

Violence against women in Iraq under US Occupation

By [Global Research](#)

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AFTER SADDAM, IRAQI WOMEN USED AS SEX OBJECTS

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"The extent to which women have lost their rights in Iraq is shocking"

Violence against women has increased dramatically since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. They have been kidnapped, killed, raped, and even sold to foreign countries for the global prostitution network, the Woman Freedom Organization (WFO), a Baghdad-based NGO, said in a report earlier this month.

"We've studied reports from local NGOs on women's rights in the past three years, including violence, kidnappings, forced prostitution and honor killings," WFO President Senar Mohammad told *Reuters*. "And the extent to which women have lost their rights in Iraq is shocking."

According to the WFO study, the most worrying trend was the kidnappings of women, many of whom reported being sexually abused or tortured. "Kidnapping and raping women has become so widespread that every woman worries that she may become the next victim. Very few women are seen on the streets. It was not like that before the war, no! Many are frightened to step out of their home," an unidentified Iraqi woman said.

More than 2,000 Iraqi women have been kidnapped since April 2003, the report said, adding that such incidents were largely unknown during Saddam Hussein's regime. "Money has become more important than lives, and kidnapping women - easy targets because of their weakness - is a quicker way to get a good ransom," said Mohammad.

Moreover, the study says that several Iraqi women were being sold as sex workers abroad, mainly to the illegal markets in Yemen, Syria, Jordan and the Gulf States. Victims usually discover their fate only after they have been lured outside Iraq by false promises.

"They told my family that I was very beautiful and they were sure I could be a famous model outside Iraq," said one woman who was deceived by traffickers into going to Kuwait. "Because my brothers and father died in 2003, and we needed money desperately, my mother agreed that I should go."

"But I discovered that everything was a lie, and I was forced to have sexual relations with

men,” she said painfully. “I lost my virginity to a 65-year-old man who bought me at a very high price and who slept with me everyday until I ran away and arranged my return to Iraq.”

Sexual abuses

The report also raised concerns about the conditions of women detainees currently held in prisons run by the U.S. and UK occupation forces, pointing to the Al-Kadhimiya and Abu-Ghraib prisons in particular. “Based on our records and from anonymous information, we estimate that there are more than 250 women in these two prisons alone, who are exposed to different kinds of torture, including sexual abuses,” Mohammad said.

“I was kidnapped and sexually abused,” said Surra Abdu, who spent two months in al-Kadhimiya prison. “But after I was released and reported the matter to the police, they interrogated me and hurt me more, saying I was in cahoots with my jailers.” Abdu added: “Is that the freedom and security offered to us when Saddam was toppled?”

The Iraqi Interior Ministry denies that women detainees were regularly subject to mistreatment. “We’re Muslims, and we know very well how to treat our women prisoners,” said top ministry official Ahmed Youssifin.

But the WFO rejects the government’s assertions, insisting that it has abundant evidence of the abuse of women detainees. “It’s very difficult to believe women are being well-treated in Iraqi prisons,” he said. “Many times have I seen signs of torture and beatings on their faces after they were released.”

Some of the photos that U.S. guards shot at Abu Ghraib show a U.S. military policeman “having sex with an Iraqi woman,” according to Maj Gen Taguba, who headed a 2005 investigation into abuses of female detainees at the hands of U.S. guards. The Taguba report also stated that U.S. guards committed other crimes against Iraqi women for their entertainment. “An Iraqi woman in her 70s had been harnessed and ridden like a donkey at Abu Ghraib and another coalition detention center after being arrested last July,” the report said.

Lawyers of women prisoners also assert that U.S. guards had been raping women detainees and forcing them to strip naked in front of men. They also said that these crimes were being committed all across Iraq. According to an Iraqi female lawyer, identified as Swadi, a woman prisoner at a U.S. military base in al-Kharkh told her that “she had been raped... several American soldiers had raped her. She had tried to fight them off and they had hurt her arm.”

There is reason to believe that these abuses are still going on. When Swadi tried to visit women detainees at Abu Ghraib recently, U.S. guards refused to let her in. When she complained, they threatened to arrest her.

It is obvious that these abuses are horrible. What is so painful is that the oppression of Iraqi women won’t end soon. It will also have a devastating impact on the way of life of the Iraqi people — thanks to the U.S./UK invasion.

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