

Female Criminality in the Arab World

The decision to compile an issue exploring female criminality in the Arab region stemmed from a need and a desire to tackle a controversial topic on which very little has been published.

When I first suggested the topic to potential contributors, I realized there was substantial resistance in recognizing women's role as criminals (especially in the Arab world and the Middle East). This is most probably due to the fact that women are primarily portrayed as victims rather than perpetrators of crime. Yet, although women are more likely to be victims of crime, many women have been involved in serious and even notorious crimes. Furthermore, there has been a long-standing tendency to 'pathologize' female criminals and to view victimization as the sole contributing factor behind their acts. However, the relationship between gender and victimization is far more complex with no clear cut causal relations and women's involvement in violent crime is not always the result of need, poverty or victimization.

In fact, one of the most intriguing questions raised in discussions with *Al-Raida's* Board members was the extent to which female victimization affects female criminality. In other words, are women's crimes reactionary or deliberate? We also wondered about the types and distribution of crimes committed by women.

To help us address these questions we have been fortunate to enlist the support of a number of contributors who currently play a major role in including gender issues on the criminology agenda.

We are delighted to welcome the new contributors to *Al-Raida*, and are also pleased to have a number of other contributors whose articles have appeared in previous issues on the subject of gender. Each has taken the opportunity to reflect on the current state of gender and criminology in the region, and on relevant issues that continue to raise concern.

The articles are primarily qualitative observations and opinions, with little emphasis on quantitative data, since statistics pertaining to women and crime are inaccurate, and because very little is known about the nature of crimes committed by women in the Arab region.

This current issue includes opinion pieces as well as research articles.

A number of criminal cases in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon are also included: Unreported cases of female fraud and the phenomenon of female violence during the recent Egyptian elections are both addressed.

A number of academics, activists and legal practitioners were asked to tackle the issue of female criminality from the following perspectives: the legislative and judicial standpoint (Zalzal); policing and social control (Daher and Saliba); the Human Rights perspective (Mhanna); female crime in cinema (Addoum); and psychological explorations of female criminality (Ataya).

Schayegh and Strobl's contributions on female criminality in pre-Revolution Iran and modern day Bahrain respectively, are very insightful.

Criminal law and criminal justice policies have also been paid special attention. And while there have been many improvements, the implications of new legislation and penal policies continue to be problematic.

We are also thankful to Internal Security Forces' Generals Fadl Daher and Amin Saliba for their personal insight into the issue of female criminality.

We hope that this issue will tackle the previous gaps in knowledge created by criminologists' neglect of the female offender, in information about women's involvement in crime, and the data on female victimization, and shed light on the treatment of women in the criminal justice process.

Although we aim to introduce the vast domain of women and crime by exploring a number of various cases and opinions, there is still a long way to go for a full and comprehensive understanding of female criminality in the Arab region. Hopefully, the following articles will instigate critical debate, boost interest in and highlight the importance of understanding and tackling female criminality in the area.

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