in 2022 as compared to 2021.
3. Registration of cases of crimes against children showed an increase of 8.7% over 2021.
4. The registered cases showed an increase of 9.3% over 2021.
5. During 2022, 64.8% of the cybercrime cases registered were with the motive of fraud, followed by extortion at 5.5%, and sexual exploitation at 5.2%.
6. The report shows a decline of 4.5% in the registration of cases over 2021.

The significance of NCRB data:

1. The NCRB does not claim that these figures represent an accurate count of criminal offences across the country.
2. The agency has underlined that its data record the incidence of registered crime, not the actual numbers.
3. The report should, therefore, be read to understand the big picture in terms of crime registration.
4. Even then, the data is a valuable aid for policymakers and law enforcement agencies.
5. They should not overlook that almost every NCRB compilation has framed the vulnerabilities of women and marginalised sections.
6. The agency's latest round-up of crime makes a case for also prioritising the anxieties of senior citizens and making homes, educational institutions and public spaces safe for children.

Limitations of NCRD findings and way forward:

1. The NCRB has flagged a caveat: An increase in crime numbers in state or city-level police data — in Delhi, for instance — could be on account of greater awareness, increased presence of law enforcement agencies or citizen-centric initiatives.
2. But policymakers also need to be alert to under-reporting.
3. As the NCRB points out, the perpetrators of violence are often acquaintances of those at the receiving end.
4. Women, for example, find it very difficult to report abusers in their close circles — husbands, fathers, partners, family members, friends.
5. For the same reason, the true extent of violence against children is likely to be greater than that estimated by the bureau.
6. An earlier NCRB report, in fact, acknowledged that it did not “capture the socio-economic causative factors”.
7. The agency’s data can, no doubt, be read along with studies that shine a light on the structural impediments faced by the underprivileged — for instance, NFHS reports or recent studies that show that women find it difficult to register FIRs.
8. There is also a growing body of scholarship which shows that people from marginalised social groups are often pressured into not reporting crimes against them.
9. The NCRB must sharpen its methodologies and make its reports more nuanced.
10. The growing incidents of cybercrime — the NCRB report underlines the seriousness of this threat — call for law enforcers to stay ahead of the curve. Across the world, data is becoming an important tool for ensuring public safety.

Conclusion:

The NCRB cannot be impervious to conversations on the use of digital systems for crime prevention and investigation. It must approach new challenges, and find ways to effectively address old ones.

