

# Female Criminality in Lebanon

## The Local Police Perspective

### ■ General Dr. Amin Saliba

Former Internal Security Forces (ISF) Chief of Staff and Lebanese University Professor

*The following texts were submitted by two high ranking Lebanese Internal Security Forces (Police) officers following the request of the editor. Although the content of the articles do not involve adequate research methodology, the participation of law enforcement officials in attempting to understand female criminality is necessary for developing an insightful perspective.*

Lebanese women, like their male counterparts, have physical and social needs. In a patriarchal social system such as Lebanon, women are commonly perceived as feeble creatures in need of protection, and in conservative communities, they are often considered a major threat, capable of dishonoring the family and tarnishing its reputation. It is worth noting that there is not one stereotypical 'Lebanese woman.' Women differ in their outlooks on life, their desires, and goals depending on the region they come from, and a variety of other factors. For example, in big cities, women have needs that vary dramatically from those of women in smaller towns, and even more so than those of women in small villages and remote areas. In addition, women in Beirut tend to be different from those in Tripoli, Sidon or Zahle, at least when it comes to their outlook and social needs. This short introduction is necessary to highlight some crucial differences between women in Lebanon. The data presented below draws on 33 years of experience

in the Internal Security Forces' Judicial Police, and includes data from Beirut and remote villages and is presented with the hope to provide insight into the crimes that women might commit.

Women in Lebanon, in comparison to women elsewhere, lead sheltered lives, which protect them from the criminal elements that may influence women and make them more prone to commit crime. We aim to demonstrate this when addressing the issue of drug crimes committed by women in Lebanon. It appears that dismal living conditions are what primarily push women in Lebanon to commit the following criminal acts:

- Honor related crimes
- Prostitution
- Theft and fraud
- Murder and drug dealing

The first crime is inflicted on or by women usually as a result of their intimate relationships, whereas the rest result from women's social and survival needs.

#### **Honor Related Crimes**

These crimes concern those who kill to avenge their honor, often taking their own life immediately after-

wards. These crimes are committed by women throughout the country, but vary slightly according to their social milieu. The percentage of such crimes committed by women living in the city is low, yet increases considerably in villages and households that uphold conservative values with respect to women's freedom before and after marriage. However, this does not mean that honor killings do not exist in big cities like Beirut. In fact, these crimes are known to have occurred in certain popular neighborhoods in the capital, where family ties are sacred and strong social relations prevail. In many cases, the woman kills a treacherous lover who has abandoned her, often taking her life afterwards. Such crimes are frequent and occur almost every month. Although these crimes have happened throughout Lebanon in the past, they now only take place in remote areas and small villages.

### **Prostitution**

In prostitution cases, a woman is either charged with adultery, and is legally prosecuted only if her husband chooses to file a lawsuit; or is charged with underground prostitution as stipulated in Article 523 of the Lebanese Penal Code, whereby a woman solicits sex for money. Women in Lebanon commit both categories of crimes; however, they go widely unreported. Hence, the data available to judicial investigators at tribunals is mostly inaccurate. The percentage of women detainees charged with these crimes in the last five years is very low. This is particularly the case regarding prostitution because many of the detained women are not Lebanese nationals in the first place.

### **Theft and Fraud**

These crimes are rarely committed by women in Lebanon. They are predominantly 'male crimes,' perhaps because men do not trust women and believe that they are incapable of taking part in thievery, as well as the gangs that monopolize this enterprise. Yet, when they do steal, women throughout the country tend to commit acts of theft on their own and out of economic need. This crime is widespread among single and married women with limited income, or among women working as house cleaners. The percentage of imprisoned Lebanese female thieves is lower than that of female thieves who come to Lebanon as domestic workers. Lebanese women rarely commit fraud, and these crimes are only committed by wealthy women living in cities. They are usually businesswomen, who, in the face of financial ruin, commit fraud offences to cover their business losses.

### **Murder and Drug Dealing**

With the exception of those who commit crimes to avenge their honor, female murderers are rare in Lebanon. When women do commit such crimes, they do so after having been deceived, coerced, or out of financial need.

Women often act as accomplices in murder crimes whereby they are coerced by a spouse, lover, or friend to kill, consequently, their crimes are usually carried out under pressure. Yet, the rate of such crimes is minimal compared to Western societies, perhaps because Lebanese women fear for their reputation and that of their families.

With respect to drug crimes, women are usually tricked into trafficking drugs from one country to another or into dealing drugs on the Lebanese market. Yet, very few Lebanese women have the courage to engage in such an activity and male drug dealers are known to consider women untrustworthy as business partners.

Drug usage has become widespread in Lebanon, especially among women in their twenties. Moreover, drugs are found in the universities and secondary schools of big cities. Drug abuse is particularly high in Beirut and its suburbs, as well as the rest of the large cities and towns. Their peer groups often influence Lebanese female students to use drugs, especially their academic circle of friends. It is important to note that the number of actual drug users is far greater than the number of people imprisoned on drug charges. Drug use is widespread in Lebanese society and its implications are alarming. Therefore, the Lebanese security forces ought to work closely with civil society associations and university administrations to combat drug addiction. Moreover, they ought to coordinate with the various UN bodies and make use of the UN programs aimed at combating drug addiction.

The crimes listed above do not take into consideration the age of the perpetrators and this is a limitation that needs to be taken into account because age may be a highly relevant variable when trying to understand female criminality. In addition, it is important to note that no Lebanese woman has ever been active in a terrorist organization, whether to target specific individuals for kidnapping in exchange for ransom, or to target political regimes in other countries.

However, in conclusion, it is necessary to highlight the importance of protecting Lebanese women, especially students in universities, by informing them about the dangers of using and trafficking drugs, using credit cards without authorization, prostituting themselves, or committing major crimes. Moreover, Lebanese women should be made aware of the negative consequences of cultural liberation that results from globalization, especially with respect to premarital sexual relations. In most cases, women who engage in such crimes risk destroying their lives and their reputation. Because we live in a highly conservative society, this would be detrimental to both their families and friends.

Translated by Nadine El-Khoury