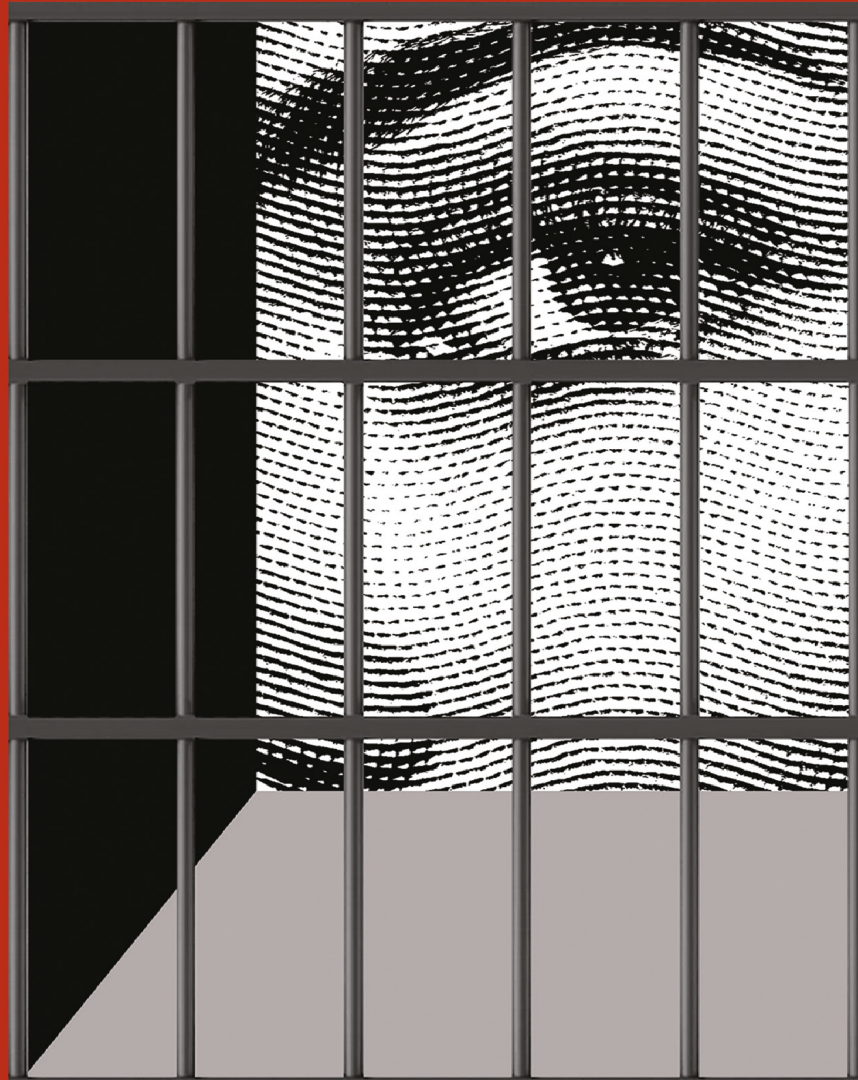




USPEaK
Universally Specific Purposes of English and Knowledge



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut



Assessing Gender-Sensitivity of Services and Security Protocols in Lebanese Jails in Beirut and Mount Lebanon governates



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Under the guidance and facilitation of Mrs. Roweida Saleh, this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study was conducted as a collaborative endeavor. A diverse group of women from the Mount Lebanon and Beirut governorates came together to investigate ways to create positive change in their communities. By centering the voices and lived experiences of those directly affected, this participatory approach ensured that the research was grounded in the realities faced by women in these regions.

These participants, with their unique perspectives and experiences, enriched the study with their invaluable contributions. The research team consisted of:

Amal Hmaidan Nasr	Liliane El Mokdad	Mona Zebian
Eliane Chahine	Lobna Mahmoud	Ola Bassatni
Eman Jaber	Majida Shebbo	Saadia Ghosson
Hanaa Nasereddine	Manal Al Souki	Virginia yazbeck
Hanan Bahmad	Maria Toulany	Yvonne Serhan
Jeanette Geagea	Mira Abed Al Khalek	Zeina Abou Hamzeh
Laurance El Beayni	Mirna Mahmoud	

The participants' firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by women in their communities provided a nuanced understanding of the potential solutions and strategies for creating a more equitable and inclusive society. Their lived experiences and insights were instrumental in shaping the research findings and recommendations.

By actively involving women from diverse backgrounds, this PAR study exemplified the power of collaborative research in driving meaningful change. The participants' commitment to addressing gender-based inequalities and fostering community empowerment was a testament to their resilience and determination.



USPEaK
U.S. Embassy Beirut Program of Rights and Protection



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Beyond Bars, Beyond Bias

Assessing Gender-Sensitivity of Services and Security Protocols in Lebanese Jails in Beirut and Mount Lebanon governates.

Teaching Women Enhanced English (TWEE) Program
Beirut & Mount Lebanon

2024



USPEaK
U.S. Embassy Beirut Program of Rights and Empowerment



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of numerous individuals and organizations. We sincerely thank the women who bravely shared their experiences as detainees, whose stories formed the heart of this project.

We are deeply indebted to the dedicated social workers, lawyers, and psychologists who generously shared their expertise and insights. Their commitment to supporting women in detention is genuinely inspiring.

We also express our deep appreciation to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) for granting us permission to interview the heads of the Barbar Khazen prison and the Hbeich Jail and for administering these detention centers, who facilitated our research and provided valuable information.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and USPEaK for their invaluable support in making this research possible through the TWEE program, which allowed us to learn and grow.

Special thanks are due to our trainer, Mrs Roweida Saleh, whose dedication and professionalism ensured that all necessary arrangements were handled efficiently and with the utmost care. Her guidance and cooperation were key to achieving our objectives.

Finally, we thank our families and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this endeavor.



USPEaK
U.S. Embassy Beirut | Center of Rights and Transition



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Key Terms

- **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** is a research methodology that emphasizes collaboration between researchers and participants to address social issues and drive change, prioritizing the perspectives of those directly affected by the studied issues.
- **Gender-sensitive practices:** Approaches and protocols that consider and address gender-specific needs and issues ensure equitable treatment and consideration of different genders.
- **Gender-specific healthcare:** Medical and health services tailored to address the unique needs of different genders, such as reproductive health services for women.
- **Community tree:** A participatory tool used in PAR to visualize and analyze community relationships and issues.
- **Community mapping:** A collaborative method to create visual representations of community resources, needs, and issues, reflecting local knowledge and experiences.
- **Counterfeit Money:** Fake or fraudulent currency that is illegally produced and used.
- **Gender bias:** Unfair treatment or discrimination based on gender.
- **Participatory action research (PAR):** A research methodology that prioritizes collaboration and empowerment of participants.
- **Gender sensitivity:** Awareness and understanding of gender differences and how they impact individuals and society.
- **Basic Amenities:** Essential facilities and services for comfortable living, such as private spaces and toilet facilities.
- **Detention:** The temporary confinement of a person by law enforcement.
- **Overcrowding:** The condition of having too many people in a confined space.
- **Human rights:** Fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every person, regardless of nationality, sex, national origin, race, religion, or other status.
- **Gender-based violence:** Violence that is directed against a person because of their gender.
- **CSO:** Civil Society Organizations
- **WHO:** World Health Organization
- **NGO:** Non-governmental Organization
- **CEDAW:** Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women.
- **NHRC:** National Human Rights Commission



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction:	4
Research Methodology	6
Research Design	6
Data Collection Methods	6
Data Analysis	7
Ethical Considerations	8
Conclusion	8
Findings and Analysis	8
Analyzing Voices: Insights from Questionnaire Responses	8
Voices From Within: Unpacking and Analyzing Interviews	12
I-Perceptions of Gender-Sensitive Practices:.....	12
An Overview of Gender-Sensitive Deficiencies.....	12
II- Gendered Experiences:.....	13
The Impact of Gender on Detention in Beirut and Mount Lebanon	13
Beyond the Walls: The Importance of Family and Social Support for Female Detainees	16
The Psychological Impact of Detention: Providing Essential Support	16
III- Shaping the Detention Environment:.....	16
Leadership & Institutional Culture	16
Behind the Scenes: The Trials and Tribulations of Research	17
Conclusion	17
Recommendations	18
Key Areas for Improvement:.....	18
Recommendations for Implementation:	18
Recommendations for Improving Detention Conditions:	19
References	19
Appendices	20





This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Executive Summary

This research, conducted from May to August 2024 as part of the TWEE (Teaching Women Enhanced English) program funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and implemented by USPEaK, investigates the gender-sensitivity of services and security protocols in Lebanese jails within the Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates.

The study engaged female researchers in a participatory action research methodology, including those with personal experience within the justice system, to assess the challenges faced by female detainees. By centering the voices of those directly affected, the research aimed to identify gender biases within detention facilities and propose concrete reforms for a more equitable and humane environment.

The mixed-methods approach combined quantitative data from public surveys reaching 320 women and qualitative insights from interviews with former detainees, psychologists, caseworkers, lawyers, and jail administrators. Findings indicate significant gender disparities in access to sanitary facilities, healthcare, and overall treatment, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive reforms. Key recommendations include establishing dedicated detention facilities for women, amending legal frameworks, enhancing support services, providing gender-sensitivity training for personnel, and ensuring effective oversight of detention conditions.

This study calls for collaborative efforts among policymakers, prison authorities, and civil society organizations to implement these recommendations, aiming for systemic changes that uphold the rights and well-being of female detainees.

Key Findings:

- ◆ **Widespread Gender Bias:** The research uncovered systemic gender bias within Lebanese detention facilities, characterized by inadequate infrastructure, limited access to healthcare, and a lack of privacy and security for female detainees.
- ◆ **Public Awareness Gap:** A significant portion of the public is unaware of the specific challenges faced by female detainees, including their legal rights and the conditions within detention centers.
- ◆ **Limited State Support:** The state's role in providing essential services to detainees needs to be more consistent. Many rely on external support for basic needs like food, hygiene products, and healthcare.
- ◆ **Impact on Mental and Physical Health:** The lack of adequate healthcare, including mental health support, coupled with overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, has severe consequences for the physical and psychological well-being of female detainees.
- ◆ **Legal and Procedural Deficiencies:** Women detainees often face violations of their legal rights, including prolonged detention periods and limited access to legal representation.

Recommendations:

To address these critical issues, the research recommends the following actions:

- ◆ **Improved infrastructure and services:** Establish specialized detention facilities for women with adequate healthcare, sanitation, and privacy.
- ◆ **Enhanced staff training:** Implement comprehensive training programs on gender sensitivity and human rights for all detention facility staff.
- ◆ **Strengthened legal support:** Increase access to legal aid for women detainees and ensure adherence to legal procedures.
- ◆ **Increased public awareness:** Conduct public education campaigns to raise awareness about detainees' rights and the challenges faced by women in detention.





This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

By implementing these recommendations, Lebanon can take significant steps towards creating a more just and equitable detention system for women.

Note: This executive summary concisely summarizes the report's essential findings and recommendations. For a more detailed analysis, please refer to the full report.





USPEaK
University-Supported Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Introduction:

This research was conducted from May to August 2024 as part of the TWEE (Teaching Women Enhanced English) program, funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and implemented by USPEaK. The study aimed to shed light on the challenges faced by female detainees in Lebanon and to provide recommendations for reform. Our analysis of gender-sensitive practices in Lebanese detention centers reveals critical disparities between facilities, highlighting the need for a more equitable and humane environment.

Lebanese jails and detention centers, particularly in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates, face significant challenges in upholding gender-sensitive practices. This participatory action research (PAR) project, conducted entirely by women aged 20 to 45, aimed to assess these facilities' current state and identify areas for improvement. We, the researchers, are women from diverse backgrounds – some directly impacted by the justice system, others with a stake in social justice reform. This shared perspective fueled our commitment to a collaborative approach centered on the voices and experiences of women within the system (Watts, Ngunjiri, & Sibiya, 2013).

PAR is a research methodology that prioritizes collaboration and empowerment. Aziz, Shams and Khan (2011) found PAR effective in deciphering social contexts and finding solutions to societal problems. We engaged with various stakeholders throughout this project, including detained women, female correctional officers, and administrators. This participatory approach ensured that the research agenda reflected the lived realities of those most affected by gender bias within the jail system (Heron & Reason, 1997).

Our research delves beyond the physical security of these institutions. We explore the often invisible biases embedded within service delivery and security protocols that disproportionately affect detained women. For example, limited access to sanitary facilities or a lack of gender-specific healthcare can have a profound impact on a woman's physical and mental well-being (Morrow, 1995).

Furthermore, this project is not solely about identifying shortcomings; it is a call to action. We envision a future where Lebanese jails in Beirut and Mount Lebanon become models of gender-sensitive incarceration, prioritizing the well-being and rehabilitation of all individuals, regardless of gender.

Through a series of participatory action research methods, we gathered data and fostered dialogue. These methods included a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and community mapping. Two tools were used in community mapping: a community tree and a community map. According to Reason, Peter, and Bradbury, Hilary (2001), a "community tree" is a visual tool involving the collaborative creation of a tree diagram representing the interconnectedness of various elements within a community. The tree metaphorically symbolizes the community as a living entity with roots, branches, and leaves, each representing different aspects of community life, resources, relationships, and challenges. On the other hand, the community map is a collaborative exercise where "local voices are articulated, as against standardized modes of mapping, which have historically frequently reflected more top-down or expert forms of knowledge.", Perkins, (2018). We also critically analyzed existing policies and practices within the jail system.

Moreover, this research is not an endpoint but a springboard for further dialogue and action. We believe the insights drawn from this project, which involved the direct participation of women most impacted by the system, will empower policymakers, prison authorities, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to work collaboratively towards a future where "Beyond Bars, Beyond Bias" becomes not just a slogan, but a tangible reality for women within the Lebanese justice system.





USPEaK
University Speeches Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut



Research Questions:

To guide this research, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the key challenges faced by women detainees in Lebanese jails and detention centers, and how do these challenges intersect with broader issues of gender inequality and human rights?
2. How do existing policies, procedures, and practices within Lebanese jails and detention centers contribute to or mitigate gender bias against female detainees?
3. What are the most effective strategies for addressing gender bias and improving the conditions for women detainees in Lebanese jails and detention centers?



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Research Methodology

A Mixed-Methods Approach to Investigating and Understanding Gender Bias in Lebanese Detention Centers

This participatory action research (PAR) aimed to investigate gender bias in Lebanese jails and detention centers through a mixed-methods approach. By combining quantitative data from public surveys with qualitative insights from expert interviews, the research sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perceptions related to gender bias in the detention system.

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods to capture a holistic view of the issues. This approach allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the findings' validity and reliability.

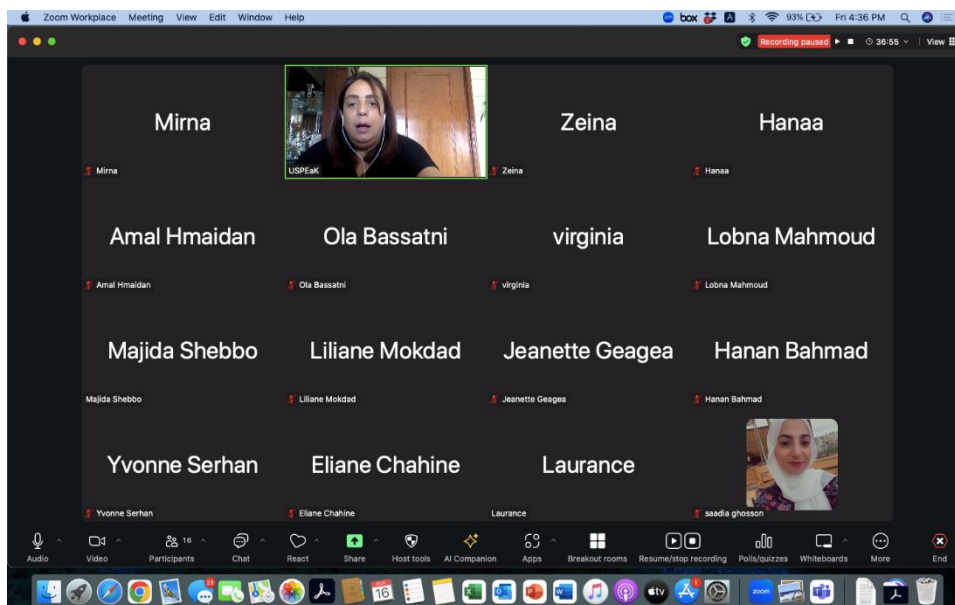
Data Collection Methods

I. Questionnaire Survey

A structured questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data from the public regarding their perceptions and experiences of gender bias in jails and detention centers. The questionnaire included a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to assess:

- Awareness of gender bias issues in the detention system
- Perceptions of the treatment of female detainees
- Attitudes toward the adequacy of facilities and support for women in detention

The questionnaire was distributed online and in-person to a diverse sample of participants, ensuring representation from various demographics, including age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. A total of 320 responses were collected.



II. Expert Interviews

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with various stakeholders to gain deeper insights into the complexities of gender bias in detention. The interviewees included:

Previous Detainees: Individuals with firsthand experience within the detention system shared their personal stories, highlighting their challenges and biases.



USPEaK
University-Sponsored Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

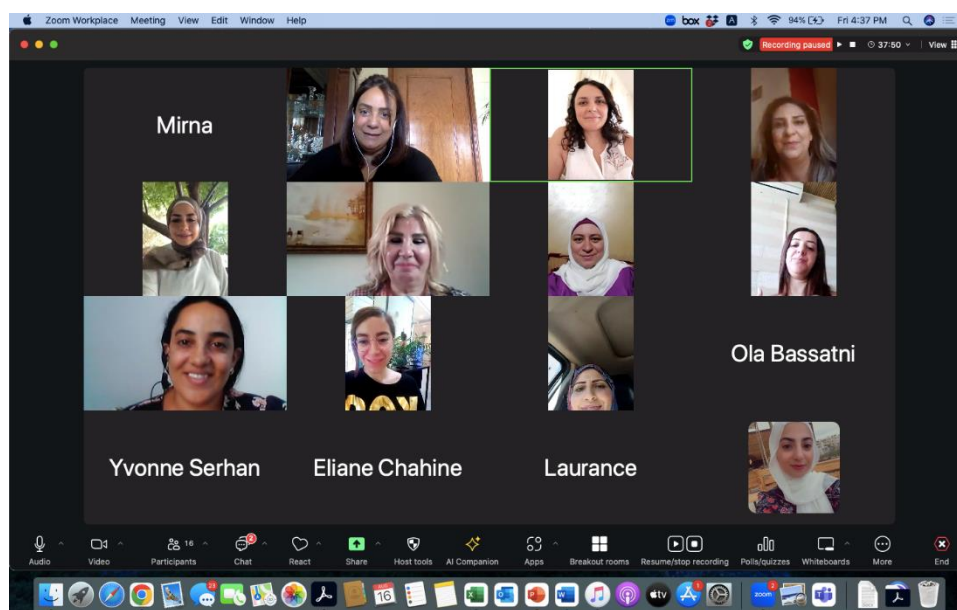
Psychologists: Mental health professionals provided expert perspectives on the psychological impacts of detention on women and the adequacy of mental health support.

Caseworkers: Social workers and support staff discussed their experiences working with female detainees and the systemic barriers they encounter.

Jail Heads & Administration: Administrators of detention facilities offered insights into the operational challenges and policies affecting female detainees.

Lawyers: These interviews provided valuable insights into the legal framework surrounding detention, highlighting the discrepancies between the stated laws and their practical implementation. The lawyers also offered crucial context and depth to our understanding of the conditions faced by female detainees.

A semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics were covered. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a confidential setting to encourage open and honest dialogue.



Data Analysis

- Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using statistical software (Excel). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions of gender bias in detention.

- Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Key themes and patterns were identified through an iterative coding process, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of interviewees. The analysis focused on:

- ◆ Common challenges faced by female detainees
- ◆ Perceptions of support and resources available to women in detention
- ◆ Recommendations for improving gender-sensitive practices within the detention system



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the research was a priority for us as a group of researchers. We secured informed consent from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, with data stored securely and accessible only to the research team.

Conclusion

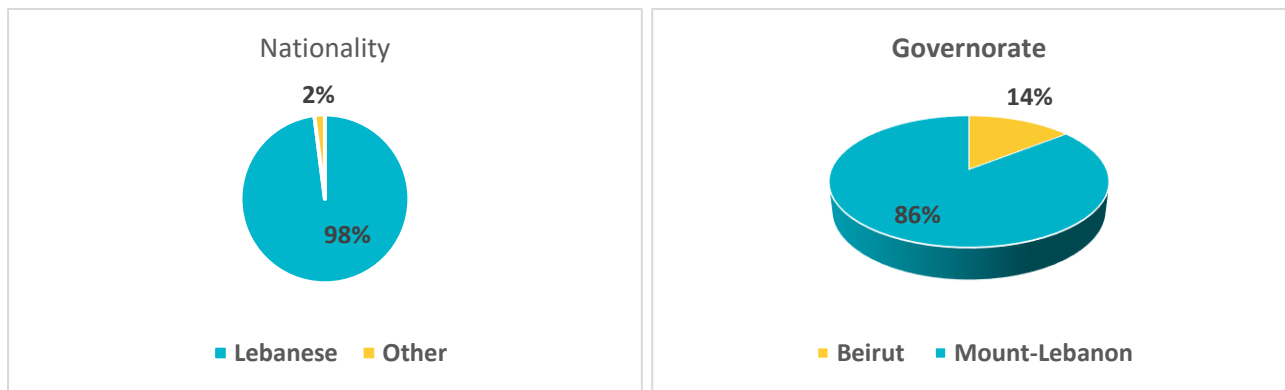
This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of gender bias in Lebanese jails and detention centers, combining quantitative insights from the public with qualitative narratives from critical stakeholders. The findings aim to inform policy recommendations and enhance gender-sensitive practices within the detention system.

Findings and Analysis

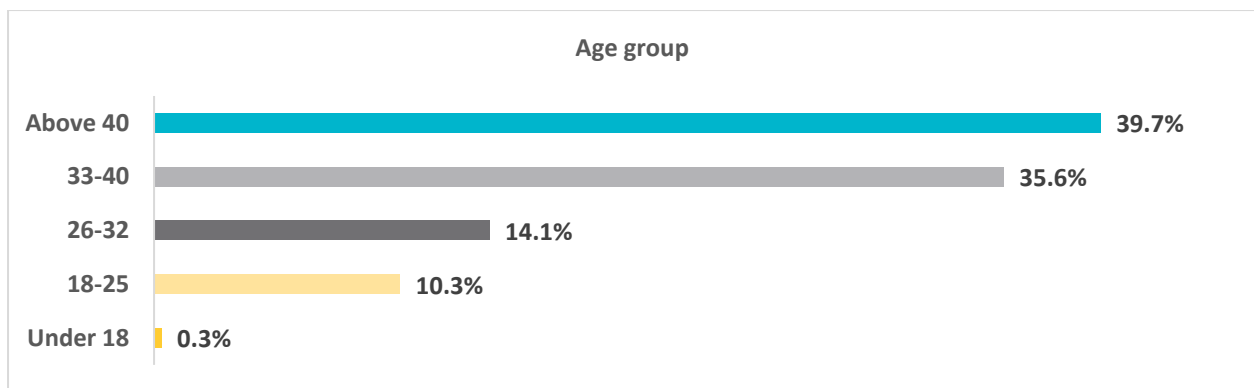
Analyzing Voices: Insights from Questionnaire Responses

The following demographic profile provides a foundation for understanding the experiences and perspectives of the women who participated in the study.

320 women completed the questionnaire, with an overwhelming majority (98%) identifying as Lebanese nationals. 86% were from Mount Lebanon, while 14% were from Beirut.



The sample was predominantly composed of women aged 40 and above, constituting the largest age group. However, there was representation across different age brackets, with 35.6% of participants falling between the ages of 33 and 40, 14.1% between 26 and 32, and 10.3% between 18 and 25. Notably, only 0.3% of respondents were below the age of 18.

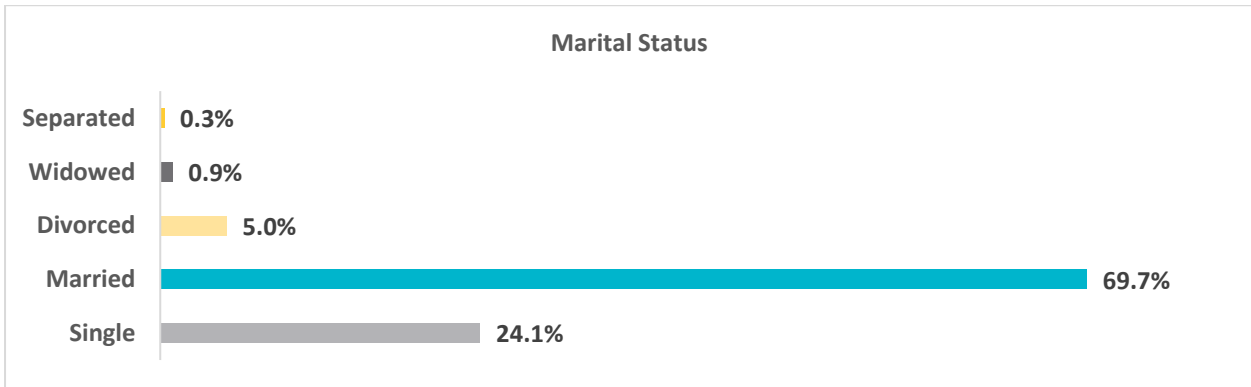


In terms of marital status, the majority of participants (70%) were married, followed by single women (24%) and divorced women (5%).

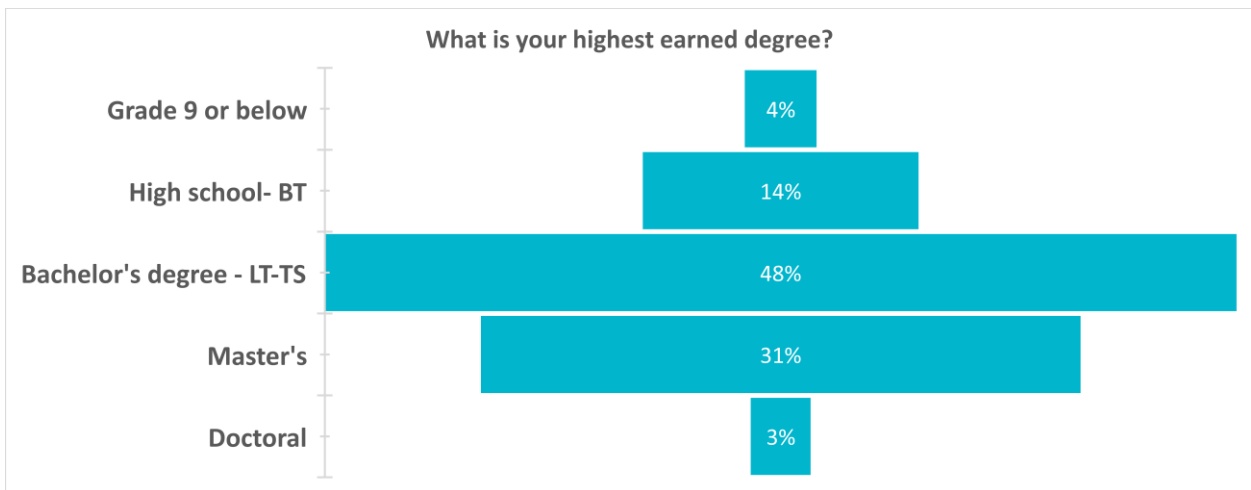




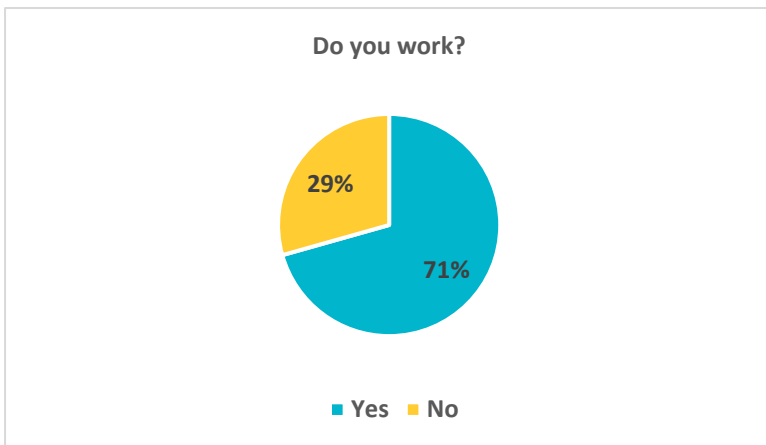
This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut



The educational attainment of the sample was relatively high. Almost half (48%) of the participants held a bachelor's degree, while 31% possessed a master's degree. A smaller proportion (3%) had completed a doctoral degree. High school graduates accounted for 14% of the sample, and 4% had less than a high school education.



Moreover, 71% of the female participants in this survey work, while 29% are not employed.



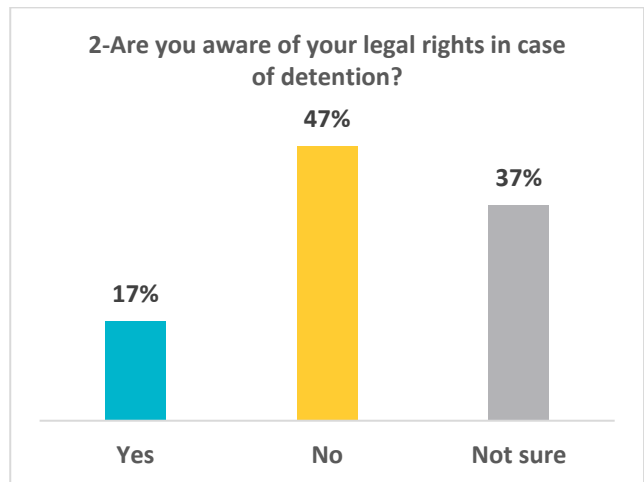
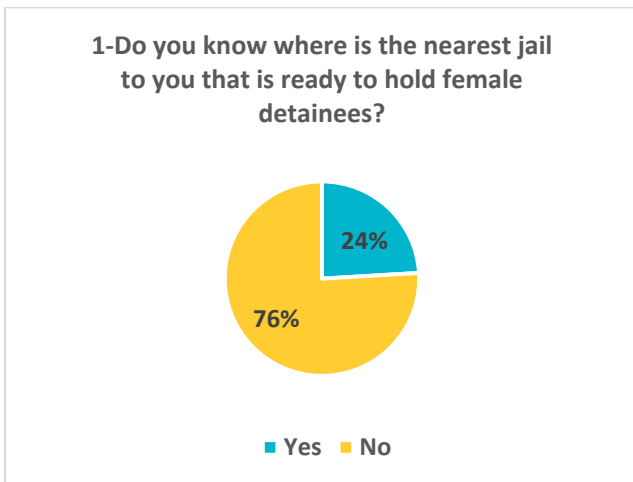
The survey included questions to assess public awareness of gender sensitivity in Lebanese jails and detention procedures. The results indicate significant gaps in knowledge.

Most participants (76%) needed help identifying the nearest jail facility for female detainees, demonstrating a lack of familiarity with the detention system. Conversely, only 24% of respondents knew the location of such facilities.





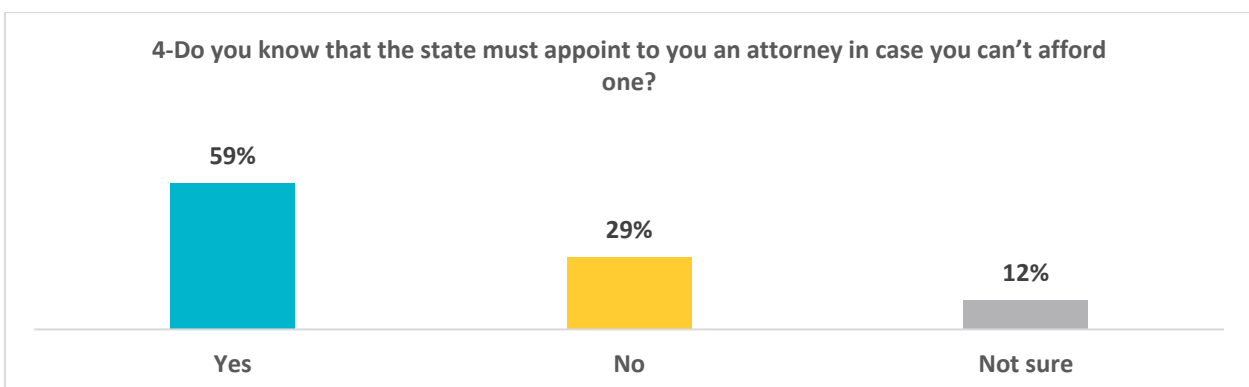
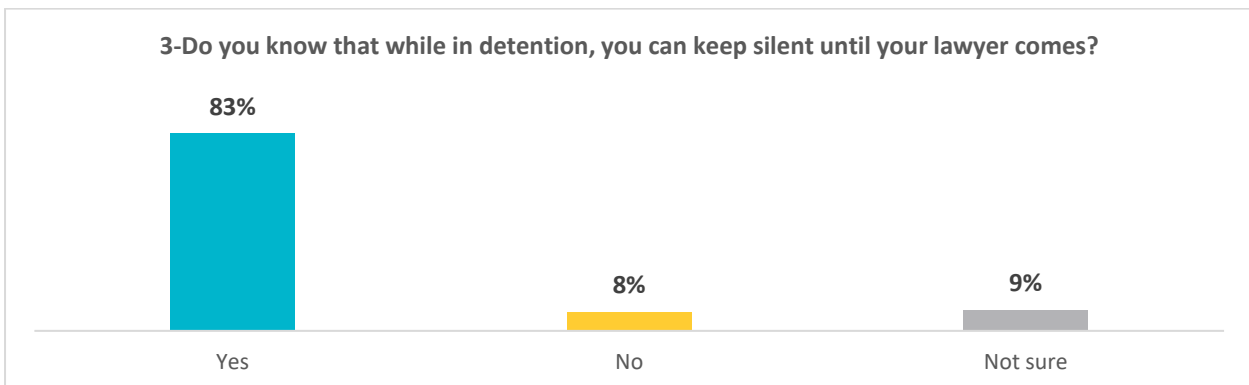
This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut



Furthermore, the survey revealed limited knowledge of legal rights in the event of detention. A concerning 47% of participants admitted to being unaware of their legal rights, while 37% expressed uncertainty. Only 17% confidently affirmed their knowledge of these rights.

The survey also explored public knowledge of detainee rights and detention procedures.

Most respondents (83%) were aware of the right to remain silent until legal counsel was present, indicating a reasonable understanding of this fundamental right. However, 9% expressed uncertainty, and 8% were unaware of this right.



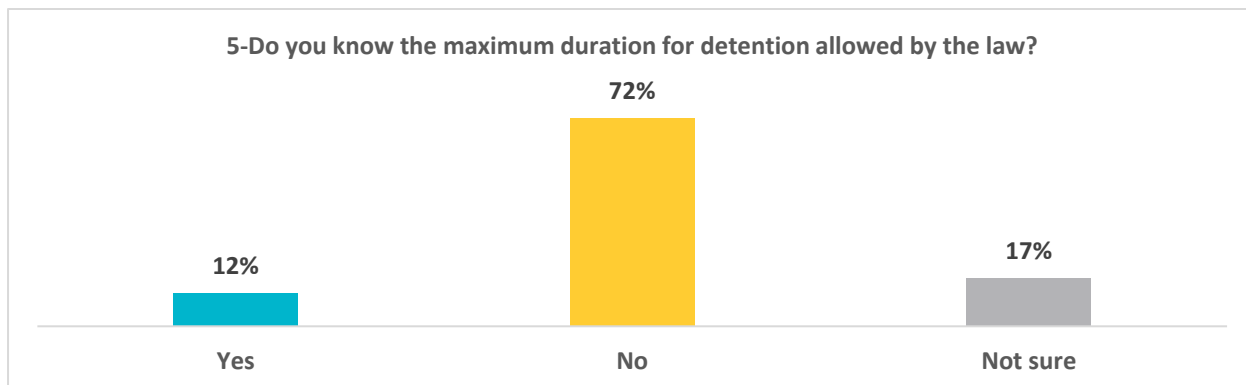
Regarding legal representation, 59% of participants were aware of the state's obligation to provide legal counsel for those unable to afford it. However, a significant proportion (29%) were unaware of this right, and 12% were uncertain.



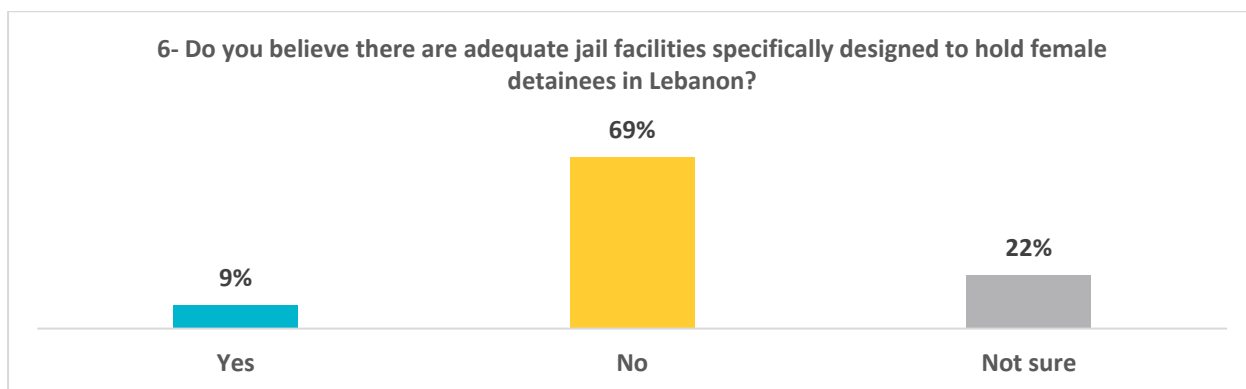


This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

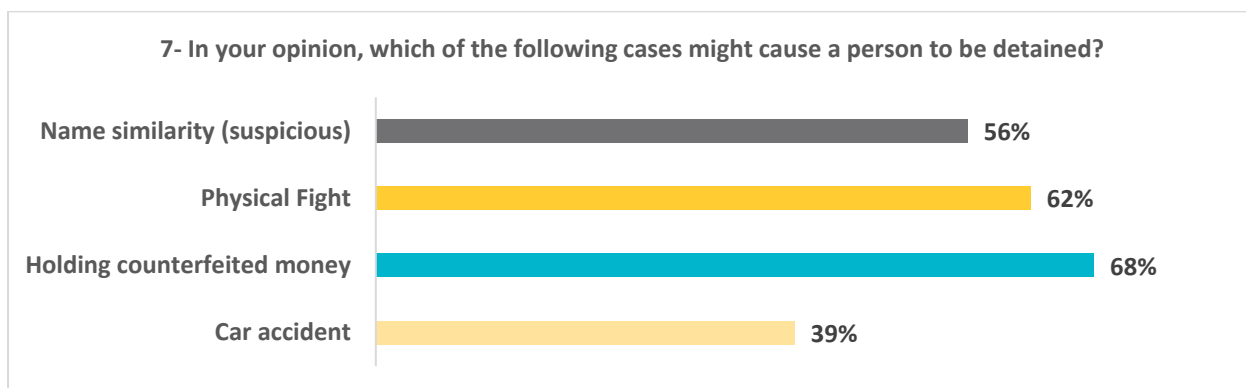
Public knowledge about the legal duration of detention was limited, with 72% of respondents unaware of the maximum permissible detention period. Seventeen percent expressed uncertainty, while only 12% correctly identified the legal timeframe.



When asked about the adequacy of detention facilities for female detainees, a majority (69%) expressed dissatisfaction. Twenty-two percent were still determining, while only 9% believed the facilities were adequate.



Finally, the survey explored public perceptions of reasons for detention. Most agreed that holding counterfeit money (68%) and engaging in physical fights (62%) could lead to detention. Name similarity was cited by 56% of respondents as a potential cause, while car accidents were identified by 39%.



These findings highlight a critical need for increased public awareness regarding detainee rights, the functioning of the detention system in Lebanon, the legal rights of detainees, and the conditions within detention facilities.





This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Voices From Within: Unpacking and Analyzing Interviews

Three key themes were identified to unpack and analyze the interviews. The first theme examined the experiences of gender within the detention system, focusing on gender-sensitive practices and deficiencies. The second theme investigated the impact of gender on detention, exploring the unique needs of female detainees, the importance of family and social support, and the critical role of mental health and psychosocial support. The third theme delved into leadership and institutional culture, providing insights into staff training and awareness, as well as the commitment of leadership to improve detention conditions for females in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

I-Perceptions of Gender-Sensitive Practices: An Overview of Gender-Sensitive Deficiencies

Our analysis of gender-sensitive practices in Lebanese detention centers reveals critical disparities between facilities. While some centers have shown a greater readiness to offer a more dignified experience for female detainees, others exhibit significant deficiencies. The general economic collapse in Lebanon has severely affected the operations and resources of these centers, contributing to the challenges detainees face. Additionally, the overwhelming number of detainees and the backlog of cases within the judicial system have led to overcrowding and unpreparedness in many facilities.

However, the data gathered from our recent survey highlights a substantial gap in public awareness regarding gender-sensitive practices in Lebanese jails and detention centers. For example, 76% of respondents were unaware of the location of the nearest jail facility for female detainees, demonstrating a significant lack of familiarity with the detention system. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (47%) admitted to being unaware of their legal rights in the event of detention, with another 37% expressing uncertainty. This lack of awareness is likely contributing to the perpetuation of inadequate conditions for female detainees, as the public is not well-equipped to demand better standards.

Violations of legal detention periods were also highlighted, with detainees often held for months, far exceeding legal limits, which further worsens their conditions. Public awareness of this issue is low, as 72% of survey respondents were unaware of the maximum legal detention period, pointing to a critical need for legal education.

The systemic issues of abuse and privacy violations are a significant concern. A former detainee reported being subjected to physical and verbal abuse. This underscores the pervasive disregard for the dignity and rights of female detainees. Both the social worker and psychologist reported similar issues across various facilities. Public dissatisfaction with the adequacy of detention facilities is also evident, with 69% of survey participants expressing dissatisfaction with the conditions in facilities designed to hold female detainees.

Legal support for detainees is another area of concern highlighted in our findings. The former detainee felt that her statements and evidence were disregarded, and legal procedures needed to be followed. This underscores the critical role of legal professionals in advocating for women's rights and ensuring fair treatment. Our survey also revealed that only 12% of respondents correctly identified the legal duration of detention, highlighting a critical need for public education on legal rights.

As state representatives, judges significantly promote gender-sensitive practices by implementing laws and international treaties, such as CEDAW, that protect women's rights. However, there appears to be a lack of practical commitment to their implementation. Lawyers, particularly those from NGOs, play a crucial role in handling cases, organizing awareness sessions, and conducting advocacy campaigns to support women's rights and provide protection for detainees. The preference among female



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

detainees for female lawyers to avoid embarrassment further underscores the importance of gender-sensitive legal representation.

II- Gendered Experiences:

The Impact of Gender on Detention in Beirut and Mount Lebanon

Meeting the Unique Needs of Female Detainees: A Gender-Sensitive Approach

Our research indicates significant discrepancies between the treatment and conditions experienced by female detainees compared to what is necessary for their well-being. Based on the questionnaire responses, 86% of respondents support efforts to improve conditions for female detainees. Furthermore, 92% believe there is a need for more training to address gender bias among law enforcement and judicial personnel. This aligns with the NHRC's emphasis on addressing human rights violations in detention centers. (NHCR, 2024)

The interviews provide a deeper insight into the conditions faced by female detainees as follows. Concerning the bathroom facilities, the detention centers have a limited number of bathrooms, and many women reported a lack of privacy. Although some privacy is provided, it remains inadequate, with cold water and a lack of necessary supplies for hygiene. Personal hygiene products are rarely available unless provided by private associations. Interviewees emphasized that overcrowding and poor sanitation conditions are prevalent, echoing the questionnaire's findings, where 90% of respondents noted the lack of clean and private toilet facilities. The NHRC's report further emphasizes that such issues are widespread, with poor sanitation being a common problem in detention centers. (NHCR, 2024)

The analysis also shows deficiencies in various facilities where we had the chance to visit. A former detainee's accounts underscore a significant lack of privacy and basic amenities for women, including the absence of private spaces and dedicated toilet facilities. This aligns with the observations made by a social worker, who noted similar issues of overcrowding and inadequate hygiene across multiple detention centers in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. These findings indicate a systemic failure to address the specific needs of female detainees.

However, Detainees frequently lack access to necessities, such as food and personal hygiene items. This aligns with observations from lawyers and social workers, who note that state-provided resources must be more frequent and adequate. Consequently, detainees are often forced to purchase additional supplies or rely on sporadic aid from private associations. The survey results further support these claims, with a significant portion of the public expressing dissatisfaction with the adequacy of detention facilities, particularly regarding the provision of necessities.

Our findings also indicate that physical health needs, particularly for detainees with disabilities, are often neglected. The former detainee, who has a disability in her right leg, was forced to sit on a plastic chair for prolonged periods, exacerbating her condition. This lack of consideration for both gender and disability needs reflect a broader issue within the detention system. This insight is supported by another testimony of another previous detainee who claims she was denied access to her blood pressure medication while she was detained for 20 hours.



USPEaK
University Support Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut



Moreover, regarding food and nutrition at the detention centers, the interviews revealed that meals are state provided but often insufficient, requiring detainees to rely on external help or buy additional food themselves. 69% of survey respondents highlighted the inadequacy of facilities designed for female detainees, underlining a systemic issue in the provision of basic needs.

Our interviews also reveal that the state typically does not cover medical care, placing additional burdens on detainees to seek external help or funding for their health needs. Despite that, under international norms, the United Nations Standards Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules) states that "every prisoner shall be provided by the prison administration at the usual hours with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served." They further state that "drinking water shall be available to every prisoner whenever he or she needs it." Prisoners should also "have access to necessary healthcare services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status," and state authorities should "endeavor to reduce prison overcrowding and, where appropriate, resort to non-custodial measures as alternatives to pre-trial detention." (Human Right Watch, 2023)

Both the interviews and the questionnaire responses pointed to significant gaps in healthcare. Inadequate access to medical care and prolonged detention durations further exacerbate the vulnerability of female detainees, with 54% expressing concerns about compromised safety.

The sense of safety and respect within detention centers is severely lacking. Detainees have reported experiencing both physical and verbal abuse, including being struck by detectives. While some detainees have received adequate support from guards, the overall environment remains hostile and unsafe, urging the need for unified support to all women detainees. The lack of privacy, as noted earlier, only adds to this feeling of insecurity and disrespect. Additionally, detainees often feel unheard, with their statements and evidence frequently ignored, as reported by both detainees and their legal representatives.



USPEaK
University Support Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Former detainees provided insight into the severe lack of privacy and respect for women in some detention facilities. The embarrassment of being detained late at night, concerns about community gossip, and the neglect of family needs—such as timely medication for a sick child—contributed significantly to their mental distress.

Psychologically, the situation is dire. The constant surveillance, coupled with the stressful and hostile environment, has led to widespread anxiety, stress, and depression among detainees. The complete absence of mental health facilities in these detention centers only worsens the psychological toll on these women. Both detainees and professionals have underscored the need for immediate improvements in this area, particularly for those with existing mental health conditions.

The conditions at police stations were found to be particularly harsh for female detainees, who sometimes face violence, physical abuse, and poor living conditions, leading to feelings of insecurity and danger. The lack of facilities for psychologists and the overcrowded conditions prevents proper care and rehabilitation, contributing to stress and mental health issues.

The interviewed lawyer raised significant concerns regarding the safety and security of female detainees, focusing on sexual harassment and extended detention periods. One of the major issues identified was the lack of reporting procedures for harassment within prisons and detention centers. This gap leaves many incidents unaddressed, a finding echoed by the survey, where 47% of respondents were unaware of their legal rights in detention, highlighting a broader issue of insufficient protections and awareness.

Harassment During Transport was another concern, with female detainees sometimes being transported with male detainees, raising risks of harassment. A reported incident involved a woman who objected to being handcuffed and transported with men, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive protocols.

Inside detention centers, harassment by former detainees who assume unofficial authority roles is common, along with abuse due to poor conditions. The lawyer recommended forming investigation teams composed of women and involving social workers and lawyers in domestic violence cases to ensure proper protection for female detainees. This recommendation reflects the survey's findings that 76% of respondents were unaware of the nearest jail facility for women, indicating a lack of system awareness that could exacerbate vulnerabilities.

Extended judgment times were another concern, with legal proceedings often taking one to two years, far exceeding the legally required 24 to 48 hours. This prolonged uncertainty adds to detainees' stress and suffering. While some gendarmes were reported to be kind, providing essential items like food and clothes, there was a general lack of awareness and instances of discrimination due to insufficient training. This issue was mirrored in the survey, where 59% of participants knew the state must provide legal counsel for those who cannot afford it, but a significant portion remained unaware or uncertain.

The social worker's perspective focused on the broader safety and security challenges within detention centers, particularly overcrowding, where up to 30 women are housed in a single room, leading to unsanitary and unsafe living conditions. Gender discrimination was also a serious issue, with female detainees often left with male guards during night shifts, raising significant safety concerns.

Violence among prisoners was another issue, with frequent incidents of beating and abuse, particularly between different nationalities, creating a hostile environment. This concern was reflected in survey findings where 68% of respondents agreed that holding counterfeit money could lead to detention, indicating a general awareness of the precarious situations detainees might face.



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

The detainees' perspectives provided a personal view of these conditions. One detainee reported no mistreatment but noted carelessness towards her family situation and a lack of privacy, as she was housed in a room between offices with no clear information on when she would be evacuated.

Beyond the Walls: The Importance of Family and Social Support for Female Detainees

Family and social support emerge as crucial factors in the experiences of female detainees. Detainees often find themselves unable to communicate with their families due to limited or non-existent phone access in detention centers. Interviewees highlighted that detainees are often unaware of their legal rights, such as the right to make a phone call, which can exacerbate their sense of isolation.

Moreover, the role of social workers, as revealed through interviews, is pivotal in bridging the gap between detainees and the outside world. Social workers attempt to facilitate communication and provide essential resources, though their efforts are constrained by limited budgets and logistical difficulties. 77% of survey participants expressed dissatisfaction with the handling of female detainees, emphasizing the need for specialized facilities and greater advocacy for detainees' rights. The NHRC's report acknowledges the pivotal role of NGOs and social workers but also highlights the constraints they face, such as limited resources and logistical challenges. (NHCR, 2024)

The Psychological Impact of Detention: Providing Essential Support

Our research reveals critical insights into the psychological impact of detention on women. Interviewees describe an environment where detainees often face stress, anxiety, and depression due to poor conditions, overcrowding, and lack of privacy. One former detainee shared experiences of verbal and physical abuse, highlighting the urgent need for better psychological support systems within detention facilities.

A consistent theme across interviews is the absence of adequate mental health services and rehabilitation programs. The interviews stressed the need for increased numbers of psychotherapists and more humane prison conditions, which align with the survey's findings, where respondents overwhelmingly indicated a need for reform in treatment and support services.

The interviews and questionnaire responses paint a bleak picture of the detention environment for women. Common themes include overcrowding, a lack of access to healthcare, poor sanitation, and extended detention durations. These conditions contribute to a hostile environment that negatively affects mental well-being.

III- Shaping the Detention Environment:

Leadership & Institutional Culture

Leadership and institutional culture are pivotal in shaping the operations, outcomes and overall environment in both jails & prisons. While these two types of correctional facilities share some goals such as maintaining safety and security, their leadership challenges and cultural dynamics differ significantly due to their distinct purposes and populations.

In the interview with the head of Barbar Khazen prison (the central women's prison in Beirut), we found the administration committed to gender sensitivity, focusing on the unique needs of female inmates and detainees to ensure their safety, health, legal rights, and rehabilitation. A specialized medical care system has been implemented, including gynecological services and mental health support, and created spaces for mothers to meet their children. By partnering with organizations like the Red Cross, WHO & other NGOs, gender-sensitive practices are enhanced. The prison leadership



USPEaK
University-Sponsored Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

also emphasizes continuous monitoring, providing access to social workers and legal advisors, and involving inmates in feedback processes to foster a responsive and inclusive environment.

In contrast, in Hbeich jail in Beirut, the leadership is committed to maintaining immediate safety and security due to the high turnover of inmates and the unpredictable nature of the population. However, they are not implementing consistent procedures and are not providing ongoing training for staff on gender sensitivity, instead focusing on training staff to handle the immediate challenges.

However, challenges persist. The issue of overcrowding and limited resources, as highlighted by both the social worker and the detention Center head, underscored the need for systemic solutions. Access to quality healthcare is limited, especially in Hbeich jail, with no medical staff and no access to hospitalization. Violence and safety concerns are significant, as detainees may experience physical, sexual and psychological abuse from other inmates. Legal representation is often inadequate, particularly for those who cannot afford private attorneys.

While the Central Women's Prison in Beirut (Barbar el Khazen) has implemented some positive changes, ensuring these practices are replicated across all detention facilities is essential. The conditions in Barbar El Khazen Jail align with the need for staff training, yet the Hobeich representative noted a lack of proper training for staff on gender sensitivity. Practical staff training and awareness are crucial for implementing lasting change within detention centers. The proposed training modules for investigation teams and lawyers align with international best practices for handling cases of gender-based violence. However, extending this training to all staff members, including correctional officers, medical personnel, and administrative staff is essential. Furthermore, ongoing evaluation and reinforcement are necessary to maximize the impact of training. Additionally, creating a culture of accountability and performance management can help ensure that staff adhere to gender-sensitive principles in their daily work.

Behind the Scenes: The Trials and Tribulations of Research

Conducting this research was not without its challenges. Throughout the research project, we encountered several significant obstacles.

Despite our rigorous efforts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, many former detainees hesitated to participate in the research due to concerns about potential repercussions. The fear of stigmatization or legal consequences deterred some individuals from sharing their experiences.

Additionally, the questionnaire faced less-than-expected response rates, indicating a lack of public interest or awareness of the issue.

Moreover, the vast geographical area of Beirut and Mount Lebanon and the ongoing war and economic crisis in Lebanon further hindered our ability to conduct regular face-to-face interviews and collect data effectively.

Finally, the unstable security situation, limited access to transportation, and economic hardships faced by many individuals contributed to these challenges.

Conclusion

Our research underscores the pressing need for reform in the treatment and conditions of female detainees in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The data collected from both questionnaires and interviews highlight systemic issues, including inadequate facilities, lack of privacy, insufficient healthcare, and psychological stressors.



USPEaK
University-Sector Partnership of English and Law



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

The findings of this participatory action research underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms within Lebanon's detention system to address the systemic gender bias that disproportionately affects women. The voices of female detainees, combined with the perspectives of professionals working within the system, have painted a stark picture of the challenges faced by women in these institutions.

From inadequate physical conditions and limited access to healthcare to violations of legal rights and a lack of gender-sensitive support services, the experiences of women in detention reveal a systemic failure to uphold basic human rights. The absence of specialized facilities for women, coupled with overcrowding and a lack of privacy, creates a hostile environment that exacerbates psychological distress and physical health problems.

To address these critical issues, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes implementing structural changes to detention facilities, providing comprehensive healthcare services, strengthening legal protections for women detainees, and conducting widespread public awareness campaigns. Furthermore, investing in staff training and fostering a culture of gender sensitivity within the detention system is crucial for creating a more humane and equitable environment.

Policymakers, prison authorities, and civil society organizations must work collaboratively to implement these recommendations. By prioritizing the rights and well-being of female detainees, Lebanon can take significant steps toward building a more just and equitable society.

Recommendations

A comprehensive approach that addresses the systemic issues affecting female detainees' rights, well-being, and living conditions is necessary to address the critical challenges faced by female detainees in Lebanon. The following recommendations outline key areas for improvement, focusing on enhancing facilities, strengthening legal frameworks, increasing support services, training personnel, and ensuring effective oversight.

Key Areas for Improvement:

- **Enhanced Facilities:** Establish specialized detention facilities for women with adequate resources and privacy.
- **Improved Legal Frameworks:** Amend laws to better protect the rights of female detainees.
- **Increased Support Services:** Provide access to mental health services, legal aid, and necessities.
- **Training for Personnel:** Implement gender-sensitive training for law enforcement and judicial staff.
- **Effective Oversight:** Ensure regular monitoring of detention conditions by relevant ministries and civil society organizations.

Recommendations for Implementation:

- **Strengthen leadership commitment:** Encourage detention center heads to prioritize gender-sensitive practices.
- **Expand staff training:** Implement comprehensive training programs for all staff.



USPEaK
University-Sponsored Program of English and Leadership



This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

- **Develop clear protocols:** Establish guidelines for handling cases of gender-based violence.
- **Increase collaboration:** Foster partnerships between detention centers, government agencies, and civil society organizations.
- **Monitor and evaluate:** Implement regular monitoring and evaluation systems.

Recommendations for Improving Detention Conditions:

- **Legal Amendments:** Advocate for lawmakers to amend existing legislation to better address the specific needs of women in detention.
- **Dedicated Detention Facilities:** Establish specialized pre-trial detention facilities for women and increase the overall capacity of women's prisons.
- **Addressing Special Needs:** Implement comprehensive strategies to meet the health, psychological, and mental well-being of detained women.
- **Improving Detention Conditions:** Enhance living conditions within detention facilities and ensure consistent oversight and protection.
- **Awareness and Training Initiatives:** Conduct awareness sessions for detainees, increase vocational training, and provide gender-sensitive training for staff.
- **Ongoing Support Services:** Offer continuous legal and psychological support, ensure access to hygiene products and health supplies, and facilitate family connections.

Provided that the resources to implement these recommendations can be secured, Lebanon can take significant steps towards creating a more humane and equitable environment for female detainees, ensuring that their rights and well-being are protected.

References

Ammar, N., & Makarem, N. (2019). *Women and imprisonment in Lebanon: A neglected domain*. ResearchGate.

Aziz, A., Shams, M., & Khan, K. S. (2011). Participatory action research as the approach for women's empowerment. *Action Research*, 9(3), 303–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750310396952>

Human Rights Watch. (2023, August 23). Lebanon: Harrowing prison conditions. *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/23/lebanon-harrowing-prison-conditions>

Morrow, S. L., & Smith, M. L. (1995). Constructions of survival and coping by women who have survived childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42(1), 24–33. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.42.1.24>

National Human Rights Commission of Lebanon (NHCR). (2024). *Monitoring human rights violations in places of detention in Lebanon: Deprivation of everything*. <https://en.nhrclb.org/archives/475>

Perkins, C. (2018). *Community mapping*. In *Oxford bibliographies*. Oxford University Press.



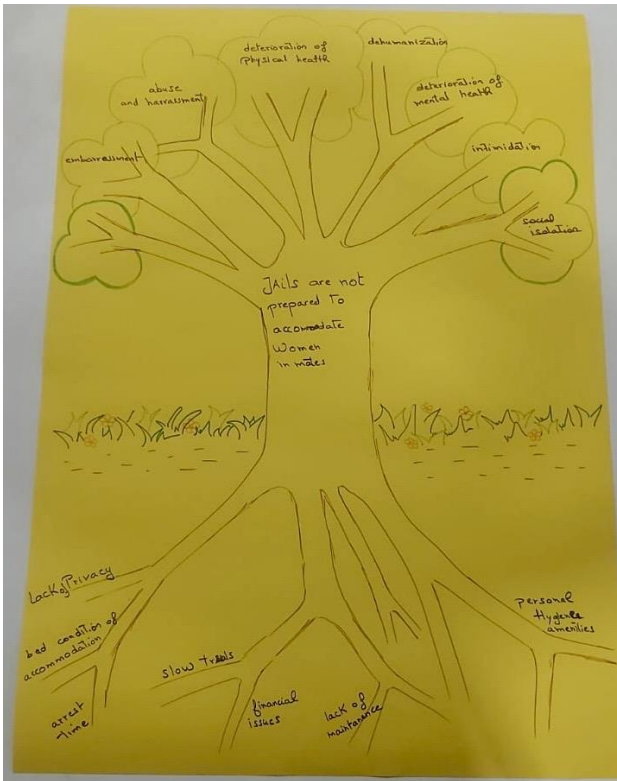
This program is funded by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut

Reason, Peter, and Bradbury, Hilary. "The Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice." Sage Publications, 2001.

Appendices

Appendix A: Community Mapping

Community Tree



Community Map





Contact details:

- +961 8 378 720
- admin@uspeaklb.org

Visiting address:

- Ballbeck City**
Baalbeck-Hermel, Lebanon
- Al Ain City**
Baalbeck-Hermel, Lebanon

Social Media:

- uspeaklb.org
- USPEaK Info
- USPEaK
- USPEaK
- USPEaKLebanon
- USPEaK