

Sexual Abuses inside Detention Centers (An interview with a girl that was raped five times)

In the context of documenting the crimes committed in Syria through interviewing some of the people who experienced the brutality and torture inside the Syrian regime's prisons, Fadel Abdul Ghani, head of [SNHR](#), interviewed in April, 2013 a victim of sexual abuse who was prisoned in one of the Syrian regime's detention centers. We are publishing this story in particular for the important details it includes as it provides a comprehensive overview of the treatment of women prisoners inside the detention centers which consists mostly of torture, humiliation, and in some cases sexual abuse.

Please know that we changed the victim's name to Amal (Hope) in order to preserve her social and security status. Amal was engaged at the time of the interview. Her fiancé insisted on keeping her despite everything happened to her inside the prison, however; he was killed by the Syrian regime's forces before he was able to leave Syria to meet Amal.

The details of the interview that took place at a cafe in Amman, Jordan:

Fadel: What happened with you exactly?

Amal: On the last day of Eid Al-Adha the security forces broke into our home. I was back then from a clinic as I was suffering from some illness and it was decided that I must have a cholecystectomy surgery. My mother and father were divorced; my mother called my father before I got home and told him that he must come immediately because the military security has broken into our home. When I got home I wasn't much surprised to see them because they arrested my father before at the beginning of the revolution. My father was arguing with a security personnel and refusing to let them take one of his daughters, I thought they meant my younger sister.

Fadel: Please be more specific, did you mean that the military security's intention was to take your sister?

Amal: That was what I thought initially, I didn't expect that they meant me. My father told me then: they just want to ask you about a couple of things, it won't take more than 30 minutes, but don't worry, I won't let them take you.

While my father was trying to soothe me although I wasn't afraid, suddenly about 20 men entered the house, they weren't wearing any uniform, just t-shirts with Bashar Al-Assad picture on it, they pulled me from my hand to the car outside while saying promptly: come on... you are wanted for interrogation... my father's words went in vain: This is not right!! My father followed us quickly to the military security branch in Tartus. When we arrived, my father and I entered a room where Ibrahim, one of the detectives, was there.

Fadel: What was the name of the branch's administrator?

Amal: I don't have any idea.

The detective didn't say a word and we sat still from 12 PM until 4 PM when two security personnel came and whispered something to Ibrahim's ear then he said to my father:

You have to leave without your daughter... you can't take her home with you right now. My father had to do as he said, but he asked them if he can come later to bring me my medicine, the detective agreed and told my father as he was trying to calm him: of course you can bring you daughter her medicine, get it here and we will give it to her... and we will not let anyone hit or close her. After 15 minutes of my father's departure, detective Ibrahim asked me to take off my Khemar before another detective named Mohammad came and saw me that way... as I was about to take off my Khemar, detective Mohammad asked me to take off the Khemar too, I did. He asked as he was waving his gun: who is this girl? Ibrahim answered: it is Amal... here he said: if I have known that you are this beautiful, I would have brought you sooner.

By then I was very scared as I started to know what to come, he asked me again: do you have a mobile phone? I answered him negatively, then they took me to the torture room where they tortured me for three consecutive days, and when they give a chance to rest, which was usually no longer than fifteen minutes, they would bring mice to the room.

Fadel: What were the methods of torture?

Amal: They electrified and burned me.

Fadel: Who was the supervisor of your torture?

Amal: Detective Mohammad.

Fadel: Was he the same Mohammad from before? And was there any one else?

Amal: Yes the same Mohammad... he started torturing me from dawn. On the second day there were two men who tortured me. On the third day he came back to torture me.

Fadel: How did they torture you?

Amal: At the beginning they used electricity, and then Shabah (The Ghost) (this is a very common way to torture prisoners in which they hang the prisoner's hand to the ceiling and then they beat him.), BesatAr-Rih (The flying carpet), mice, and fire. The room was very dark so the mice's eyes looked red.

They executed a man in front of me in a horrible manner; they put a middle-sized mouse in his mouth before they sewed his mouth closed and left him that way until he choked to death.

One of the security personnel, who used to bring me the medicine, told me that he didn't hear the sound of any women being tortured despite that I saw 40 women exiting the torture rooms on the day they brought me here.

Fadel: When you were being tortured, what you were wearing?

Amal: A jeans and a heavy shirt, it was winter and I was feeling cold.

I remained at the torture room for the whole three days, I wasn't allowed to go to the bathroom except on the third day when I was raped. Detective Mohammad came to me and said: tomorrow you will be transferred to the civil judiciary in Tartus and you will be released, but you have to confess any crimes you committed so I can write it down based on your testimony. I replied: I don't have anything to confess about, you usually write down the crimes without asking the accused, why are you asking me this time? Of course I just said that to irritate them, Mohammad laughed, which was the first time I saw him does that, then he got out and came back with another three security personnel.

Fadel: So they transferred you from the solitary confinement where you were being tortured?

Amal: Yes, they took me to another room with a bed and a blanket; of course it was also empty of any torture devices.

Fadel: What happened next?

Amal: After the detective told me about me being transferred tomorrow, he asked me to sleep and have some rest so I can be ready in the morning. After about 30 minutes detective Mohammad came with three security personnel, he started flirting and harassing me, but then he left me for the three men whom he entered with to rape me. When the first one got near me I tried to resist with all I had but he raped me eventually. The same thing happened to me with the second one. After that I was exhausted and fell on the ground when the third man raped me. Every one of them watched me as I was getting raped then they left me on the ground bleeding. Afterwards the branch doctor came and took me to the bathroom to clean myself, then he in-

jected me with something I didn't know what it was, when I asked him he said: don't be afraid, this just something that will get you stronger so you can attend the court session.

Of course that was because it was dawn.

Fadel: Do you mean that the three men raped you one after another? Was it the first one who tore your clothes?

Amal: Yes exactly, the first one started everything.

He left me naked without any clothes...

The other two were standing at the door watching and waiting for their turn, while the third one was raping me, the doctor came after ten minutes.

Fadel: Do you remember their names?

Amal: No... they didn't mention their names. I didn't know anyone except Detectives Mohammad and Ibrahim and a third guy named Ali Yousuf that was in charge of searching... that is all I know.

Amal: On the second day they took me to the court where the judge looked at my papers, and then he said: this woman is a terrorist and transferred me to the terrorism court. I was shocked and scared, I kept asking myself: where are they going to take me? Damascus? I couldn't concentrate or think about anything...

They took me afterwards to Tartus central prison, there was no sector for torturing women. I had to wait while they chained the prisoners who were about to be transferred.

In the cell there was a different charge for every woman, nonetheless there was a prisoner named Bushra Al-Kurdi whose charges were political.

I remained at Tartus central prison for 11 days, afterwards they took me along with other prisoner after covering our eyes and chaining us. We went by the bus to Adra prison in Damascus or that is what I thought. The guards kept humiliating and insulting us all the way. When we reached our destination, we opened our eyes and found ourselves in a wide yard and I was barely able to read two words from a panel that said Homs governorate.... It wasn't a security branch or a police station, but apparently a place that was turned into a detention and torture center.

I wasn't tortured for two days, but the torturing by electricity and fire started on the third day and it was stronger than it was back in Tartus. There were humiliation and insults and the sectarian accusation like (you are Omar's followers... you are Salfis), but I wasn't raped there. I was wearing a shirt and a jeans, all what they wanted to do there is to insult Islam and religion in front of us.

Fadel: How many hours did they torture you per day?

Amal: There is a system for every security branch, for instance they tortured me in the branch from 2:00 AM until 4:00 PM. And in Tartus the torturing was all day, I went unconscious more than five times while I am being tortured and in every time the doctor injected me to wake me up.

In Homs the torturing was shorter but stronger and the insults were also harder. I used to curse Bashar every time they insulted me. They transferred me to the civil prison in Homs and I remained there for three days. The prison was very filthy and the food was delivered in garbage cans which was very disgusting and unappetizing. There were 375 women; all of them were in three rooms and a hallway, we slept in shifts.

Fadel: How much big was the room? Was it as big as this room?

Amal: I think it was to this column (Amal pointed to a column that was no more than eight meters away from us).

We all slept in these three rooms and the hallway; we were more than 375 prisoners.

The number of men was even more. A 70-year-old man suffocated to death because of the Oxygen shortage in the room after they closed all the windows, he was suffering from asthma.

I took my medicine with me from Tartus to Homs. In Homs they asked me about what I was carrying, I told them this is my medicine, they took it from me by force and started stepping on it after they threw it on the ground and said: you don't get to have any medicine... die already.... The security personnel in Homs were much worse than Tartus.

On the third day they called my name: Amal Masnour Tadfir!! They covered my eyes and took me to Damascus, when I opened my eyes I found myself in a large yard and there was a panel says: section 215, "And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous." Quran.

I was really scared as I was wondering what were crimes that we did. Are we criminals?

In that yard there were a lot of kids whose ages were 12-14 years old in addition to 150 women approximately.

Later I learned from Abu-Mohammad one of the jailors, who used to bring us food and water, that this section was for the Muslim Brotherhood's members before the revolution and we should have been transferred to section 219, but because of the lack of space they had to transfer us to section 215. Abu-Mohammad was an old man whom the security men used to

beat and insult.

Fadel: How many days did you spend in section 215?

Amal: 13 days...

On the first day at 215 they divided the girls into groups, each group had six or seven girls, they took us to a room with black walls and camera at the corner. I noticed the camera and told the other girls in my group about it, we all stood in silence waiting for what will happen. After 30 minutes a tall and big man came along with other security guys, he was wearing black clothes and carrying an electric teaser. He ordered us to take off our clothes.

We looked to each other's faces in shock, he asked us again more firmly, a lady from Daraa, who was 36-year-old, asked him: why do you want us to do so? He answered: we want to search you, another lady protested: why can't you search us without taking off our clothes? After some arguing two ladies from Homs took off only their heads covers. The man didn't like it and said: this is not enough, everyone have to take off all her clothes, we want you bare naked.

The arguing and protesting was useless, the girls had to take off all their clothes, me and other girl from Damascus were beaten hardly after we refused strongly. We realized that the camera was on which made it all worse.

After they searched us, they took the seven of us to a very small room (they call it the solitary), Abu-Mohammad himself was delivering food, I wasn't able to eat any food because I was very disgusted, I only ate crusty bread.

Torture in this branch was from 12:00 to 2:00 AM we were tortured two girls at a time. The ways of torturing wasn't very different; Ash-Shabah, BesatAr-Rih, except for the electric shocks; they were done by higher voltages. The torture here was tougher and more brutal for the prisoner men. The dead bodies were thrown onto the hallways so the guards would disfigure and step on them, the screams were so hard that it shook the whole place, they used to torture the men at day and the women at night.

The branch manager used to come every 15 days or so to search the rooms and switch the rooms of the girls from time to time in order to prevent them from making any friends. On one occasion among us were this very pretty girl who was 21-year-old although it looked younger because her body was smaller. When the manager saw her he had her brought to his

office, I knew then that he chose a girl to rape every time.

I remember another story. When our room was getting overcrowded they transferred four girls to a room in the basement with a girl named Yasmin. Yasmin has an American nationality and is married to a Syrian husband which why she was arrested. In the same room there was a lady named Merphat Al-Assad. Merphat didn't get tortured or beaten; they used to inject her with something that made her lose her memory according to some of the prisoners. Later I learned that she was from Aleppo and she claimed that Bashar Al-Assad was fond of her before he married his current wife Asmaa Al-Assad. That lady was saying strange words before she lost her memory such as: (I have a daughter from Bashar Al-Assad, her name is Intisar and she has disappeared). She used to turn her back to the other prisoners and pretend to talk with Bashar asking him why he left her. She was transferred later to a mental hospital in Damascus. One day between morning and noon, they opened all the solitary cells and asked all the prisoners to form a line except for the Muslim Brotherhood members who were about 150 prisoners. Some of them were prisoners for 45 year. Before that day some of the women stole a pin from one of the officers' office and made a hole in the wall where the Muslim Brotherhood prisoners were on the other side, we spoke with one of them, he told us that he was arrested with his father since he was 11 years old. His father died later in a heart attack and the son stayed, he is now 40-year-old.

Amal continues:

After the men and women formed a line, we went to the yard. Bashar Al-Assad pictures were all over the ground like prayer rugs. The other security men were nervous and prepared their mobile phones to take pictures. One of the security men was in front of the pictures and in front of him there was a piece of wood as he was about to lead the prayer. He was as if he were telling us: (you who worship Bashar, get ready for the prayers).

Everyone kneeled before the pictures as they were asked except for me and another woman prisoner, one of the security men grabbed me violently from my neck and forced me to kneel. I said: ok, ok there is no need to be violent, I will kneel by myself. Then I spit on the picture and stepped on it.... The security men beat me hardly. I would have died if they didn't have stopped... the arteries of my brain were damaged because of the rough beating that I had.

On the fourteenth day inside section 215 I was transferred to Palestine branch where I stayed for 10 days; I spent five days of which in the hospital.

Fadel: Why did you enter the hospital? Was it because the beating from before?

Amal: on the first day in Palestine branch I wasn't tortured much, but on the second day they started torturing me violently... the brutal torture continued for the next three days. On the fifth day, two security men came and raped me just like Tartus. They took me before that to a solitary room where I told them: I am not virgin..! (I thought that would stop them from doing so, given that they prefer virgins so they can destroy the girl's future and reputation), even the branch manager preferred virgins exclusively. They made sure to give the girls who were raped birth control pills, if the girl got pregnant accidentally, it would hit herself until the fetus is dead and in some times they would kill it... every girl got her share of torture separately. Amal continues as she is describing the details of her rape:

Firstly... the first guy raped me while the other one was watching and waiting for his turn. After they finished I fell on the ground and lost my consciousness. After I woke up, the other prisoners told me that I stayed in the hospital for five days unconscious that the security called my parents and told them that I died. After I was out of breath while I was unconscious the doctors thought that I died. They transferred to the military police hospital in Damascus, and told the supervisor doctor: put this body in the refrigerator, he said that he will do so after he run the necessary tests to make sure that I was dead. He tried to resuscitate me after he found out that I wasn't dead yet. I was transferred to the recovery room where I stayed for five days, sometimes I would regain my consciousness briefly then lose it again. I felt the poor treatment by the nurses back then, on the fifth day after I fully regained my consciousness, I was transferred to the security branch at Barza neighborhood in Damascus. I wasn't tortured there. After two days I was transferred again to Adra prison.

Fadel: what happened with you there, and how many women prisoners were there?

Amal: I entered Adra prison along with nine other women prisoners, the number increased to 37 or 38 women prisoners in addition to a child who was arrested with his mother... The jailor Abu-Naghm had a mistake while addressing my papers, he read that my charge was homosexuality instead of terrorism, so I was transferred to the prostitution section in the prison. I cried and felt a lot of pain while I was there, the political charges and terrorism section was way better.

Abu-Naghm's job was to receive the new women prisoners' papers and classify them to the right section in addition to fighting along with the regime forces, he was known for his cruelty with the women.

There was also Abu-Haydar, his job was just to rape, not to torture or beat, just to rape... for instance when a woman prisoner has a big charge such as (a battalion leader's wife) and she

refuses to confess, they would send her to Abu-Haydar!!! I heard this name several times in the prison and I saw him later.

Fadel: What was Abu-Haydar like?

Amal: He was big and tall, with green eyes and long hair... I saw him on my second day there. I stayed in Adra prison, when some of the women prisoners have some sort of dispute they would tell the manager what they heard, the manager would come later and say: you, you, and you to the solitary confinement, it was some sort of punishment caused by the political talk, I was one of the most prisoners to get that punishment.

Through Tal Al-Mallouhi's mother and security personnel I was able to tell my father that I am now in Adra prison. I felt relieved afterwards as if I was released... I could now use the bathroom and my father can bring me some money.

Fadel: Please elaborate more... what was the role that Tal Al-Mallouhi's mother played?

Amal: Tal Al-Mallouhi was sentenced and was in the convicts' room. My fellow prisoners and I were in a room called Al-Ida' (A room in which they put the prisoners who didn't appear before the judge yet). Between the two rooms there was a small gap that we used to talk to each other through it. Tal Al-Mallouhi was allowed to have visitors, use the telephone, and have special food, they also had a fridge, television, and other stuff. Tal was the only who was convicted from before the revolution.

I heard about Tal Al-Mallouhi before, when I heard her name I asked about her and talked to her, she asked me: does your family know that you are here? I answered: no, she asked for my father phone number and said: I will figure something out, when her mother came to visit her she gave her the number, and she told my father about me.

Consequently my father visited me three times a week, they wouldn't let him see me although the other women prisoners were allowed to have visitors but me, and two other sisters named Noura and AyaTouqni, those two sisters were at the air force intelligence branch in Homs. Their papers mentioned that they are not allowed to have visitors as well as me. Also there was a warning that prohibits us from seeing our parents.

In the security branches there was a doctor who used to come after the torture to provide treatment ... also in Adra they used to get us a nurse twice a week... (Every Sunday and Wednesday) who checked each girl. However there was no medical care for the prisoners in-

side the solitary confinement.

We were allowed to have towel for our menstrual cycle in Adra, this was not the case in the other security branches that I was in. When we had our period, there was too much blood that we had back then to tear some of our clothes to use it instead of the towels.

After a month and a half inside Adra prison, I was summoned. I was among the six prisoners who were supposed to appear before the court... a day before on Wednesday the lawyer Anwar Al-Bunni sent to me through someone a paper to sign it. I did and he gave me also 2500 S.P., I didn't know much about these stuff nor about the lawyer himself, I heard later from the prisoners that he usually represents political women prisoners.

After I hired the lawyer on Wednesday, the trial was on Thursday... we were six women prisoners... three of us didn't get released while I was released along with two other women prisoners named Hazar and Ruba.

They told us that we will be released on Sunday because Friday and Saturday were an official holidays. I was surprised that we were released on Friday. Tal Al-Mallouhi's mother was the one who picked me up. I didn't know her in perso, but she introduced herself as Tal's mother and told me that my father wasn't able to come because the roads were closed and there was no way to Tartus. She offered me to spend that night in Damascus until the roads are open. I refused and rushed to the station where I booked a ticket to Latakia because I couldn't find any trips to Tartus. Then I called my father and asked him to come pick me up from a known point.

The most horrible thing I experienced while I was in prison was:

In Palestine branch there was something called joint torture (At-Ta'zib Al-Mushtarak) where they torture men and women together. They brought eight men and four women... we formed a line in the hallway... they said that there is a new detective coming and he wants to know you. The new detective came, his face was grumpy. He asked the first guy (he was 14-year-old) about his name and where is he from, then he asked him: have you participated in the demonstrations? The kid answered: No, no sir I haven't!! The detective slapped him and said: you are lying! He ordered his men to cut off the kid's genitals. He went to the second guy and asked him the same, he answered: no... no I swear I didn't sir! The detective slapped him and accused him of lying and had his men cut off his genitals too which they did. The third guy, who was no more than 19-year-old, was from Der Ezzor, he answered: yes, I did when he was asked, the detective asked him again: how many demonstrations did you participated in, he started counting on his hand, and the detective asked him angrily: are you counting? He replied: I guess it

was more than 100 demonstrations, then the detective started beating him brutally and said to him: say that there is no god but Bashar! The kid refused, after some arguing the guy asked the detective: I want to ask you, is Bashar really your god? The detective said: that's not of your business, the detective continued insulting the guy, he asked again: is Bashar really your god? The detective answered angrily: Yes... Bashar is my god, the guy said: FUCK YOUR GOD... The guy was punished by having his genitals cut off and they left him bleeding to death... The others were aided immediately by the branch doctor.

The detective asked me and the girls about our names, charges, and where we from... and that's was it...

At section 215 they used to leave the dead bodies on the floor for three or four days. Every day there were new two or three bodies... when the prisoners started saying Allah is the greatest (Allah Akbar) we knew that someone was killed or slayed.

Fadel: have you heard about any other rape stories from the other women prisoners?

Amal: The women didn't talk about that matter with me... I didn't hear any girl talking about her story... but some of the prisoners used to whisper to each other (Oh, that poor girl, they did this and that to her.....) I learned later that there were a lot of girls who were raped; also they used to give us pregnancy control pills from the first day.

