

NO ONE IS SAFE:

Sexual Violence Throughout the Life Cycle
of Detention in Egypt

2015-2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | 2 |
| | |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 4 |
| | |
| INTRODUCTION | 14 |
| | |
| METHODS | 16 |
| | |
| CASE NARRATIVES | 25 |
| | |
| FINDINGS | 37 |
| | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | 44 |
| | |

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The authors of this report would like to acknowledge those who shared their stories with us, including victims, survivors, their families, human rights researchers, and lawyers in Egypt and beyond, for their endless courage and sacrifice. At least three individuals referenced in this report were later executed by the Egyptian government: Mahmoud Alahmady, Abdulrahman Solaiman, and Ahmed Mahrous. Similarly, in her suicide note, the late Sarah Hijazi spoke about the sexual violence she endured and the subsequent trauma that plagued her until the end of her life. The majority of interviews we conducted with local organizations go unattributed in our report based on the interviewee's preferences in fear of reprisals. The human cost of ongoing repression is very high, and the courage to speak out is tremendously honorable.

We would also like to acknowledge academics and researchers who reviewed and provided crucial feedback to us on different versions of the report. Without their scholarship and theorizing, this work would not be as comprehensive and complete. Some of these people and organizations include Abdulrahman Hamdy, Hannah ElSisi, Haitham Ghoniem (of We Record), Barra ElSour, Tarek Abdelmaged, Maha Hemdan, and a number of lawyers in human rights organizations, including the Committee for Justice, for offering feedback on different versions of the report.



EGYPTIAN FRONT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report examines instances of sexual violence in Egyptian prisons from the period of 2015 to 2022. The report finds that Egypt employs abuse in detention as a method to coerce, punish, and bring a population under the control of the state; sexual violence is used as a means of weaponizing social norms on gender and sexuality to further degrade prisoners and their loved ones, as well as to repress the ability to address the impact of abuse through pursuit of accountability or other pathways to healing. Because of social norms and taboos (which are also perpetuated by the State in its laws or institutions) around gender and sexuality, those who have experienced sexual violence in prison face compounded obstacles to addressing the trauma endured.

To probe this phenomenon, the report draws on qualitative research carried out by the Freedom Initiative, the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, and a local human rights organization in Egypt that prefers to remain anonymous for security concerns. In reviewing a set of abuses documented from 2015 to 2022, the research identified 655 distinct cases of sexual violence carried out in relation to detention and conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with former detainees, family members, lawyers, and subject matter experts. The research has adopted the term “lifecycle of detention” to better reflect the nature of sexual violence that occurs within and outside of prison walls; extends not only to detainees, but also their family members and loved ones; and that its lasting effects may reverberate over the course of a lifetime and reach far into society.

Case Narratives:

- Sexual violence may begin from the very moment that an individual is pursued for detention. Arrests are frequently conducted without warrants, and sexual violence during arrest has been used as a method of coercion to elicit information (including against family members) or as subjugation.
- As sites that house detainees of a variety of backgrounds and identities and facing a variety of allegations or pretexts for arrests, police stations are rife with sexual violence; sexual violence is not used against one “type” of prisoner (despite prevalence of references to “political” or “criminal” detainees among rights advocates) but was documented against a wide range of detainees.
- Sexual violence in police stations took a variety of forms, purposes, and targets. In some instances, guards exploited detainees for their own sexual gratification and projection of personal power; in other instances, sexual violence was used as a punitive measure, often through electrocution of the genitals (for men and women).
- National Security Agency (NSA) sites have with the greatest preponderance of sexual violence; sexual violence was systematically perpetrated against detainees of all genders, often in conjunction with periods of enforced disappearance in which they had no access to lawyers or ability to report or document the abuse they endured.
- Sexual violence often took place during interrogations at NSA sites where detainees would be raped, molested, electrocuted in their genitals, or threatened with sexual violence against them or their family members to coerce confessions. These confessions were often used as evidence against them in later trials.
- Female prisoners were particularly susceptible to sexual violence in prisons, where guards would often molest them under the guise of “cavity searches.” While these searches are not necessarily illegal (nor unique to Egypt), guards used them as an opportunity to carry out abuse, sexually harassing women or using items picked up off the ground to conduct the searches.

- Officers in police stations also sought to exert control over detainees by using abuse that was explicitly homophobic; low-ranking officers grabbed gay men, trans women, and non-binary individuals by their genitals and used homophobic slurs against them and/or encouraged other male detainees to rape or abuse them.
- Family members visiting detainees were also subject to sexual violence through similarly abusive searches upon entry into detention facilities, sometimes multiple times in a single visit. While some women were able to bribe their way out of the searches, this underscores the class dynamics in the abuse.
- Many detainees were subjected to onerous probationary measures after release, which often required them to return to police stations, and which exposed them to renewed abuse.
- The physical, psychological, and social impact of sexual violence leaves lasting harm, but often detainees face obstacles to speaking out or seeking accountability or therapeutic intervention due to intersecting stigmas around detention, sexual abuse, and, in some cases, their gender or sexual identity.

Findings:

- NSA sites were the sites of around 80 percent of all violations documented in this research. The fact that detainees held in NSA sites are often held there during periods of enforced disappearance underscores the systematic nature of sexual violence against detainees, and the empowerment of state officers to brutalize detainees during this period.
- Sexual abuse was utilized deliberately to extract information and confessions from detainees, which was later used as “evidence” in trials, including in terrorism trials. In at least one case, “evidence” gathered during a period of sexual violence was later used in a trial that resulted in a detainee’s execution.
- Throughout the lifecycle of detention, officers weaponized norms of masculinity and femininity in attempts to degrade detainees, using slurs or references to honor, modesty, and chastity during abuse.
- Despite distinctions between “political” and “criminal” detainees within and outside of prisons, prisoners of all backgrounds and identities faced sexual violence. While a prisoner’s political identity offered protection in some cases and in others made them more likely to be subjected to sexual violence, no “type” of prisoner was spared.
- Children as young as 12 have been subjected to sexual violence in Egyptian prisons, despite domestic and international legal protections.
- Both social stigma and fear of reprisals play a role in preventing detainees and their family members from speaking out about sexual violence, meaning the abuse is likely more prevalent than detailed here.
- In no case were detainees able to seek formal accountability for sexual violence perpetrated against them. While Egyptian law does criminalize rape and other “dishonorable” acts, even when detainees filed formal complaints, these were not properly investigated.

Key Recommendations:

- Reports like the U.S. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices should explicitly cover sexual violence perpetrated by state officials in Egyptian prisons.
- U.S. State Department and Embassy officials, as well as relevant Congressional offices should raise instances of sexual violence and enforced disappearance privately and publicly with Egyptian officials.
- The U.S. State Department, Treasury Department, and Justice Department should investigate those officers responsible for sexual violence for violations of U.S. laws or existing sanctions regimes.
- The U.S. Congress should continue to place conditions on bilateral assistance to Egypt and should explicitly mention sexual violence.
- The U.S. Congress should create a fund for Egyptian exiles to ensure that victims of sexual violence in Egyptian prisons are able to seek safe refuge and rehabilitation in the United States.
- U.S. intelligence and security agencies should review any intelligence-sharing agreements or relationships with the Egyptian government to ensure that intelligence is not gathered through coercive methods.
- The U.S. Mission to the United Nations should support calls for an independent human rights monitoring mechanism at the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- The Egyptian National Council for Human Rights should immediately adopt an independent investigation into allegations of the use of torture, including sexual violence and allegations of enforced disappearance.
- Egypt should adopt legal definitions of rape and sexual assault that comply with international law, including forms of rape and sexual assault against individuals regardless of gender.
- Egypt should bring prison regulations, particularly around the use of cavity searches, into compliance with domestic and international law and public health standards.
- Egypt should facilitate visits to prisons for impartial human rights organizations.
- Human rights organizations should continue to work to broaden the population served by investigating abuses and advocating for protections beyond categorizations of “political” and “criminal” detainees.
- Human rights organizations should ensure that any documentation of abuse within prisons includes specific monitoring and categorization of sexual or gendered violence.
- Grantmaking bodies should avail resources to examine the impact of psychotherapeutic interventions both in Egypt and within exiled communities and expand funding for such resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Egypt is a carceral state. As such, incarceration is a mode of governance; the constant threat of criminality rests on the state's arbitrary application of the law and brings with it a pervasive and constant fear of state violence.¹ These acts of violence are pervasive and often intimate, and their purpose is an extension of state control over the bodies and lives of those it views as its subjects. Security forces perform acts of sexual violence as a low-cost method of repression, as victims face compounded social and political costs to even acknowledging the abuse they have suffered.

Through a gender lens, we can see how the structural and physical violence intersect; sexual violence is not only a method of subjugation, punishment, or coercion of a detainee, but it reflects norms of gender, sexuality, and the coercive nature of the state. Female prison guards and security officials may question a woman's virginity while forcing fingers into her vagina; a National Security Officer will threaten to emasculate men by raping them with a stick or electrocuting their genitals; and members of the LGBTQ+ community are called gendered slurs and misgendered as officers demand anal examinations.²

Thus, prison life in Egypt does not begin with the violent initiation rituals detainees endure as they enter prison gates, nor does it end with a detainee's release from the confines of a detention facility. Rather, it is an ecosystem of violations that envelops the prisoner, their family and loved ones, and society writ large³. While many human rights advocates (and even state officials) have adopted a terminology of "political" and "criminal" prisoners, ostensibly to establish a schematic to differentiate between those who may be deserving or undeserving of different forms of advocacy, detainees of all walks of life face systematic violence that violates their most basic human rights. This research explores this violence through a gendered and sexualized lens, including that which is directed against detainees and their families throughout the life cycle of detention—starting with the moment of arrest, to the experience(s) of detention, and which extends beyond the prisoner to family or loved ones entering the prison.

Though its forms vary, sexual violence in Egypt is a means of torture and degradation, deliberately perpetrated upon men, women, children, and trans and nonbinary people alike. Throughout the process of their arrest, processing, and detention, our research documents instances of rape (by penis, implement, and fingers); threats and attempts to rape; electrocution of genitals; touching of genitals; and other forms of sexual assault against detainees and their family members.

This research includes 655 instances of sexual violence that were perpetrated from 2015 to 2022. The project draws from a myriad of sources, including interviews and review of testimonies and court documents with a diverse sample of detainees and their families. Through this report, we hope to highlight how sexual violence is endemic to the experience of detention in Egypt, is systemic in the security apparatus, and extends beyond the walls of the prison (in both place and time). We also hope to encourage a gender lens in future research of abuses by security officers. Finally, we hope this report will honor the memory and struggle of victims of sexual violence who were executed, like Mahmoud al Ahmady, and others who took their own lives after enduring sexual violence in prison, like Sarah Hegazi.

After a discussion of our methodology, the report highlights cases of sexual violence throughout the lifecycle of detention. The sections afterwards highlight some of the findings and policy recommendations we propose to better understand and mitigate this horrendous phenomenon.

655

instances of sexual violence documented
from 2015 to 2022

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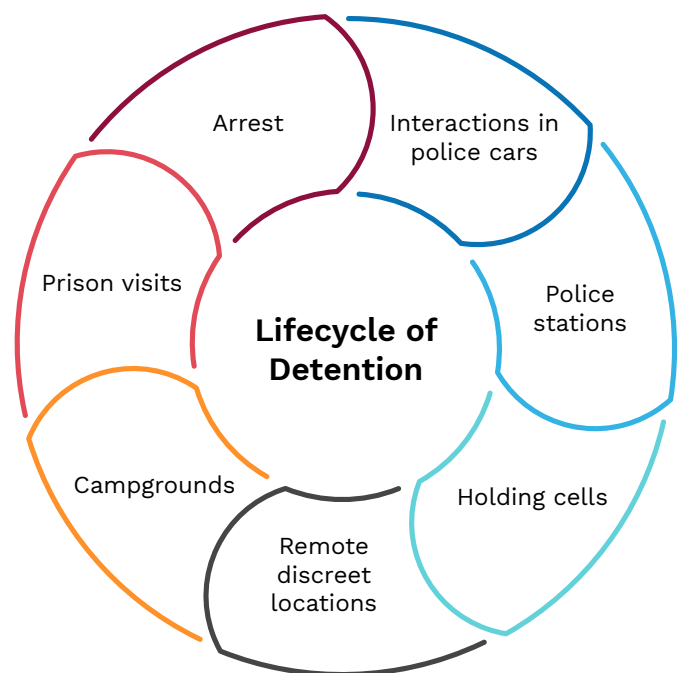
METHODS

Intent and Objectives of Research:

This project explores the nature of gendered and sexual violence throughout the life cycle of detention in Egypt. While previous projects have focused on particular sites of violence (police stations or prisons, for instance)⁴, this report considers the lived experience of detention as a whole and examines the various points of interaction with the security apparatus throughout it. While most abuses are experienced by detainees, they also extend to their family members, friends and even lawyers during the time of arrest or prison visits. Throughout the entire life cycle of detention—from moment of arrest to time in prison, and even after release—we discovered the use of sexual violence as a form of abuse, and we identified a variety of ways in which it severely impacted detainees and their loved ones. Thus, the report asks, what types of sexual violence do authorities inflict at different junctures within the life cycle of detention? Additionally, how are these instances of violence gendered? Finally, we ask what is the psychological or social impact of these instances of violence?

Definitions:

The report highlights the salience of sexual violence as a systematic practice by looking at its prevalence throughout the life cycle of detention. By using this concept, we mean to highlight the series of interactions the detainee has and the locations in which these interactions occur, starting from the moment of interface with law officers. We say “lifecycle of detention” to connote an experience that includes the moment of arrest; interactions in police cars; detention in police stations, holding cells, remote discreet locations, campgrounds that are being used as detention centers, prisons, or any other place in which the prisoner is deprived of their liberty by the state. We also use “lifecycle of detention” to connote the reach of these instances of violence to those close to the detainee, as they also interface with security or prison officials during moments of arrest or prison visits.



The report also uses the terms criminal detainee and political detainee. While setting positive definitions of either term is a topic rife for debate, for the purposes of this report we largely differentiate between them the same way the security apparatus in Egypt does: criminal detainees are those who are mostly engaged with by normal police and political detainees by the National Security Agency. While we also acknowledge—and hope to underscore in the report—the harm in these terms as ontological constructs, they are important analytically. In this case, the “political detainee” is any detainee who faces charges related to their expression of political identity, opinion, or who is targeted because they pose a threat to the power of the state; a “criminal detainee” is any who is detained because of some act of violence or malfeasance that may not be political in nature. Of course, these definitions are rife with complication, as in a carceral state the mere act of detention may be abusive of political rights. In Egypt, for instance, the detention of a trans woman for her gender identity under a crime of debauchery may be conceived as a criminal case by the state but political by those outside of it.

The report also contends with different conceptions of sexual violence. Egyptian law does not comprehensively reference different forms of sexual assault, but relevant to this report are Egyptian laws' conception of rape and indecent assault (هتك عرض). According to Criminal Code/Article 267, rape is referenced as: "Having complete sexual intercourse with a female without her free consent the assailant shall be punished by death sentence or lifetime imprisonment."⁵ Indecent assault (Criminal Code/Article 268) includes a wide array of assaults that range from touching or exposing one's genitalia, to instances of the perpetrator inserting their penis in the victim's mouth, or a stick in their anus. The law does not differentiate between touching that takes place over or under a garment and applies to any body part that could be considered "indecent." Additionally, Egyptian law considers it an act of indecent assault if the perpetrator intends to commit an act that violates norms of decency to the victim. While the vast majority of the documentation we report here satisfy the indecent assault criteria, these definitions are lacking in many ways to fully encompass the variety and severity of sexual violence experienced in the lifecycle of detention in Egypt. Further, the definition of torture in Egyptian law (as defined in Article 129 of the Penal Code), only consider acts of abuse during interrogation for the purpose of extracting information to be torture. Victimization for reasons that do not pertain to the extraction of information is considered torture. This limited definition fails to account for abuse throughout the lifecycle of detention where violence is instrumentalized for an array of reasons.

Standards set by international organizations and definitions in international human rights law reflect more adequately the various types of assault documented in our research. As such, for the purposes of this report, we take sexual violence as it was defined by the International Criminal Court in Prosecutor v. Akayesu: "[S]exual violence, which includes rape, as any act of a sexual nature which is committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. Sexual violence is not limited to physical invasion of the body and may include acts that do not involve penetration or physical contact."⁶



[S]exual violence, which includes rape, as any act of a sexual nature which is committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. Sexual violence is not limited to physical invasion of the body and may include acts that do not involve penetration or physical contact.

- International Criminal Court in Prosecutor v. Akayesu

This definition allows us to fully capture the violations we examine without explicit references to decency or morality, references that necessarily project certain gendered or sexual norms onto the victim, rather than defining the act vis-a-vis the malintent of the perpetrator. Further, incorporating elements from international human rights law allows us to think of assaults in a more nuanced way. The report takes the position that rape, as defined in Prosecutor v. Anto Furundzija, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to be: "the sexual penetration, however slight, of the vagina or anus of the victim by the penis of the perpetrator or any other object used by the perpetrator; or of the mouth of the victim by the penis of the perpetrator; by coercion or force or threat of force against a victim or third person."⁷ The element of penetration here, for instance, is important as it allows us to think of cavity searches and anal examinations as instances of rape, not only sexual assault.⁸

Throughout this report, we also refer both to "victims" of sexual violence and "survivors" of it. We do not use these terms interchangeably; we intend to draw attention to both the fact that the state and its officers have perpetrated heinous crimes that have grave and long-lasting consequences for their victims, as well as to draw attention to the agency that survivors of sexual violence exhibit in reclaiming power over their lives and experiences. We realize that the road from victimhood to survivorhood is not linear, and we explore this in the sections on psychological impact.

Data Collection:

This report examines instances of sexual violence occurring from 2015 to 2022 (in a few instances we reference cases outside of this period, which are clearly denoted). To identify potential cases, the report relied on a myriad of sources. As shown below (Table 1), the report includes documentation that occurred through information provided by victims, their families, case documents, witnesses to instances of victimization, and on documentations with lawyers and human rights organizations. For these cases, the research team reviewed primary source documents associated with the cases, including interrogation files.

Table 1. *Count of Instances of Sexual Violence by Mode of Documentation*

| Mode of Documentation | Count of cases |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Family of victim | 421 |
| With victim | 34 |
| With lawyer/human right org | 127 |
| With eyewitness to violence | 7 |
| Case documents | 66 |
| Grand total | 655 |

Absent the ability to select a random sample of the prison population in Egypt, or even the population of former prisoners, we relied on various forms of data to be as representative as possible of the prison population. Interviews with lawyers were identified from various human rights organizations focused on Egypt. Subsequent interviews with lawyers were identified through snowball sampling—they would connect us to other colleagues or clients to share their experience of enduring or documenting sexual assault. Additionally, we took a random sample from a database on enforced disappearances in Egypt and analyzed documentation conducted by a local human rights organizations to identify instances of sexual violence. Finally, the instances that relied on case documents and interrogation transcripts relied on cases previously documented by the Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR).

EFHR identified defendants and read through their case file in its entirety to identify the violations they encountered. For the purposes of this project, we revised and recategorized instances of torture previously documented to specify instances of sexual violence.

We believe that the number of cases we are able to identify and document in this report represents a fraction of the actual number of instances of sexual assault in Egypt during this time period. First, as organizations working on political and civil rights, the cases we have most exposure to are cases of “political detainees.” This excludes a significant swath of the prison population referred to sometimes as “criminal detainees.”[1] Interviews we conducted with lawyers and researchers suggest that the abuses they endure can be much more frequent and severe. Human rights activists have also shared that this delineation affects members of the LGBTQ+ community more significantly as many of them are detained as “criminals” by virtue of their gender identity.

Second, given the nature of the authoritarian regime, and as documented by lawyers referenced in this report and others, not all defendants are represented by lawyers. For many of Egypt’s approximately 120,000 detainees (as estimated by the Arabic Network of Human Rights Information), access to legal or human rights organizations and their representation presents an obstacle for many families and is generally seen as a privilege.

Further, as several cases we have identified from interrogation transcripts indicated, even when able to obtain and secure legal representation, defendants are often threatened that sharing any details of torture and abuse with the prosecutors would lead to severe consequences. A number of lawyers also shared that defendants at times are disappeared from their place of detention, and unknowingly undergo a mock interrogation with a prosecutor to test whether they would report any of the torture they endured. In other instances, lawyers have reported that prosecutors refused to include testimonies from defendants in transcripts. Finally, transcripts of interrogation records are not easily accessible to lawyers, defendants, or even human rights organizations. This has implications on the number of cases we are able to identify and analyze.

Interview Approach:

The report sheds light on 655 instances of sexual violence that were endured by 544 victims and includes extensive interviews with victims, family members, lawyers, and subject matter experts over an eight-month period (from June 2021 to February 2022).

Our interviews all adopted a trauma-sensitive approach that places the victim's health as a primary consideration and the collection of data as secondary. We paid special attention to stressors, offered to end and resume interviews at a later date, and offered to connect the interviewees to psychological resources if needed. Finally, the report has replaced the names of the victims with pseudonyms. None of the names mentioned correspond with the names of people whose victimization we have documented.

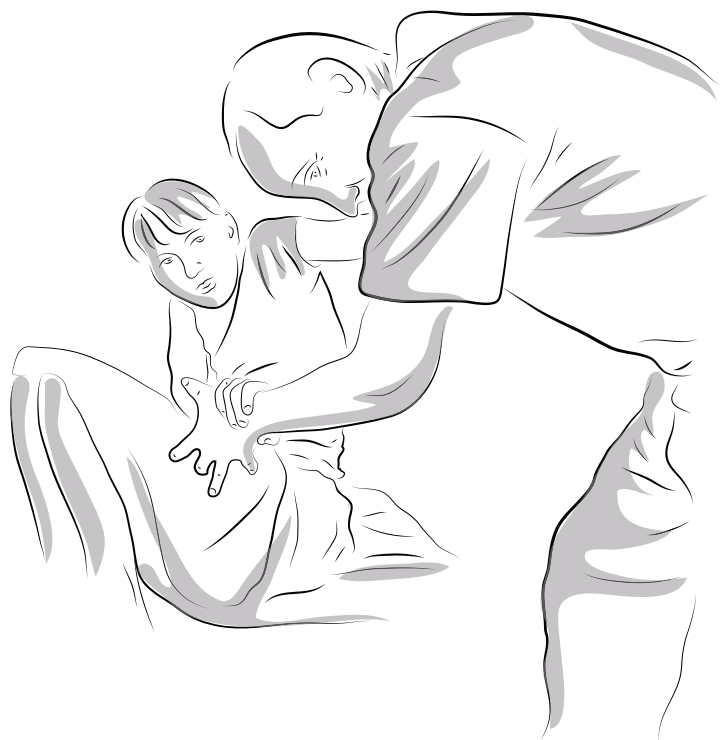
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CASE NARRATIVES

The Process of Arrest

The first part of the lifecycle of detention starts with arrest. All cases we documented during this juncture were conducted without warrants. These cases show officers barging into homes and carrying out a wide array of abuses that are often gendered.

One case included sexual violence against Maryam, the daughter of an individual wanted by the police for political reasons. In the midst of interrogating Maryam about the whereabouts of her parent, the supervising officer ordered the lower ranks to tear all her clothes off.⁹ The officers proceeded to do so, ripping off her headscarf and her pajamas until she was completely naked. They continued to beat her by grabbing her bare breasts and genitals. Maryam, who was pregnant at the time, begged them to stop, screaming that this could result in the death of her unborn child. Upon learning that she was pregnant, the officer pushed her to the ground, stepped on her stomach, and beat her further with a stick. During beatings, officers called Maryam a whore and other expletives. Further, these attacks happened in clear sight of Maryam’s toddler, as an officer held her in the living room of their home demanding that she witness the scene.



Interviews we conducted with researchers indicated that similar cases are not uncommon. The gendered nature of the assault here is obvious.¹⁰ The sexual expletives yelled at Maryam highlight the officer’s intention to degrade her, not by implying any criminal act, but by attacking her modesty. Additionally, the act of abuse was conducted in plain view of her husband, whom they were pressuring for information. There was a deliberate choice of the presiding officer to do this to Maryam, not the husband, further emphasizing the gendered attack and psychological abuse—it would be a worse punishment to force a man to watch his wife “dishonored” than to physically abuse the man himself.¹¹

Security officers are intentional in how they use sexual violence. The arrests of LGBTQ+ individuals are often rife with instances of sexualized and gendered violence. In an interview conducted with a human rights lawyer, she spoke about an incident she consulted on involving a gay man in Egypt.¹² Khaled was going to meet a man he had met over Grindr, a social networking app for people from the LGBTQ+ community.¹² At his date’s house, he realized he was being entrapped and that his date was a police officer luring him to arrest him. Khaled was beaten by police officers, verbally assaulted, and raped with a finger that one of the officers inserted in his anus. A researcher working on the LGBTQ+ community in Egypt confirmed that entrapment through apps such as Grindr has become a common means of targeting sexual minorities in Egypt.

A 2017 report by the Egyptian Initiative of Person Rights highlights the widespread nature of these arrests as well.¹³

Table 2. Count of Instances of Sexual Violence in the Process of Arrest

| Type of Sexual Violence | Women | Men | Grand Total |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|-------------|
| Forced nudity | 1 | - | 1 |
| Touching of genitals | 1 | - | 1 |
| Rape with finger | - | 1 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 2 | 1 | 3 |

In Police Stations

The lifecycle of detention is not necessarily linear. For people detained under criminal charges, being transported to the police station after arrest is a usual next step. For political detainees, some are processed at police stations initially, while others are sent to National Security Agency (NSA) sites within the police stations or beyond. Detainees can also be held and disappeared in undisclosed locations.

Nonetheless, we identified the police station as a critical juncture within the lifecycle of detention as it may resemble what could be considered processing specific detainees. Police stations are also particularly important sites as they hold both political and criminal detainees, have holding cells that are rife with violations, include areas in which people are interrogated and tortured, and are the sites of detention for detainees fulfilling probationary measures.¹⁴ Our research identified 57 cases of sexual violence in police stations. Instances of sexual violence that men endured ranged from groping to rape with an instrument. An interview with someone present with a victim shared that a man held on a criminal charge was asked to squat in line alongside other detainees. Upon his refusal, a higher-ranking officer charged towards him, held him from his penis and testicles and continued to tighten his grip and twist his fist yelling “what is it that you did not want to do you faggot?!” The detainee squatted as demanded as the officer loosened the grip.

We also documented 18 instances in which men were electrocuted in their genitals as a means of torture in police stations.¹⁵ In 2020, according to his family, Mahmoud was beaten severely in a police station and was electrocuted in his genitals and other parts of his body.¹⁶ Another detainee, Tawfiq,¹⁷ was stripped naked and electrocuted on his genitals and legs. In some cases, other forms of physical violence preceded sexual abuse as a means of torture as was most obvious in the case of Mazen.¹⁸ According to his lawyer, Mazen was electrocuted in different parts of his body, including his genitals. The lawyer added that Mazen was “blindfolded, handcuffed with both wrists behind his back, hung during interrogations, and forced to confess to crimes he did not commit. Mazen was raped with an implement as officers in the police station forced a stick in his anus.” According to the lawyer, the detainee was not able to see the perpetrator and was unaware of his own whereabouts at the time.

We also documented 10 instances of sexual violence against women in police stations. Zeina recalled her experience, explaining:



the [female] officer said, 'I am going to search/pat down everyone here.' I was asked to stand in a place close to an air vent that was open on both sides. From the vent, you can see what's happening on either side of the wall, which meant that men could see me. The woman asked me to strip naked. I refused. She yelled 'are you going to undress, or do you want me to do it for you,' and proceeded to rip off clothes as I started crying. She took all my clothes off, touched my breast and remarked: 'and they call you a virgin? These are the breasts of a whore, not a virgin.' She dug her nails so deep in them I thought that my skin was going to come off in her hands. She asked me to squat and stand-up multiple times and forced me to use the bathroom in front of her.¹⁹

- Zeina

Zeina also remarked that this experience traumatized her to the point that she could not talk for the following four days.

In another incident, Nada recalls her experience being cornered and groped by a male officer in "every bit of [her] body."²⁰ She also added the officer tried to kiss her neck forcefully. She pushed him away, screaming and yelling, to which he remarked that he was just "joking" with her. The following day, the officer did the same thing and said "come, let me take a picture with you."²¹ When she stepped away, she recalls that the officer "grabbed me, pulled me closer to him, groped my breasts like people do on the streets when we're sexually harassed, and then laughed it off as though he was joking."²²

A number of detainees also reported witnessing instances of sexual violence in police stations. One recalls that she saw an officer cornering a girl detained on a criminal charge and trying to forcibly kiss her. She recounts that upon seeing the eyewitness, and realizing she was a political detainee, he left the girl he was assaulting alone. Another detainee recalls that two women from her holding cell were taken to the officer's office. She heard them screaming as he demanded that the women take their clothes off.



The girls came back handcuffed with their wrists behind their backs, their feet cuffed as well, and completely naked. We later learned that they were both raped by the police officer.²³

- Detainee

For LGBTQ+ individuals, police stations are particularly rife with sexual abuse and violence. The gendered nature of sexual violence is very clear in these instances as victimization often occurs amidst an onslaught of homophobic slurs by both officers and other detainees in the holding cell. Low ranking officers are notorious for grabbing gay men, trans women, and non-binary folk by their genitalia. Grabbing someone from behind or shoving a finger into their anus, in this context, is used to connote the lack of a detainee's masculinity and manhood as a means of degradation.²⁴ Officers, according to an interview conducted with a human rights lawyer, call on the detainees to perform a variety of daily tasks, referring to them only as 'khawalat', faggots.

In their recollection of an instance of rape against a refugee, Mahmoud, the researcher in a human rights organization, noted “low ranking officers would tell the detainees in the holding cell, ‘he’s a faggot. Fuck him. Enjoy it.’” Mahmoud was later raped in the police station by two different men. Another non-binary individual who is a refugee was also raped by another criminal detainee. In an interview with a victim, Alaa recalled the times they were raped and how it happened:



In the holding cell at the police station, our gender identities are almost immediately exposed. Officers deal with us differently than other detainees. In a number of incidents, while in the bathroom in the cell, for instance, a fellow detainee would approach me with their erect penis and demand that I touch it or perform oral sex. Refusal is tricky because you could be beaten severely. Sleeping was another issue. We would all sleep close to each other on the floor from over-crowdedness. While sleeping one night, I felt an erect penis on my lower back. Before I could scream or make any motions, the detainee attempting to rape me put a razor on me indicating that any motions on my end would trigger a violent response on his. I refused and fought as much as I could that time. There were two other times where I just couldn't fight back. I was raped twice in two separate instances in the same way.²⁵

- Alaa

For trans women, police stations are often sites of sexual violence as well. Sarah,²⁶ a trans woman, was going to meet a date off Grindr before she realized she was entrapped. She found a police car waiting for her and an officer opposite her arrested her and escorted her to the police station. She stayed in the police station for three months. According to a human rights researcher who worked on her case, she woke up a number of times to detainees trying to rape her in her sleep. The researcher noted that Sarah was raped at least once by a detainee in the police station.

We also found at least seven instances of anal examinations of gay men and a trans woman. At least one of these detainees was a minor.

We identified three additional incidents of sexual and violence against minors. In one instance,²⁷ a 15-year-old male was stripped of his clothes and severely electrocuted in his genitals and legs to the point that he sustained wounds that the family reported to researchers.

Table 3. Count of Instances of Sexual Violence in Police Stations

| Row Labels | Women | Men | Trans men | Trans women | Non-binary | Grand Total |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Sexual assault | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Forced nudity | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | 7 |
| Anal exam | - | 3 | 1 | 3 | - | 7 |
| Electrocution in genitals | 1 | 18 | - | - | - | 19 |
| Touching of genitals | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 11 |
| Attempted rape | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Rape with an instrument | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Rape with a penis | 2 | 2 | - | 1 | 3 | 8 |
| Grand Total | 10 | 29 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 57 |

At National Security Agency (NSA) Sites

Our research indicates that sexual violence occurs most often in NSA buildings, to the extent that it is a near systematic feature of detention at these sites. Of the 655 instances of sexual violence that we have documented, 523 of them happened in NSA sites. These violations ranged from electrocution of genitals to rape (oral, anal, and/or vaginal), and were perpetrated against men, women, and trans or nonbinary individuals. The most common form of sexual violence documented at the NSA was electrocution of genitals. One detainee, Raafat, narrated his experience to a prosecutor saying:



“...every time they would electrocute me, they would put a chair between my legs, handcuff me behind my back and electrocute me as they were listening to songs on their phones. [...] They would hang me from the ceiling for two days and they would say, ‘we are the NSA, we are going to kill you and wrap you in blankets and throw you in a sewer.’ They would do all this while I was blindfolded. They would make me stand naked in the middle of the office and beat me with a stick. They punched me and slapped me on the face. This lasted for 14 days. I asked them for my diabetes medication and for a skin allergy and they completely ignored me. They later transferred me to the to a camp in Damietta where I stayed for two days and was beaten, electrocuted, and insulted-till I came here [in front of the prosecutor] today.”²⁷

- Raafat

Another detainee, Shady, reported to the prosecutor that his wrists and ankles were bound together, that a stick was put in the middle of that and used to lift him from the floor, and that two electric wires would be tied around his legs and a third around his testicles.²⁸ Other detainees also reported being electrocuted in their anuses. Ahmed, for instance, reported to the prosecutor that he was stripped naked and that his hands and legs were cuffed to a metal chair and that he was electrocuted in his anus.²⁹

Electrocution of the genitals as a means of torture was used both as punishment and/or as coercion for confessions; threats of electrocution of genitals extended to other family members in the latter instance. Narrating what happened to a prosecutor, Marwan explained:



“On the second day, the officer tortured me in the same way and asked the same questions. On the third day, the officer gave me a piece of paper and told me to memorize and recite the information in it. It had names of people and bombings I had no clue about. After I memorized it, he told me that he was going to film me reciting [these confessions]. I refused. [...] I was filmed and said what the officer wanted me to say. Before leaving to the prosecutor’s office at night, he [the NSA officer] told me that if I denied any of the crimes I had just confessed to, he would send an officer to me in prison and that I knew what that would entail. He also threatened to hurt my father, mother, and fiancé if I didn’t do what he wanted me to.”³⁰

- Marwan

After being electrocuted on his genitals on multiple occasions, another detainee reported that he was threatened that they would rape his wife if he did not confess to being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.³¹ A detainee in another case detailed some of the torture he endured before noting to the prosecutor that “the confessions I said last time were under pressure from the NSA, as I was severely tortured and coerced into them.”³²

The same detainee explains his torture, recalling that NSA officers:

“[P]ut two electric wires on my toes and connect them to high-voltage source of electricity. Afterwards, they took my clothes off, put a stick under my knees as my wrists were handcuffed and across my legs. I was lifted in a position they call the grill as two officers took turns electrocuting me in my genitals and throughout my whole body.”³³

One detainee noted being electrocuted in his penis as well as other parts of his body, though he was only sent to the prosecutor’s office after his wounds had healed.³⁴ The significance of this is that in some instances, if wounds were obvious or if the prosecutor decided to address scars he saw, detainees could be seen by a medical professional and have the wounds examined and recorded. The report also documented ten instances in which NSA officers raped detainees by inserting a stick into their anal cavities. One detainee, Yousuf, reported his experience saying:

“[the NSA] handcuffed behind my back with a cloth that was so tight to the extent that it left marks on my wrists, laid me on the floor, stripped me of my clothes and tied electric wires around my feet, my entire body, and my genitals. Then, they hung me on the door, and put a stick up my anus. They took a picture of me in that position.”³⁵

Photographing abuse is a form of gendered violence, as forced anal rape is culturally considered as removing one’s dignity and masculinity, but also a form of intimidation to other detainees or blackmail to Yousuf himself. This was confirmed in an interview we conducted with We Record, a human rights organization working on Egypt, as they noted that images of sexual violence have been used as threats against other detainees before.

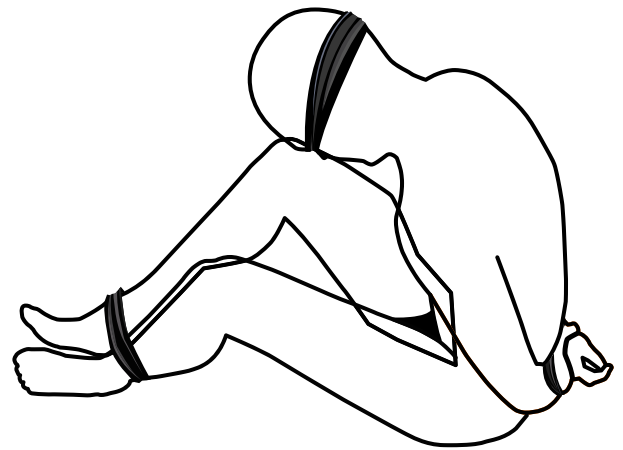
In another instance, a detainee, Ashraf, reported that upon his refusal to sign confessions he was coerced into making, he was taken to an underground room where officers then put a stick in his anus, which resulted in severe bleeding.³⁶ A third detainee, Ragab, reported that he was also raped with a stick and that NSA officers kept him hanging by a rope so long that his shoulder was dislocated.³⁷



NSA officers also use forced nudity as a form of sexual violence against detainees. One detainee, Adel, after severe beatings and electrocution of his genitals, was stripped naked while beaten and forced to remain naked for a whole week.

Another detainee, Salah, shared more details about forced nudity and how it fits into this ecosystem of torture:

“They forced me into a room while I was blindfolded and handcuffed behind my back and started asking me about my relation to Hasm [a declared terrorist organization in Egypt]. I told him I had no affiliation with them. He threatened me and told me that he could kill me and that he could bring my wife in and rape her. He threatened me, too. He slapped me on the face and I kept on telling him that I do not know anything about the group. He asked people who I assume were low-ranking officers and made them strip me of my clothes. They electrocuted me using electric wires on my toes. I started screaming ‘write whatever you want, and I will agree to it.’”³⁸



Nudity is used here as a form of punishment, but also as a threat that there is much more to come if the detainee does not cooperate.

We also documented and identified 57 instances of sexual violence against women in NSA sites. While the number of incidents is drastically lower than men, this is relatively high in proportion to the number of women detained, particularly those detained in political cases. Instances of violence ranged from touching of genitalia, forced nudity, and electrocution of genitals to threats of rape and rape with fingers, instruments, and penises. In 26 cases from North Sinai female detainees were threatened with rape and groped in their genitalia.³⁹ Upon their detention by the NSA, they were stripped naked and touched on their breasts and genitals as threats of rape are spewed by the officers.

Several women reported being raped in NSA sites. Israa told her family that while held by the NSA, she was blindfolded, beaten, stripped of her clothes, and anally raped with a stick. This form of torture, Israa said, forced her into making false confessions.⁴⁰ While in an NSA site, a former detainee reported that while at the NSA building, she walked into a room in which she saw a woman lying on the floor and an officer yelling “give her birth control pills, we don’t want any problems”⁴¹

Threats of rape were also reported. Another detainee, Sousan was also stripped of her clothes and threatened with rape. When she told the presiding officer that she was pregnant, she received even more intense beatings to her stomach.⁴² She later gave birth in detention and, according to her lawyer, the baby was sent to an orphanage. Another detainee, Layla, was also stripped of all of her clothes except her underwear and threatened that she would be electrocuted in her genitals and that “the whole line of soldiers would rape her.”⁴³

Seven women were also electrocuted in their genitals by NSA officers. A lawyer we interviewed for the purposes of this report explained this noting that, “torture in NSA sites goes as follows: [NSA officers] strip them of their clothes and electrocute [the detainees].”⁴⁴ A detainee, Samia, told her brothers that she was blindfolded as she was enforcedly disappeared in the NSA site. Samia was stripped naked, beaten, threatened, electrocuted, and forced into confessions.⁴⁵

... torture in NSA sites goes as follows: [NSA officers] strip them of their clothes and electrocute [the detainees].

- Lawyer

It should be noted here that the officers presiding over this torture are male and that many of the women whose cases are documented here wear headscarves. This adds an additional layer of gendered violence to the instances of forced nudity and sexual violence writ large, as the headscarf is seen to represent a woman’s modesty, and its removal is a deliberate violation of that gender norm. This is particularly obvious in the case of Salma, a 15-year-old girl. While being interrogated, an NSA officer pulled off Salma’s headscarf and whispered explicit, sexual language in her ear. Mid-interrogations, the officer proceeded to orally rape the detainee by putting his penis into her mouth.⁴⁶ The officer later threw her on the floor face down, cuffed her hands behind her back and pulled on them, and stepped on her stomach. She was on her period at the time and started bleeding on the office floor. The detainee shared that she started crying hysterically and that the officer proceeded to spritz her with perfume while exclaiming “it’s your honor that you get some of the pasha’s perfume.”⁴⁷

Salma was not the only child who experienced sexual violence in NSA sites, and we also documented sexual violence against children whose ages ranged from 12 to 17. A lawyer shared the details of the violations against one of their clients, Muneer, a 12-year-old boy: “was tortured by intense beatings, electrocution of his genitals, and [officers] putting cigarettes out on different parts of his body.”⁴⁸ The lawyer added that the Muneer was put in a room that had water and exposed electrical wires. The wires were plugged into a source of electricity and Muneer was electrocuted. Anwar, a 15-year-old boy, was also cuffed behind his back, hung from his hand and electrocuted in his genitals. Ibrahim, a 16-year-old boy, was stripped of all his clothes and electrocuted in his genitals. He also reportedly lost consciousness multiple times while being tortured and endured a broken rib from the beatings.⁴⁹

Notably missing here are documentations of cases of sexual violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community. While we do not claim that none have occurred in NSA sites, as we do document one incident of an anal examination against a trans man, the NSA interfaces most commonly with political detainees. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are most often held under criminal cases and therefore not enmeshed within the NSA’s ecosystem.

Table 4. *Count of Instances of Sexual Violence in NSA Sites*

| Row Labels | Women | Men | Trans men | Grand Total |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Oral rape | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Forced nudity | 11 | 11 | - | 22 |
| Threats to rape | 14 | - | - | 14 |
| Anal exam | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Electrocution in genitals | 7 | 442 | - | 449 |
| Touching of genitals | 19 | - | - | 19 |
| Rape with an instrument | 1 | 10 | - | 11 |
| Rape with a penis | 4 | - | - | 4 |
| Rape with a finger | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Grand Total | 58 | 463 | 1 | 522 |

In Prisons

While not all detainees are imprisoned, there is no clear rhyme or reason around who are briefly disappeared and sent home, who remain disappeared, and who reappear in prisons throughout the country. It should be noted, too, that part of prison life in Egypt involves the separation of criminal and political detainees. While this is not always achieved, authorities often punish political detainees by sending them to criminal wards. This happens in male and female prisons alike. Finally, unless otherwise specified, female prisoners are dealt with, for the scope of this report, with female guards.

As a proportion of the total case count, women endured more instances of sexual violence in prison than men. These violations reached both the detainee and their family members during visits. The violations happened mostly as detainees were being searched/patted down to enter prisons, otherwise known as cavity searches. While cavity searches are legally allowed in countries like the U.S. for instance, legislation on how searches of prisoners are conducted remain vague.

The violations women endure include touching of genitals, as a female prison guard would explicitly grope a detainee for instance, as well as vaginal and anal rape with a finger. Talia, a detainee, reported that

“[A]s soon as we arrived at prison, they took all of our belongings, and we were stripped of all of our clothes. The presiding correctional officer grabbed a plastic bag from the floor and proceeded to check my vagina in a very demeaning way. I started screaming ‘what are you doing, I am still a virgin and haven’t been married yet’ and continued to yell at her until she left me alone.”⁵⁰

The presiding correctional officer grabbed a plastic bag from the floor and proceeded to check my vagina in a very demeaning way.

- Talia

Another detainee, Maria, shared a similar experience saying that when they arrived, several women were forced to congregate together, all of whom had been stripped of their clothes.⁵¹ After begging the correctional officer, they provided what Maria described as a transparent garb (*elshell*) that showed her body underneath. Adding context, another detainee, Yasmin, shared that after changing into the prison garb, the correctional officer said: “you have two options, you either squat up and down so I make sure you are not hiding anything, or I will pick up a plastic bag and you will be subject to a vaginal search.”⁵²

While cavity searches may be routine procedure for entry into prison, they took on an explicitly sexualized nature in many instances. After walking Fatima to the bathroom and asking her to undress completely, the officer prepared to search the detainee’s vagina and asked, “are you a virgin?”⁵³ When the detainee said that she was, the officer responded, “So I can’t put my finger? They will check you, you know, to see if you’re lying.”⁵⁴ In an interview, Fatima explained:

“On my way back from a hearing the officer searching me said ‘you have a nice body and I like the way you walk, why don’t you stay here with me for a bit.’ Two officers (Hanaa and Hanem) used to assault us, not search us. They pat us down in a very sexual manner. They did not have to reach under my bra to touch my breasts, but they insisted on it. The officer would put her hand on our vaginas and with some girls, they would put fingers in. This is assault. When we would report this, [the guards] would get yelled at, but nothing would stop.”

The sexual nature of these cavity searches demonstrates why they can clearly be considered rape, and indeed two detainees shared an experience that prompted the prosecutor’s office to call for an investigation to ascertain whether the search constituted rape. According to interviews conducted with lawyers of the victims, after asking Nisreen to undress completely, the corrections officer “dug her fingers deep into the detainee’s vagina.”⁵⁵ The same guard, while searching another detainee, Samaa, in the same manner, was faced with her screams: “I am still a virgin and engaged to be married. You are destroying me.”⁵⁶ However, the investigation into these incidents was never seen through and was “filed into oblivion,” as their lawyer described.

Several other cases reported health concerns due to the abusive nature of the searches. One detainee explained that the officers would “use the same plastic bag on a number of detainees which could spread viruses between us. She would search our anuses and vaginas. She would not put one finger only, but two or three. She shove[d] them in so people start bleeding. One of the girls with us bled for a week straight to the point where we didn’t know if or how it was going to stop.”⁵⁷

One of the girls with us bled for a week straight to the point where we didn’t know if or how it was going to stop.

- Detainee

Sexual violence is not explicitly the domain of the officers or guards themselves, but sometimes outsourced to other prisoners. In one instance, Nourhan, a female detainee, got into an argument with a corrections officer, so he sent her to a ward that the lawyer referred to as filled with “murderers and drug dealers.”⁵⁸ There, the other detainees reportedly tore all of her clothes apart, beat her, and sexually assaulted her. She stayed in the same ward with torn garments that showed her body. As noted above, men tend to endure lower percentages of sexual violence in prison than women. In this report, we document 10 incidents that range from forced nudity to electrocution and rape with an instrument. We documented a case, for instance, in which Abdullah, a detainee, was hung naked on a tree in the prison courtyard as officers beat him with wooden sticks on his genitals.⁵⁹ In another instance, Amir reported that officers raped him with a stick in prison on multiple occasions.⁶⁰ We also documented four instances in which detainees were electrocuted on their genitals in prisons.

We also documented instance of anal examinations of a trans man and a trans woman. Upon entry, a prison officer called for their medical examination, and they were transferred to a hospital in Cairo. Both detainees reportedly endured anal examinations by the presiding physicians. These examinations, while not requested by either the prosecutor’s office or prison authorities directly, were conducted in what they described as a very demeaning way that amounted to sexual violence.⁶¹

Table 5. Count of Instances of Sexual Violence in Prison

| Row Labels | Women | Men | Trans men | Trans women | Grand Total |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Forced nudity | 20 | 3 | - | - | 23 |
| Anal exam | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Electrocution in genitals | - | 4 | - | - | 4 |
| Touching of genitals | 13 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| Rape with an instrument | - | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| Rape with a finger | 19 | - | - | - | 19 |
| Grand Total | 52 | 10 | 2 | 2 | 66 |

During Family Visits

Sexual violence in prisons extends beyond the immediate detainees to their families, particularly during prison visits. Many political detainees are held in a number of prisons all within a complex of prisons called Tora. Within the Tora prison complex are a few prisons including the notorious Scorpion prison. During visits, family members are searched multiple times until they are allowed to see their loved ones. While interviews with lawyers indicated that these violations are virtually inescapable, we documented 30 distinct examples of sexual violence for the purposes of this report. The violations are mainly directed towards women as they are being searched for prison visits. The report documented seven instances where a prison guard raped a woman with a finger, 11 instances of forced nudity, and 12 instances of touching of family members genitals.

7

Rape with a finger

11

Forced nudity

12

Touching family members genitals

One family member, Yousra, reported “the guard puts her hands on my genitals and breasts in a very degrading way, and the only way to get out of this is to bribe her.”⁶² Another family member, Menna, reported that visitors are searched at least two times, one at the gates of Tora prison complex, and another at the specific prison’s gate. In both, she added “the searches are horrible. They put their hands under our clothes, inside our undergarments and if you don’t have money to bribe them, the situation is much worse.”⁶³ Menna also reported that women often leave the room where there are being searched in tears.

the guard puts her hands on my genitals and breasts in a very degrading way, and the only way to get out of this is to bribe her

- Yousra

Forced nudity is also used as a means of degradation. Sahar, a family member reported that while the prison guard was touching her breasts she felt a piece of metal and asked what it was. Upon explaining that was the metallic latch of a bra, the guard asked Sahar to strip completely to examine her more thoroughly⁶⁴ Another family member reported that the guard forced her to take her bra off to ensure that she was not smuggling letters.

Some family members reported instances of rape with a finger that they endured during these searches. They reported that prison guards would purposely put their fingers in their vaginas and anuses under the guise of cavity searches. One family member, Rawan, recalled “their searches amount to rape. [The woman guard] used to reach for my vagina underneath my underwear.”⁶⁵ Rawan also stated that this happened to her when she visited prison in her capacity as a human rights lawyer; when she visited as a family member, she was able to bribe herself out of such an intrusive search.

Rawan’s case shows that rape may be escapable by a bribe, and thus may be avoidable by those with the means to pay. Somia, another family member, shared her experiences visiting a friend:



The guard inserted her fingers inside my vagina and anus and asked whether or not I was a virgin as she was chuckling. [...] I yelled at her and walked away. I am still traumatized by this.⁶⁶

- Somia

Recalling her experience being raped with a finger by a prison guard, Majd said: “the guard put her hand [in my vagina] and I was on my period. She put her hand under my undergarments to a point where she reached my menstrual blood.”⁶⁷ These instances of rape were also reported by another family member, Layal, “the guard puts her hands in our vaginas and anuses to ensure that we are not smuggling any drugs to the detainees.”⁶⁸

Table 6. Count of Instances of Sexual Violence during Family Visits

| Type of Sexual Violence | Women | Grand Total |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Forced nudity | 11 | 11 |
| Touching of genitals | 12 | 12 |
| Rape with finger | 7 | 7 |
| Grand Total | 30 | 30 |

Post Release

The period after release is rarely characterized as a clean end to the trauma of detention or sexual violence. Release from prison is often associated with other probationary measures that may place victims at risk of continued sexual violence. In an interview with a researcher from Barra Alsour, a feminist, queer initiative working to combat discrimination against nonheteronormative genders, they reported that those held for alleged prostitution are particularly subject to months of probationary measures upon their release. This researcher reported that in order to avoid spending hours on end at the police station, these women are often forced to exchange sexual acts with low-ranking officers in return for their freedom. Another woman reported waiting in a police station during her probationary period to be surprised by a low-ranking officer standing on the other side of the bars opposite her with an erect penis masturbating while staring at her.

Lasting Impact

The psychological symptoms of sexual violence are significant. Dr. Aida Seif al-Dawla, Director and one of the founders of El Nadeem Center against Violence and Torture, noted that instances of sexual violence aim to degrade and break either the detainee or their family's dignity. This violence is gendered, carries the weight of societal shame and guilt as an additional layer of punishment, and is sexualized in the intimacy of the psychological scars. One victim of rape, Rahma, reported in an interview:



I would rather someone stab me with a knife than violate me with their penis. I can deal with the physical pain if it was just a knife, but the scars of rape stay with you forever. Rape is murder. After I was raped, everything changed. My life. My attitude. How I relate to sex. Everything completely changed afterward

- Rahma

A therapist, Dalya, who over the last decade, has worked with hundreds of clients also shed light on the severity of symptoms torture survivors endure. She noted that these instances of sexual violence led to self-doubt, shame, guilt, and a multitude of anxiety disorders. Clients she worked with continue to struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder, addiction, and depression due to these severe experiences. At least one client who was raped anally with a stick continues to struggle with bipolar depression, a condition their therapist shared was exacerbated by the instance of rape they endured. Dalya noted that the vast majority of rape victims she saw, as a result of sexual violence, endured symptoms of PTSD in addition to drug, alcohol, and sex addictions. Men who endured some of these violations, according to the therapist, also struggled with sexual dysfunction upon their release. This included men who were electrocuted in their genitals and consequently suffered some form of erectile dysfunction, for instance. Amongst her clients, women who endured sexual violence were often diagnosed with vaginismus. Dalya also reported the prevalence of physical symptoms alongside psychological ones. These included instances of chronic pain (in neck, back, legs, knees), persistent headaches, as well as Gastroesophageal reflux disease.

One survivor of multiple instances of sexual violence, Eman, said that for months afterwards, she would cry uncontrollably. Eman also mentioned that she suffered from severe mood swings, ranging from hyperactivity to severe depression. She also noted that her appetite for things like food or sex would also endure these swings, from hyper-sexualization to what she described as an extreme lack of desire.



From Victim to Survivor

Interviews with both victims and therapists highlight both the importance of therapy and its successes. Dr. Seif al-Dawla added that their approach to therapy does not aim to repress certain memories, rather, to reconcile the pain and subsequent emotions of anger they endure. The lifecycle of detention and the ecosystem of violence and torture has a logic of its own that is damning to the victim. Therapy, Dr. Seif al-Dawla added, “is very helpful, and worst-case scenario, helps break the solitude around the horrific experience and works towards validating it in a safe and compassionate environment.” Another therapist reported successes with this social-identity approach of contextualizing trauma through both personal and group-based therapy. Reconciling the severity of the personal experience and victimized identity/ies with the post-traumatic context is achieved, according to our interviews, much more successfully in therapeutic environments.

A former detainee reported the importance of therapy but also shed light on the importance of personal initiative. She recounted her success with therapy as a breakdown of 50 percent due to counselling, and 50 percent of her own journey and initiative to take care of herself. The same detainee also reported that if upon her release from prison, public materials were available on the importance of therapy or materials that contextualized the horrific experiences she endured, she would have been much more likely to pursue therapy sooner.

While mental health resources and organizations to support victims do exist, work remains to make therapy more accessible. Pursuing mental health, especially for instances of sexual violence, could be mired with feelings of shame and guilt for victims. In interviews for this report, researchers spoke to us about how these feelings of shame, amongst men for instance, have resulted in divorces as they do not feel that they are able to protect their families or provide for them in the same way. Further, access to successful therapy may depend on a range of other factors, including access to resources, either in social networks that are more attuned to available talk therapists or financial capital to afford therapeutic interventions.

NO ONE IS SAFE:

FINDINGS

Clear and significant patterns emerge from our overview of this data. The overwhelming majority of instances of sexual violence are committed in NSA sites.⁶⁹ A Human Rights Watch report published in 2017, described the “torture epidemic,” sponsored by the NSA, as offenses that could rise to “crimes against humanity.”⁷⁰ While the geographic breakdown of cases is diverse, the vast majority of abuses happen at NSA sites in AL-Abbasia, Lazoghly, both in Cairo, and Abbis in Alexandria. Within our sample, the NSA represented a glaring 80% of violations, accounting for 522 instances. Periods of enforced disappearance, also upheld by the NSA, are particularly likely to facilitate sexual violence. The letter of the law in Egypt does not recognize the existence of enforced disappearance, despite thousands of cases documented by Egyptian civil society since 2013. While disappeared, detainees are removed from even the limited laws and procedures to report abuses. They are denied contact with their lawyers, resulting in either the underreporting of instances of sexual violence or mentions in front of the prosecutors. In multiple instances we have documented, detainees reported mock interrogations with prosecutors by NSA officials to ensure that they will adhere to the confessions that were coerced out of them while tortured. Practices of coerced confessions and mock interrogations ensure that state narratives of detention are reflected in a paper trail as separate from the detainee’s own history and actions. In this state of being that is outside the purview of the law, the NSA recreates the victim in the image of its perfect detainee, so to say.

Throughout the lifecycle of detention, violence against prisoners has both a gendered and sexualized nature. Table 7 shows the breakdown of instances of sexual violence by gender. We see, for instance, that women are much more likely than men to be groped in their genitals, to endure forced nudity, or be raped with a penis. Men, on the other hand, were much more likely to be raped anally with a stick than women. Raping men anally with a stick was often associated with sexualized threats and comments. Officers would make explicit references to masculinity while perpetrating the abuse—taunting victims that they would be emasculated or that their honor will be violated. Amongst women, while being vaginally or anally raped with a finger, prison guards made similar references to modesty or chastity, asking women about their virginity or harassing them that they were not virgins. Trans men and women were deliberately misgendered and subjected to violations expressed through officers’ “curiosity” about their sex organs or by forcing them to endure sexualized violence in prisons for their assigned gender. The sexualized nature of violence was evident even in supposedly routine or medicalized examinations or searches: gay men, for instance, were subject to unnecessary anal examinations, a form of rape. A manifestation of this gendered nature of violence includes instances in which detainees from the LBGTQ+ community are often forced to perform demeaning chores in police stations, like cleaning the bathrooms and mopping the floors. They are forced to do this as a form of emasculation.

Table 7. *Count of Instances of Sexual Violence throughout Lifecycle of Detainment*

| Row Labels | Women | Men | Trans Men | Trans Women | Non-binary | Grand Total |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Oral rape | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Sexual assault | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Forced nudity | 35 | 17 | 1 | 1 | - | 54 |
| Threats to rape | 15 | - | - | - | - | 15 |
| Anal Examination | - | 3 | 3 | 4 | - | 10 |
| Electrocution in genitals | 8 | 468 | - | - | - | 476 |
| Touching of genitals | 36 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 48 |
| Attempted rape | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 2 |
| Rape with an instrument | 1 | 13 | - | 1 | - | 15 |
| Rape with a penis | 6 | 2 | - | 1 | 3 | 12 |
| Rape with a finger | 20 | 1 | - | - | - | 21 |
| Grand Total | 124 | 528 | 6 | 11 | 6 | 655 |

The prevalence of abuse sheds light on systemic violations that expand our notion of victimhood. Abuses are perpetrated against “political” and “criminal” detainees alike, as well as their family members, though the modes, severity, or intent of abuse may differ. Through the lens of sexual violence, we see how certain types of violations act more or less as open secrets. One family member, for instance, commented that she believed the guards abused her upon visits to further alienate the family from their loved ones. They do this, a wife of a former detainee added, “to try to keep us away,” constituting a compound violation intended to harm both the family and the detainee.

Despite the systematic incidents of abuse against all manner of detainees, an informal hierarchy of detainees can translate into the types of abuses they endure. Sharing her experience of sexual assault another noted “this used to happen to us [political prisoners], so you could only imagine what happens to criminal detainees.” Interviews with lawyers and researchers confirmed the same sentiment noting that especially women tend to endure higher and more intense levels of sexual violence from prison authorities.

Class can also play a significant role in the extent to which one endures sexual violence in Egypt. According to a human rights lawyer, after being entrapped on Grindr and abused during the process of arrest, by the time a gay man made it to the police station authorities had realized that the detainee belonged to a prominent, wealthy family in Egypt. The types of sexual violence that other members of the LGBTQ+ community endured were not levied against him. Further, amongst family members of detainees, women are typically able to evade being raped with a finger by paying a bribe. Bribes also can work towards making cavity searches, generally, less invasive. As one defense lawyer put it, “you can always pay your way out of abuse if you’re rich enough,” adding after a pause, “and not in political cases.” For instance, human rights lawyers, or family members of influential detainees say that they avoid paying these types of payments as authorities can hold them under charges of bribing public officials. For human rights lawyers and family members of influential detainees, this form of petty bribery can be weaponized against them.

Sexual violence is used explicitly to coerce confessions later used in prosecutions. The most egregious instance of this is three cases we have documented who endured sexual torture and were later executed. These three men reported the sexual violence they endured to the prosecutors. We are not aware of any actions that were taken on their behalf. In another case we documented, a detainee was beaten severely, electrocuted in his genitals, and threatened that if he did not confess to certain crimes, he would be raped anally with an instrument and that his family would be hurt in the process, too. A female detainee shared as well that she was blindfolded, beaten, stripped of her clothes, and threatened into confessing to crimes.

Despite the prevalence of sexual violence in the lifecycle of detention, Egypt’s social and political dynamics provide a serious obstacle to a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. While instances of sexual assault and sexual violence are underreported in general, in this context specifically there are layers of fear of immediate repression from Egyptian officials, fears of transnational repression for families and detainees based abroad, as well elements of shame and guilt that keep victims from speaking up. Some instances are underreported in case files because victims are threatened by NSA officers that mentions of torture to the prosecution will have severe repercussions.

Accountability for victims never took a formal route. Even when victims reported to the prosecutors or other authorities, complaints were either filed away or ignored. The type of accountability we did document was less formal. In an instance of sexual assault in a police station, a higher-ranking officer promised the victim that the lower ranked officer that assaulted her would not see her again or deal with her. In another instance we documented, a number of women who were touched on their genitals during visits to their detained family members pursued a formal complaint but at the presiding officer’s office settled for a scolding to their abuser as they were worried that further investigations could result in their arrest.

Egyptian law does not differentiate evidentiary standards in cases of abuse or torture at the hands of the state, further complicating the pursuit of justice. To pursue a complaint, victims need to know the identity of their perpetrator (easily obscured if victims are blindfolded), present evidence of their assault (easily obstructed by waiting until wounds heal or fluids are no longer present), and provide a location and date of abuse which is increasingly complicated especially during periods of enforced disappearances. Additionally, no laws exist to protect witnesses who are at risk of reprisal for naming an abusing officer.

The systemic nature of sexual violence perpetrated by Egyptian authorities are in stark violation of the country's international and domestic legal commitments. The Convention Against Torture, which Egypt ratified in 1986, for instance, prohibits the use of confessions produced under torture and requires that perpetrators of these abuses be held accountable.⁷¹ Additionally, the report highlights 15 incidents of torture against children in violation of article 37 (a) of The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Egyptian government ratified in 1990.⁷² The acts of the authorities are also in violations of international standards as explicated in the Mandela Rules that note that cavity searches “shall not be used to harass, intimidate or unnecessarily intrude upon a prisoner’s privacy.”⁷³ Further, that they should be administered only if necessary and by a medical professional. The rules also note that they should not be administered against family members.⁷⁴ The Egyptian government’s acts are also in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Egypt ratified in 1981.

Local laws also prohibit inhumane treatment of detainees. Article 55 of the Egyptian constitution prohibits all forms of torture and the treatment of detainees in ways that do not preserve their dignity.⁷⁵ Current laws and regulations remain insufficient in addressing the endemic nature of torture, as Human Rights Watch referred to it.⁷⁶ The violations that detainees endure in prison, for instance, are in stark violation of the Regulation of Prisons Law No. 396 of 1956. Punitive measures against detainees explicated in the law do not condone any form of sexual violence as a form of punishment. While this law does highlight the legality of searches, the lack of regulations around cavity searches can be seen as enabling further abuses and assaults.

NO ONE IS SAFE:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for U.S. Officials:

- Ensure that existing reports and mechanisms for monitoring human rights abuses and gender-related reporting (particularly Egypt's chapter of the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices) cover the scope of sexual violence perpetrated by state officials in prisons and examine instances across the scope of gender identity.
- U.S. State Department and Embassy officials, as well as relevant Congressional offices, should raise instances of sexual violence privately and publicly with Egyptian officials, calling for an immediate end to the practice and investigation into the widespread use of sexual violence as a form of torture against detainees.
- U.S. State Department and Embassy officials, as well as relevant Congressional offices, should raise the widespread practice of enforced disappearance and the use of NSA sites publicly and privately with Egyptian officials, drawing attention to the practice as a serious crime and one that facilitates a host of other abuses.
- The U.S. State Department, Treasury Department, and Justice Department should investigate those officers responsible for the oversight of detention sites (particularly those that oversee NSA sites more notorious for sexual violence) for violations of U.S. laws or existing sanctions regimes (including the Global Magnitsky Act, the Khashoggi Ban, Executive Order 13818, and sanctions applicable under the Robert Levinson Act).
- The U.S. Congress should place more conditions on bilateral assistance to Egypt based on clear human rights benchmarks, and these should include language on an end to illegal practices like torture and enforced disappearance, with explicit mention of the use of sexual violence.
- The U.S. Congress should create a fund for Egyptian exiles to ensure that victims of sexual violence in Egyptian prisons are able to seek safe refuge in the United States and ensure that their medical (including psychological) needs are met.
- U.S. intelligence and security bodies should review any intelligence-sharing agreements or relationships with the Egyptian government to ensure that intelligence is not gathered through coercive methods.
- The U.S. Mission to the United Nations should support calls for an independent human rights monitoring mechanism at the United Nations Human Rights Council, in order to provide systematic monitoring and targeted recommendations and guidance to the Egyptian government to mitigate sexual violence in Egyptian prisons.

Recommendations for Egyptian Officials:

- The National Council for Human Rights should immediately adopt an independent investigation into allegations of the use of torture, including sexual violence, through a review of existing case files.
- The National Council for Human Rights should immediately adopt an independent investigation into allegations of enforced disappearance, including the preponderance of sexual violence in sites of enforced disappearance. It should also consider instituting the office of an ombudsperson to handle sexual violence complaints.
- Egypt should sign and ratify the International Covenant for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and enshrine a definition of enforced disappearance in Egyptian law.
- Egypt should adopt legal definitions of rape and sexual assault that comply with international law, including forms of rape and sexual assault against individuals regardless of gender.

- Egypt should bring prison regulations, particularly around the use of cavity searches, into compliance with domestic and international law and public health standards. In practice, bodily contact during searches should be limited by all available means, including employing X-Ray machines or other scanning devices already available at prisons.
- Egypt should thoroughly examine any allegations of sexual violence that take place in Egyptian prisons, detention sites, or at the hands of Egyptian officials.
- Egypt should ensure that transgender or non-binary detainees are housed in detention facilities according to their gender.
- Egypt should end the practice of anal examinations and virginity tests for people of all genders.
- Egypt should allow civil society organizations, including the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights, international organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, and local civil society organizations unfettered access to prisons and detainees to document any instances of sexual violence.
- Egypt should hold all perpetrators of sexual violence accountable under the law, including officers of the state and its institutions. Laws regarding evidence presented in cases of state torture or abuse should be amended to establish proper evidentiary thresholds, and Egypt should pass laws to protect eyewitnesses.
- Egypt should stop the entrapment of LGBTQ+ individuals through dating apps.

Recommendations for Civil Society

- Human rights organizations should continue to work towards broadening the population served, investigating abuses, and advocating for protections beyond categorizations of ‘political’ and ‘criminal’ detainees
- Human rights organizations should launch campaigns that address the severity of sexual violence across the life cycle of detention and work toward creating ecosystems of support and solidarity with victims.
- Human rights organizations should ensure that any documentation of abuse within prisons includes specific monitoring and categorization of sexual or gendered violence.
- Human rights organizations should expand programs and research to examine the impact of psychotherapeutic interventions both in Egypt and within exiled communities and, for grantmaking bodies, expand funding for these initiatives.

Endnotes

- 1 Aly ElRaggal, “مجتمع الاشتباه الدائم ” (Egyptian Center for Economic & Social Rights, August 19, 2020), <http://ecsr.org/ال-مجتمع-الاشتباه-الدائم-دراسة-تصدر-عن-ال>
- 2 For further study on the Egyptian state’s use of sexualized and gendered violence as a “security state logic,” see Amar, Paul. *The Security Archipelago; Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
- 3 Personal correspondence with Hannah ElSisi, March 23, 2021.
- 4 Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, “Sites for Degradation: A Report on Sexual Violence against Women and Non-Heterosexuals Throughout the Criminal Justice System in Egypt,” accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.ec-rf.net/%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%84%d9%84%d9%85%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d8%b9%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%aa%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%83%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac/>; Egyptian Front for Human Rights, “Forgotten in Al Qanater: Violating Rights of Women Detained inside Al Qanater Prison,” January 22, 2020, <https://egyptianfront.org/2020/01/forgotten-in-al-qanater-violating-rights-of-women-detained-inside-al-qanater-prison/>; “Egypt: Security Forces Abuse, Torture LGBT People,” October 1, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/01/egypt-security-forces-abuse-torture-lgbt-people>.
- 5 Mozn Hassan, Response to The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women Ms. Dubravka Šimonović” RE: Questionnaire on criminalization and prosecution of rape Definition and scope of criminal law provisions,” Nazra for Feminist Studies, May 18, 2020 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/RapeReport/CSOs/115-egypt.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2022)
- 6 Prosecutor v Akayesu, Judgement I.C.T.R.,No. ICTR- 96-4-T (1998)
- 7 The Prosecutor v Anto Furundzija (1999) 38 I. L. M. 317
- 8 For more on this, see: Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Defining Rape Internationally: A Comment on Akayesu Essay,” *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 44, no. 3 (2006 2005): 940–58.
- 9 “Waiting for You; 78 Prisons, Including 35 Built after the January Revolution ‘On the Difficult Conditions of Prisoners and Prisons in Egypt’” (Arabic Institute for Human Rights Information, April 11, 2021), <https://www.anhri.info/?p=23376&lang=en>.
- 10 Personal correspondence with Hannah ElSisi, March 23, 2021. Her dissertation research examines the gendered nature of state violence throughout the ecosystem of detainment in Egypt.
- 11 Samira Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967* (Syracuse University Press, 2009).; Personal correspondence with Hannah ElSisi, March 23, 2021. Aghacy and ElSisi’s work theorizing on the nature of gendered violence in Egypt and Syria specifically inform this analysis.
- 12 Based on case number A586
- 13 Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, “The Trap: Punishing Sexual Difference in Egypt” (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, November 22, 2017), <https://eipr.org/en/publications/trap-punishing-sexual-difference-egypt>.
- 14 Upon their release from prison, detainees are often asked to report to their local police station either for specified periods of time (12 hour periods) or for more routine check-ins that can range from 15 mins to hours. The former is court mandated, similar to what prominent human rights activist Alaa Abdelfatah endured before being re-arrested, and the later is communicated to the detainee by their NSA officer as an arbitrary measure. While the court mandated assignments are time bound, the NSA mandates do not have official expiration dates.
- 15 Our documentation shows that there are two ways of this; either by using tasers on the genitals directly or by wrapping exposed wires around genitals.
- 16 Based on case number A258
- 17 Based on case number A632
- 18 Based on case number A69
- 19 Based on case number A132
- 20 Based on case number A134
- 21 Based on case number A134
- 22 Based on case number A134
- 23 Based on case number A591
- 24 Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967*; Personal correspondence with Hannah ElSisi, March 23, 2021. Aghacy and ElSisi’s work theorizing on the nature of gendered violence in Egypt and Syria specifically inform this analysis.
- 25 Based on case number A655
- 26 Based on case number A644
- 27 Based on case number A3
- 28 Based on case number A17
- 29 Based on case number A48
- 30 Based on case number A6
- 31 Based on case number A10
- 32 Based on case number A59
- 33 Based on case number A59
- 34 Based on case number A40
- 35 Based on case number A15
- 36 Based on case number A163
- 37 Based on case number A221
- 38 Based on case number A18
- 39 Since 2011, successive ruling authorities in Egypt have been engaged in sweeping and controversial counterterrorism campaigns across the North Sinai province, as local militant groups have carried out operations (including as part of groups aligned with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State). These campaigns have seen severe restrictions placed on North Sinai residents, and have led to thousands of arrests with very little transparency. The treatment of women described in this report thus reflect broader detention-related dynamics, but are also deeply embedded in politics around the global war on terror and a general tolerance for rights abuses in the name of security.
- 40 Based on case number A162
- 41 Based on case number A621

Endnotes

- 42 Based on case number A73
- 43 Based on case number A100
- 44 Based on case number A107
- 45 Based on case number A163
- 46 Based on case number A103
- 47 Based on case number A103
- 48 Based on case number A291
- 49 Based on case number A636
- 50 Based on case number A110
- 51 Based on case number A115
- 52 Based on case number A119
- 53 Based on case number A122
- 54 Based on case number A122
- 55 Based on case number A139
- 56 Based on case number A143
- 57 Based on case number A136
- 58 Based on case number A147. Being sent to other wards is a form of punishment. This is something that prison authorities levy over detainees, or even some prisoners against each other. For more on this see; Elsis, Hannah. “‘They Threw Her in with the Prostitutes!’: Negotiating Respectability between the Space of Prison and the Place of Woman in Egypt (1943–1959).” *Genre & Histoire* 25 (2020) for a more comprehensive discussion on this.
- 59 Based on case number A592
- 60 Based on case number A67
- 61 Based on case number A123
- 62 Based on case number A592
- 63 Based on case number A597
- 64 Based on case number A604
- 65 Based on case number A580
- 66 Based on case number A618
- 67 Based on case number A606
- 68 Based on case number A591
- 69 We acknowledge that the preponderance of data on NSA sites in our study may be the result of our sample, as the NSA is the body that interfaces most with political detainees.
- 70 “‘We Do Unreasonable Things Here’ Torture and National Security in al-Sisi’s Egypt” (Human Rights Watch, September 6, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/06/egypt-torture-epidemic-may-be-crime-againsthumanity>.
- 71 “We Do Unreasonable Things Here.”
- 72 UN General Assembly, “Convention on the Rights of the Child,” *United Nations, Treaty Series* 1577, no. 3 (1989): 1–23. See: “No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age”
- 73 Kasey McCall-Smith, “United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules),” *International Legal Materials* 55, no. 6 (December 2016): 1180–1205, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020782900030898>. See Rule 51.
- 74 McCall-Smith. See Ruke 60 (2)
- 75 Egypt Const. art. 55
- 76 “We Do Unreasonable Things Here.