

Damanhour Women's Prison

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Damanhour Women's Prison

Introduction

The Egypt Prison Atlas (EPA), through prison profiles, documents the construction and living conditions of prisons in Egypt, in addition to the illegal detention facilities, in order to convey a clear image that uncovers the secrets of prisons. That 'parallel universe', whose high walls enclose a mysterious world, or perhaps a miniature model of society. The profiles convey the positive aspects of the prisons that are in conformity with the texts of national law and the rules of international covenants, while also documenting their shortcomings and violations of such rules and conventions. This is in contrast to the approach followed in the biased and inflammatory rhetoric that constantly pervades the political scene. This act of documentation aims to preserve rights while urging concerned authorities to respect humanitarian laws and principles.

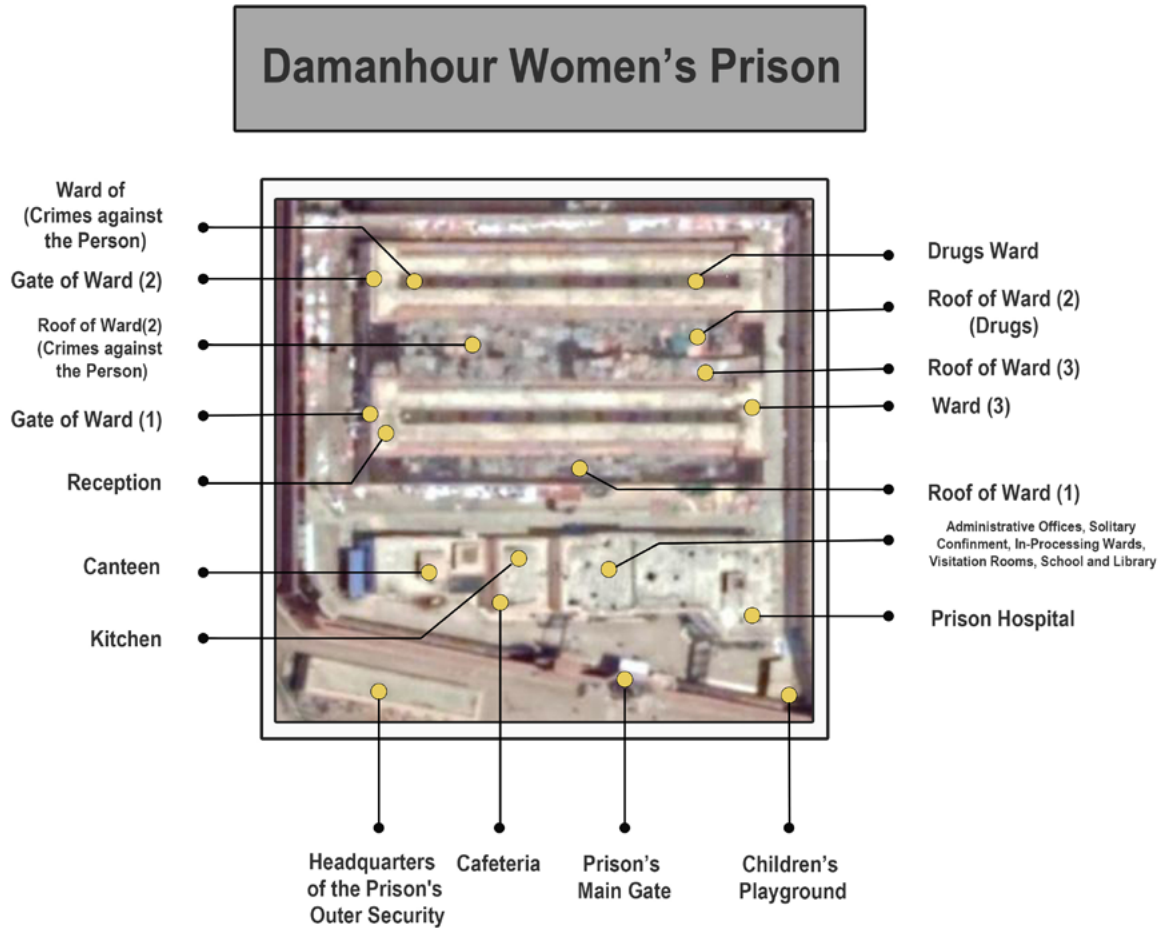
The prisons page in the EPA contains a comprehensive visualization of Egyptian prisons, in addition to displaying their data on an interactive map. It also contains general data about prisons, such as the date of the establishment of the prison, the text of the internal regulations, and an explanation of their architecture. It also sheds light on the living and health conditions in each prison, supported by testimonies from prisoners and ex-prisoners, their families, and their lawyers.

Accordingly, the EPA provides a detailed view in this profile of the second-largest Egyptian Women's Prisons-in terms of area and number- Damanhour Women's Prison with a special focus on prisoners arrested in the political backdrop, while shedding light on some of the conditions of 'non-political prisoners' and the extent to which the prisoners have access to their granted rights.

This profile is divided into three sections: The first section addresses basic data related to the prison and its external design. Then, the second section ventures inside the walls and addresses the interior design, starting from the moment of receiving and searching new prisoners, leading to the in-processing ward- the first stop for prisoners, concluding with the wards and cells where they live throughout their detention. Finally, in the third section, we describe the nature of life inside prison, including healthcare, employment, punishment, sexual abuse, and other violations.

First: Towards the Prison Gates

I. General Characteristics



A figure explaining the shape of the three prison wards from above, in addition to the administration, visitation room, and hospital buildings

1. Basic Information

Establishment Date: 1908

Governorate: El Beheira

Type: Public prison. It is known as “Al Ab’adiya Prison” because it is located in the Al Ab’adiya. Prisoners’ families called it “Guantanamo El Beheira” in the past. Prisoners now call it ‘The Red Scorpion’ due to its harsh detention conditions that are similar to Scorpion Prison, and because most of its walls are red.

Data Collection: Data on this prison was collected through semi-structured direct interviews with ex-prisoners between May 2020 and June 2022 comparing it with secondary data from media and pro-regime sources.

Methodology: For more details on the methodology for prison profiles in the Egypt Prison Atlas, please click [here](#).

2. Prison Geography

The Damanhour Public Prison is located in the El Ab’adiya area of Damanhour Center in El Beheira Governorate. It is divided into Damanhour Women’s Prison and Damanhour Men’s Prison. A separate profile will be dedicated to the latter on the “Egypt Prison Atlas” website.

3. Security Design

A. Prison Walls: Damanhour Women’s Prison is surrounded by more than four walls, as follows:

- The first wall: Surrounds Damanhour Prison in its entirety and is the main wall. Its color is red, its height exceeds seven meters, and it has an armored main gate.
- The second and third walls: Both are internal walls, separating the Men’s and Women’s Prisons. One is on the north side and the other on the east side, and each is equal in height to the main prison wall.
- The fourth wall: It is an internal wall that is parallel to the main wall. It consists of reinforced wires and supported by pillars and iron cables.
- Other walls: There are some internal wire walls that separate different parts of the prison.

B. Security Forces: The prison is jointly secured by the military and police forces and a small base is assigned and attached to Damanhour Men's Prison. The prison walls are topped by several watchtowers guarded by soldiers.

The security forces are distributed between the external and internal gates of the prison. Two military armored vehicles and a police car are permanently stationed outside the external gate, whereas the inside of the gate is guarded by two inspectors. As for the internal gate (administration), it is guarded by five to ten female inspection guards¹ and standards guards², accompanied by a male inspector.

As for the wards and the internal prison buildings, two standard guards or more are assigned to each of them to guard wards, supervise prisoners and guard the hospital.

Generally, the shifts of the guards in charge of surveilling the prison internal buildings (standard guards) and external (inspection guards) differ. Standard guards have a full twenty-four-hour shift with an interval of one or two days between each shift. While the shifts of inspection guards are daily from six in the morning to two in the afternoon.

C. Prison Gates: The prisoner passes through about five or six gates from the moment she enters the prison until she reaches her cell. The gates are respectively: the main prison gate, the external administration gate, the internal administration gate that is connected to the prison buildings (the wards, the canteen and the cafeteria), the ward gate, the 'quarter gate'³, and finally the cell gate.

Second: Inside the Prison Walls

II. Search upon Entry and the Prison Uniform

1. Search upon Entry

Rule 19 of the *Bangkok Rules* (United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders) states that:

¹ Inspection guards: They are higher in rank compared to the standard guards, they carry out the work related to Prison Administration, inspecting visitors, visits and prisoners coming from other prisons, in-processing or hearings, as well as supervising the standard guards. Their working hours start from six in the morning and end at two in the afternoon.

² Standard guards: They are lower in rank than the inspection guards. Their work is limited to guarding wards, implementing law, and escorting prisoners outside the wards. Their working hours start from eight in the morning and may last for up to twenty-four hours. The following shift would be in the next 48 hours.

³ 'Quarter': is a long corridor that consists of a set of cells lined up next to each other. On both sides of the corridor there are iron door-bars.

“Effective measures shall be taken to ensure that women prisoners’ dignity and respect are protected during personal searches, which shall only be carried out by women staff who have been properly trained in appropriate searching methods and in accordance with established procedures.”

Moreover, Rule 20 stipulates:

“Alternative screening methods, such as scans, shall be developed to replace strip searches and invasive body searches, in order to avoid the harmful psychological and possible physical impact of invasive body searches.”

While Article 9 of the Prison Regulation Law stipulates searching every prisoner upon entering the prison and confiscating prohibited items they may have in their possession, it does not provide details concerning the search method or set measures that call for respecting the sanctity of prisoners’ bodies.

In reality, upon arrival in prison, prisoners are subject to two types of searches: Search of possessions and the body search.

A. Search of Possessions: The process of inspecting belongings begins with the prisoner placing all her possessions on the X-ray detector to indicate the possibility of smuggling contraband. The Prison Administration does not limit the search to this type of inspection but also carries out the inspection using the guards’ hands. Standard guards are not allowed to perform this type of inspection.

Therefore, inspection guards search the prisoner and confiscate contraband such as valuable property, gold, colorful ‘royal clothes’⁴, and some other items that are prohibited by the Prison Administration, such as scissors, colored shoes, face coverings, etc.

Prisoners encounter a special difficulty as they lack clarity over the banned-items list. Thus, some items are confiscated at the whim of the guards, leaving the prisoner with only a few negligible items.

⁴ 'Royal clothes': are clothes that do not correspond to the prison uniform such as: colorful clothes.

It is worth noting that the confiscated possessions are deposited in the prison's safes until the prisoner receives them upon leaving the prison, or one of her relatives receives them on her first visit. This is apart from food that is thrown away or eaten by the prisoner before or after entering in-processing.

"There are two types of guards inside Damanhour Prison: The first type is inspection guards and those are the highest-ranking guards. They are assigned certain tasks related to inspection, such as monitoring and inspecting visits, inspecting in-processing, (trips to and from) court sessions, and "ta'deeb" (solitary confinement) monitoring. The second type is standard guards. Those are the lowest rankings, and they are assigned to guard the wards."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

"We get in and put the bags on the device, then we give the guards all our belongings for inspection. They empty all the contents of the bags again. The inspection method differs from one guard to another."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

B. **Body Search:** There are no scanning devices to replace the body search for the prisoners, undermining the sanctity and privacy of their bodies.

After the inspection of possessions, the prisoner is led to a water circuit, ordered to fully undress, and wear a "shull"- the prison uniform. After that, if she is a 'virgin' she would be strip-searched and asked to squat-and-stand several times. If, however, she answers that she is not a 'virgin', she is subjected to a vaginal search. In all cases, the prisoner is forced to defecate before the guard to make sure she is free of contraband. In case the prisoner fails to comply, she would be banned from going to the assigned ward and she may even be subject to beatings. She would then undergo an abdominal X-ray to ensure that her body is free of contraband.

"During the search, We basically get naked, our clothes and undergarments get inspected. We wear the "abaya" (robe) again and remove our underwear, and then we squat-and-stand about 4 times."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

2. Prison Uniform

After completing the search procedures, the prisoner hands over her ‘royal’ (civilian) clothes, and wears the prison uniform that she receives: a hair cover- the scarf- and the Galabiya - “shull” - which is a white robe, with the word ‘inmate’ written on the back. It is made of “bafta” - a rough and see-through fabric.

Prisoners are permitted to wear their own scarf and white Galabiyas if they have ones. White is the official color of the uniform for prisoners except for those sentenced to death-the official color for them is red. In all cases, the prisoner must adhere to the head cover regardless of her religious beliefs. Moreover, she is prohibited from wearing “niqab”. No political or non-political prisoner is exempt from this.

III. Wards and Cells: Living Conditions Inside

1. In-Processing

Article 46 of the *Internal Regulations for Prisons*⁵ aims at preventing the spread of diseases inside prisons. It, therefore, stipulates that prisoners are to be held in the in-processing ward for ten days, and Articles 27, 28, 29, and 30 from the same regulation oblige prison administrations to record information regarding the health status of prisoners while they are in the in-processing considering it a quarantine stage before being placed in their respective wards and cells.

In reality, the authorities do not perform any preventative medical measures other than pregnancy tests, which turns [in-processing] into a punitive measure, as an ex-prisoner disclosed to Belady.

“When they get in, they ask whether you are a virgin or not. They humiliate us, and keep saying do you know what is going to happen to you if you are lying? Are you even sure you are not pregnant? Everything will be revealed now. They humiliate us badly, even the doctors treat us the same way.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

⁵ Interior Minister Resolution No. 79 of 1961 regarding the internal regulations for prisons.

In addition, former prisoners explain to Belady that in-processing is one of the worst processes a prisoner could go through whether she is a new prisoner or a prisoner coming from a hearing. All incoming prisoners are forced to spend time in the in-processing ward, regardless of their numbers.

Ventilation in the ward is nearly non-existent and is worsened by cigarette smoke and overcrowding in the cell. These conditions contribute to the difficulty of movement, as it makes even sitting naturally very difficult and complicated. It becomes even impossible to fall asleep. As a result, most prisoners resort to abstaining from eating and drinking throughout the day to avoid relieving themselves in the bucket-as there is no toilet in the ward. Moreover, while in the in-processing, prisons are prohibited from visits or exercise.

It is worth noting that there is no designated in-processing ward in the first place. It is rather a medium-sized room located in the administrative building.

“The moment we enter, they make us undergo a pregnancy test if it is a new in-processing. We ‘Non-political prisoners’ are subjected to a vaginal inspection of guards who stare at us.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“There is no real in-processing ward, there are only two rooms, however, they assigned one of them for “ta’deeb” (solitary confinement), and the other one was dedicated to in-processing.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“There is no toilet inside the in-processing ward, just ‘toilet- bucket’ devoid of privacy.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

A. The Area and Number of Prisoners: The in-processing ward initially consisted of two rooms, but the Prison Administration started using the smaller room for solitary confinement. Thus, the in-processing ward became just a square-shaped room with an area of about four by four meters. This room is also devoid of any beds, furniture or toilet. Thus, the prisoners relieve themselves in a small ‘toilet-bucket’.

The ward is opened for them daily for a period ranging from a quarter of an hour and up to twenty-five minutes, during which they can go to the water circuits.

“There are two rooms in the administration. When you enter the administration building, you go right. In the facade there is a gray iron-bar gate that encloses two cells, the bigger cell is on the right, and the slightly small one is on the left. Mostly, the small cell is used for “ta’deeb” (solitary confinement).”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“The in-processing cell is approximately 4x4 m, not furnished with anything. It has one dusty ventilation window closer to the ceiling, a bulb that is not enough for lighting, and its door is armored like all the doors of the prison, it has a gray “shora’a”⁶.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“There is no toilet inside the in-processing ward, the cell opens for us one quarter of an hour on a daily basis to go to the toilet.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

⁶ “Shora’a”: It refers to the small openings and windows. In prison terminology, Damanhour Women’s Prison in particular -it refers to the openings at the top of the wall.

B. Ventilation: In fact, ventilation of both types (natural and artificial) inside the in-processing ward is completely inadequate as there is only one small window close to the ceiling. The ward is also devoid of any means of artificial ventilation such as fans.

"Its [in-processing ward] ventilation is very poor, like every other prison cell. There was nothing but one small square window near the ceiling with many layers of dirt blocking air and light, also there was no fan, and smoking was not banned, so we were sitting in a cloud of smoke."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

C. Duration of the Stay: Article 46 of the *internal regulations of Prisons* stipulates that prisoners must be placed in the in-processing ward for a period of ten days.

In reality, however, they may stay there for longer. The prisoner may be left in in-processing for a period exceeding ten days, in cases of overcrowding in the rest of the wards, disputes, or in case she violates the orders of officers and guards. The classification of the violation often depends on the whim of the guard or the officer in charge.

Placement in the in-processing is not only limited to new prisoners. It also includes prisoners who leave prison for court hearings and returnees from various transfers. Thus, the Prison Administration sends them to the in-processing ward as soon as they return to the prison. The duration of their placement in the in-processing ward ranges from a day to a week and may sometimes exceed this duration.

"The basic duration of stay is 11 days, which can be increased if the prison is crowded or the prisoner is troublesome, and the inspection guard or chief inspector did not like her. Generally, the duration can be increased, and sometimes in case of illnesses it can be decreased."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

2. Ward Assignment and Conditions

Division of Wards

Damanhour Women's Prison consists of three main wards, as follows:

Ward (1) Financial Crimes: For prisoners in cases involving financial crimes, debtors⁷ also houses mothers with children. Additionally, it includes about six cells dedicated to prisoners sentenced to death.

Ward (2) Homicide, 'Crimes against the person'⁸ and Drugs: For prisoners in cases involving murder, drugs and committing 'crimes against the person'. It contains several cells dedicated to prisoners on death row.

Ward (3) 'Immorality': For prisoners involved in cases of (sexual) 'immorality' and robbery. It contains several cells dedicated to prisoners on death row.

*"The wards are divided into quarters, A quarter is a corridor that contains cells, a gray iron-bar-door is located between two quarters. It opens at the same time as the prison, and closes at "el tamam"."*⁹

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

"In the entrance of each ward there is a reception. It is designed entirely in the form of iron bars. Starting from there, the ward is divided into quarters. In the center, there is the standard guards' sleeping place and where they carry out their daily work. It also includes a landline phone connected to the administration building."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

It is worth noting that the majority of wards have the same design. The difference between them is just in space. Furthermore, the Prison Administration has not allocated a single ward for "el makhsous" (death row), nor for the investigation prisoners- ones in pre-trial detention.

"The wards differ in space. As a result, some cells or internal wards are bigger or smaller than others. The biggest one, ward 2, has two or three quarters and two rooftops. Ward 1 is medium-sized and has two quarters and a rooftop. And the smallest ward is the third. But, they all share the same design and cells' internal spaces."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

⁷ Debtors: They are prisoners who have been imprisoned for inability to pay a debt, whether the debt is small or large.

⁸ 'Crimes against the person': It is every act that physically violates a person, such as: murder, causing of bodily injury, beating that leads to a disability, and kidnapping as specified in Article No. 246 of the Egyptian Penal Code.

⁹ "Tamam el adad": The time set by the Prison Administration, in which the exercise hours end and prisoners are counted. After which, they would return to their designated cells and all the wards and cells would be closed.

Conditions in the Wards

A. The Wards' Furnishing: Each cell has a water circuit but is not furnished with beds. The prisoners sleep on the floors and hang their belongings on the walls. A place may be allocated inside the cell to be used as a small kitchen that is furnished with an upside-down bucket in an area of no more than one meter by half a meter. On the bucket, there is a kettle and beverage supplies. Each cell contains a 'cooking-heater'¹⁰, placed in the corner of the kitchen floor. Cells also contain television sets- except for "el makhsous" cells. The administration often removes the television set as a punitive measure.

Beds: Wards are not furnished with items such as beds and mattresses. Instead, the prisoners provide their own furnishing. The Prison Administration hands each prisoner two black blankets ("meeri" the military type blankets provided by the prison). Each prisoner is permitted to bring a large sponge (to serve as a mattress) with her in the visit provided that its dimensions do not exceed 40x150 cm. In cases of overcrowding, the cells are emptied of all furnishings save for a few blankets to be shared by all prisoners in the room to make it a singular space. Prisoners then sleep applying the "el tasyif"¹¹ position.

Mirrors: Normally, prisoners are not permitted to possess mirrors. However, in some exceptional cases, they may be permitted to purchase small mirrors with plastic edges only to be subsequently confiscated in inspections.

B. Overcrowding: Damanhour Prison is considered one of the most crowded prisons due to the large number of prisoners in it, in addition to the lack of space and beds. A single cell holds up to thirty prisoners despite the fact that the cell was originally designed to house nineteen.

In the best case scenario, the area of one cell does not exceed seven meters in length by three and a half meters in width with one meter dedicated to the water circuit and a little more for the kitchen.

"When we complained to the chief inspector about the high overcrowding, he told us that as long as this door shuts then there is no overcrowding... and then he cursed at us."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

¹⁰ Cooking Heater: An alternative to the stove, which is a cement block with a thermal wire attached to it that connects to electricity, and it is used inside prisons for the purpose of preparing food.

¹¹ "El tasyif": A way of sleeping in which prisoners sleep on their side- like a sword (saif)- sticking to each others, due to the limited spaces.

“At the end of the summer of 2014, the overcrowding began to reach its peak, especially since they were emptying the police stations. The ward that has a maximum capacity of 19 prisoners side to side, currently holds from 28 to 32 prisoners.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Discrimination based on the financial status of prisoners manifests in the disparity in the ability to secure extra space and/or separate mattresses. Special status prisoners are “nubatshias”, prisoners who gained her favor, or prisoners with money and power ¹².

“Of course, there is no need to mention that the torment applied on us did not include the ‘big guys’ of the ward. That means if “el nubatshia” has influence, or anyone who has influence in the room, they get to have a mattress that is bigger and higher than the rest.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

C. Ventilation: Rule No. 14 of the *Nelson Mandela Rules, Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*, states:

“In any place where prisoners have to live or work:

(a) The windows must be wide enough to enable the prisoners to use natural light to read or work and are to be installed in a way that fresh air can enter whether there is artificial ventilation or not.”

Whereas The *Prison Organization Law* and its internal regulations do not stipulate the importance of good ventilation inside the cells.

In fact, due to the similarity of the design of the wards, the difference in the provision of ventilation depends on the difference in design and space between ordinary and “el makhsous” cells.

“All the ordinary cells have the same shape and ventilation window. However, “el makhsous” cells differ. The cell is very small with a very small window close to the ceiling that overlooks a wall or “manwar”.¹³”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

¹² See title VI, “El Tasni’i” (Optional Employment).

¹³ “Manwar”: Open space inside buildings for air and sunlight entry. It is used as an opening to be overlooked by the windows of the rooms lacking light and sun.

Prisoners do not receive the required and adequate ventilation inside regular cells. In each cell there are four rectangular windows- “shorra’at”- and they are extremely high, as they are placed close to the ceiling. Each of them is covered by two or more layers of wires that relatively obscure the view. Also, the majority of these windows overlook walls, “manwars”, or the sky due to their height in a way that prevents prisoners from seeing the sky due to the large number of wires.

“The regular cell contains four rectangular small “shora’at” close to the ceiling. Lined with two or three layers of thick wires. Two of them overlook the sky, which can not be seen due to the wires. The other two overlook an internal “manwar” or a roof. They are not enough neither for ventilation nor for lighting in any way.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Due to overcrowding and poor ventilation, prisoners suffer from the constant and rapid spread of skin diseases inside the cells, especially in the summer.

“There is no ventilation in the summer. Fans are always damaged, and this would result in the spread of skin diseases such as scabies that was widespread in addition to tinea, prickly heat, etc.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

As for “el makhsous” cells, there is no adequate ventilation inside them. This is due to the existence of only one small window that overlooks “manwars” of the wards and their opening is no more than a quarter of a meter. Its location is also extremely high, very close to the ceiling. The window is also covered with two or more layers of wire, in addition to the door’s “shora’at”.

“We saw that el makhsous cells did not have a ventilation outlet except for a small window close to the ceiling, and the door’s “shora’a”. Also, they did not have fans.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

As for the ceiling fans which are provided by the prison as an artificial source of ventilation inside the cells, there are usually two in each cell-except for “el makhsous”. The movement of fans (blades) are mostly slow either because they are old, or because they are in constant need of maintenance. Thus, due to the constant state of overcrowding and poor natural ventilation, fans are not dependable as a source of ventilation and are not enough to cool the air or freshen it in the summer, especially when the heat intensifies.

“Every cell has two fans, but mostly they are either too slow or broken. We always fix them at our expense after we take the administration’s permission, el makhsous cells do not even have fans.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

The situation is slightly different for prisoners with money, or “el nubatshia”, as the Prison Administration may permit them to obtain personal fans or new ceiling fans.

“The powerful prisoner, whether they are seniors or have access to money or power, would get fans more easily than the rest of the prisoners. Many prisoners are denied any new means of ventilation. Prisoners begging the chief inspector to let them buy a new ceiling fan at their expense is a normal practice. And, of course, it is a lot more expensive than the price outside. It is not enough to mitigate the heat.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Cigarettes: In addition to the constant overcrowding and poor natural and artificial ventilation, smoking is permitted inside the wards throughout the day without allocating places for non-smokers. Prisoners may even smoke as groups during the closure of cells, and the proportion of smokers in one cell is usually more than two-thirds. It is worth noting that the Prison Administration does not provide any solutions for prisoners suffering from allergies, lung diseases, or dyspnea.

“Although the ventilation there is at its worst, if the room contains 28 prisoners, at least 25 of them smoke at least 10 cigarettes each, or more. It caused me sinuses, and eye and chest allergies. It was one of the reasons behind my nearsightedness, which was good before entering the prison.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

D. **Lighting:** Article 14 of the *Nelson Mandela Rules* states the following:

“(b) Artificial light shall be provided sufficient for the prisoners to read or work without injury to eyesight.”

Despite the importance of lighting in prisons, the *Prison Regulation Law* and its bylaws neglected to discuss lighting-whether natural or artificial-or address its quality.

Natural Lighting: There is not enough natural lighting inside the wards due to the small size of the windows, the density of wires in them, and the fact that most of them overlook “manwars” or other walls, in addition to not cleaning those windows from dust and dirt attached to them. Therefore, sun rays often do not penetrate the cells.

“Natural lighting is very low due to the insufficiency of the “shora’at” at the top of the wall. There is no sunlight coming in. It is merely a light which makes us know it is daytime.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“The amount of sunlight in the ward- almost nonexistent- does not positively contribute to reducing the spread of diseases.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Artificial Lighting: Artificial lighting in ordinary cells is quite adequate. In some way, it compensates for the lack of natural lighting. This is contrary to “el makhsous” cells, where prisoners are only permitted a small yellow lightbulb that is hung outside the cell window and fails to provide for proper lighting.

One of the ex-prisoners explained to Belady that, unlike the majority of women's prisons, especially El Qanater and Banha, the phenomenon of power outages is infrequent.

"Mostly, electricity is available most of the day. It used to blackout but not persistently."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

E. Water: The infrastructure related to potable water is in poor condition. To start with, there are two water lines in Damanhour Prison:

(a) Inside the wards and cells, and the water there is saltwater, unfit for drinking or normal use. The outage of the water in this line spans throughout the day averaging more than twelve hours.

"There are two water lines in Damanhour Prison. The first is saltwater line, and it is for the taps inside the wards which deliver only saltwater. The water is mostly yellow and brown."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

(b) Potable water suitable for drinking and cooking. It is available only in the exercise areas located on the roof. In general, it is pure and fit for consumption.

"The second line is a potable water line. It is located on the roof, in the exercise area. The water is nearly the same as ordinary water found in houses."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

“Most of the time there is a water blackout inside the wards, it may return two or three hours separately throughout the day. However, the infrastructure of the water system is down and is not maintained.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

F. Water Circuits: Rule 15 of the *Nelson Mandela Rules* states:

“The sanitary installations shall be adequate to enable every prisoner to comply with the needs of nature when necessary and in a clean and decent manner.”

However, the *Prison Organization Law* fails to regulate water circuits inside prisons, whether in terms of their proportion to the number of prisoners or in terms of their cleanliness and their fitness for human use.

In fact, the number of water circuits inside Damanhour prison is not proportional to the number of prisoners, and it is divided into two parts:

Inside the Ward: Each cell/ward has a very small water circuit. Its area is less than one by one meters and contains a squat toilet and a tap. The water circuits also have no doors, but are rather separated from the rest of the cell by a piece of cloth that may not reach the floor to serve as a ‘curtain’. The Prison Administration does not equip the water circuits with lighting or water heaters.

“The area for the toilet inside the cell is one by one meters, its floor is lower than the rest of the room, it has no door, and it is isolated from the room by a curtain or a regular sheet that does not reach the floor.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“Inside the cell, there is a squat toilet and tap next to it, there is no light in the toilet.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Access to the toilets inside the cells is often by turn and by order. Overcrowding and the absence of beds make restroom access especially difficult.

“Using the toilet requires a reservation, and we keep informing each other of the turns so that we can make room for prisoners. Because of overcrowding, it is difficult to make a queue.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Outside the Ward: In each quarter, there is a designated place for showers. It is a large area that is divided into several stalls. A pipe comes out of the wall of each stall that serves as a tap. The tap often does not work. Thus, the prisoners are forced to bring a bucket while showering. The shower areas do not have doors and are fully exposed. Prisoners rely on themselves to provide curtains and fabrics to put on the doors when they shower.

Some prisoners also relieve themselves in those rooms designated for showering. As noted above, there are no toilets in the shower rooms, but an exposed sewer pipe that is cut in half to drain water. The reason for this is the insufficient number of water circuits compared to the number of prisoners.

“There was this place designated for showering, however, there was no water, and it was very smelly because prisoners used it to relieve themselves.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“The most difficult thing is that the toilet did not have a water heater in the winter. We used to heat up the water in the kettle in order to shower.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Menstrual Cycle: Rule 5 of the *Bangkok Rules* states that prisoners must be provided with free sanitary pads where they are housed. Whereas, The *Prison Organization Law* has completely neglected to attend to the menstrual cycle of prisoners.

In reality, the Prison Administration does not provide free sanitary pads to prisoners during menstruation. Therefore, prisoners rely on visits, other prisoners, or perhaps buy them from sales outlets at higher rates than the market price. Exacerbated by frequent and prolonged water outages in prison, the crisis of not providing sanitary pads causes serious psychological, physical, and health risks for prisoners.

“My friend and I had our period when we first came to the prison. The woman in charge of the ward went and bought us a sanitary pad from another prisoner and we shared it and split it in half. Also, we did not have any money, clothes, or anything.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

G. **Cleaning:** The Prison Administration does not provide any tools or products for cleaning the ward. Prisoners depend on themselves for this. “El nubatshia” supervises the cleaning process and assigns it to some prisoners ‘of lesser means’¹⁴, in exchange for a monthly payment offered to them by the rest of the prisoners.

Daily Cleaning: The working prisoner¹⁵ folds the prisoners’ sheets/mattresses and cleans the floor and the toilet in the cell.

Periodic Cleaning: The cell is extensively cleaned every fourteen days- at most. In the process, all the sheets/mattresses and bags that are hung on the walls are taken out and the cell is entirely emptied and then the walls are washed with cleaning solutions. Each prisoner sorts her belongings and cleans them in the exercise areas, and then re-enters the cell.

As for the cost of cleaning, prisoners pay a monthly amount, part of which goes to buying or providing cleaning tools and products, and another part to pay the prisoners responsible for cleaning.

¹⁴ Prisoner of lesser means is an Egyptian colloquial word which means a prisoner with no money or power.

¹⁵ For more information on the work of prisoners, please see section [VI](#).

H. Ward Inspection:

There are two types of ward searches:

First- Periodic Search: The search is carried out by either the Prison Authority or the Prison Administration. It is carried out once or twice a year to confiscate contraband. In reality, however, the administration and the inspectors often abuse their authority and leave the contraband for the favored prisoners- with access to power and money- but confiscate permitted items from prisoners who follow the rules. This includes items such as nail clippers, small mirrors, cookwares covers, cookwares, colored clothes, fans, etc. Some of the items can sometimes be restored when the search is by the Prison Administration.

As for the Prison Authority's inspection, it takes part in two phases. First, inspecting the roof¹⁶. Second, inspecting the cells and the prisoners themselves.

Inspecting the Roof: Roof inspections often result in chaos, as the authorities confiscate tools and items that have been permitted entry, such as cookware, white clothes and personal items. They also empty food supplies on top of each other and on other items. As a result, prisoners cannot easily distinguish their belongings from others, resulting in violent brawls that sometimes lead to injuries. Some prisoners have shared with Belady that this kind of inspection often takes place only to torment them.

“Prison Authority inspectors used to close the whole prison except for some “tasni’i” “nubatshias”, then start with the roof. They search everything randomly and break items like cookware or anything banned or against their whim.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“Prison Authority inspectors used to throw prisoners’ belongings and food on top of each other, after they leave, fights occur among prisoners and can sometimes lead to severe injuries.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

¹⁶ The Roof: Is an empty area in some prisons, located next to each ward, and originally designated for the exercise of women prisoners. The Prison Administration refers to it as the roof, despite the fact that it is located on a surface that is about a meter or more below the level of the building.

Inspecting the Cells and the Prisoners: After inspecting the ward’s roof, the cells are opened successively and then inspected the same way as before. Then, the prisoners are searched individually. The guards order them to undress, squat-and-stand several times, and they sometimes carry out a vaginal search for ‘non-virgins’.

“They come and inspect each cell individually, starting with taking out the prisoners and searching them individually in the external toilets, then, they inspect the ward exactly the same way they did for the roof. They bring the prisoners back and lock them in their cells in the same chaotic state. They also confiscate all the banned items or those against their whim.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Second: Search upon the occurrence of certain incidents, usually a form of punishment. Its form does not vary significantly from the previous form except that it is intended for specific wards or cells. It often occurs due to a report by a ‘snitching/reporting prisoner’¹⁷ that there is contraband, or a fight in one of the wards or the cells.

“Inspection takes place when they suspect the existence of contraband or mobile phones with one of us. It often does not differ much from inconvenience in the inspection carried out by the Prison Authority”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

In both types of search, the search is carried out early in the morning before wake-up time, and in case of quarrels, the inspection may order the “takdeer” (upsetting) of the cell it, keeping it closed for a whole day or several days and prohibiting the entry of cooked meals except for prison’s “el ta’yin”¹⁸.

Third: Prison Life

Unlike some other prisons, like Banha and El Qanater, the Prison Administration sets a specific schedule for sleeping, waking up, and turning off the TV. The person in charge of observing these times in the cell is “el nubatshia” of the ward, who is supervised by the regular guard in charge of security. Violation of the set time results in collective punishment to the cells.

¹⁷ ‘Snitching/reporting prisoner’: She is a prisoner who works with inspectors- informally. She monitors violations, and transmits information on prisoners to the prison inspection.

¹⁸ See title IV “Food and Clothing” below.

“TVs are banned before “el tamam” and are turned off at midnight, but they sometimes leave them on for an extra hour. Lights also have to be off by 10 or 10:30, and if the guard passed by and saw the lights and the TV on after the allowed time, the ward would be ‘upset’ the following day”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

The Prison Administration does not interfere in the rest of the day’s activities. The vast majority of prisoners occupy their time by working for a fee or preparing food for themselves and doing their laundry, and some of them practice their hobbies outside wards and in designated exercise areas. In addition to sleeping and waking hours, the wards open at about eight-thirty in the morning, and close at “tamam el adad” (carrying out the count) at about two-thirty in the afternoon when wards close and prisoners return from their work and activities to be counted.

Exercise time varies according to the prisoners’ sentences. ‘Political’ and ‘non-political prisoners’ sentenced to imprisonment are subject to the aforementioned times. However, those sentenced to death go for exercise only for two hours per day. The first hour is from six-thirty to seven-thirty in the morning and the second hour is from one to two or two-thirty in the afternoon.

Mothers: Article 20 of the *Prison Regulation Law* stipulates that:

“The child of a female prisoner shall remain with her in a nursery in prison until the age of four, and shall be accompanied by her for the first two years.”

Article 31 bis of the *Child Law* No. 12 of 1996 stipulates that:

“Every Women’s Prison shall have a nursery that meets prescribed conditions for nurseries, to allow placing the children of prisoners until the child reaches the age of four, with the mother accompanying her child within the first year”.

In fact, Damanhour Prison Administration allows mothers to stay with their infants in prison until they reach two years, in contradiction to the aforementioned law. In addition, the Prison Administration does not allocate a ward for mothers. Previously, it had placed them in a cell in ward 2 which is dedicated to those implicated in murder, drugs, and homicide crimes. In mid-2016, the Administration transferred mothers to ward 1- dedicated to financial crimes.

In any case, infants are not placed in a nursery, as provided by the law, and it is worth noting that there are no exceptional exercise hours or designated areas for mothers and their infants, except for a small space next to the hospital that contains some toys, and despite that mothers and children are only rarely allowed to go there. Thus, mothers with infants are subject to the same conditions and laws applied to other prisoners in terms of leaving and entering the wards, exercise hours and places, etc.

After turning two years old, toddlers are immediately removed from their mothers' custody and are transferred to the custody of the father, the mother's relatives, or to care homes in case the child could not be transferred to the relatives.

The Prison Administration facilitates the entry and exit procedures of children and coordinates weekly visits for children in care homes to visit their mothers.

IV. Food and Clothing

Food: According to the Interior Minister's Decree *No. 691 of 1998* in regards to the *Treatment and Feeding of Prisoners, the administration shall provide for three daily meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) balanced between proteins, vegetables, and fruits.*

In reality, however, there is no standardized system for feeding prisoners as there are no specific meals to be distributed at specific times in a specific hall. Rather, there are various food items that are provided for free, food items available for purchase from prison sales outlets, others that the prisoners themselves sell, and finally, food that prisoners prepare on their own.

1. Food Provided for Free "El Ta'yin":

Free food "el ta'yin" is provided by the Prison Administration. Before examining the quality of food provided by the Prison Administration, the difference in the place of its delivery should be clarified.

A. Accessibility of El Ta'yin: El ta'yin can be accessed in two ways:

- **Within the Cell:** The prisoner receives it easily.
- **Outside the Cell:** The prisoner has to pass through the gate of the ward or cell, so it is difficult to reach it.

B. Food Types, Quality, and Variety: The first type, which the prisoner receives inside the ward or cell, includes three bread loaves provided on a daily basis. However, sometimes prisoners receive only two or even one loaf. No reasons are provided for the reduction of rations but for “only a few came today”. In addition, boxed or raw food is provided, like cheese or “halawa” (an Egyptian type of confectionery) and they are provided regularly and adequately. Two eggs are provided to each prisoner twice a week, a piece of raw meat once a week, and a fruit such as oranges once or twice a week. Vegetables such as tomatoes, eggplant, or raw beans are provided on a daily basis.

As for raw food, such as eggs and meat, prisoners find difficulty in making use of these items because the prison lacks cookware, so it becomes of no value to the prisoners, as they often dispose of them or sell them to other prisoners. Therefore, the only food provided by the prison that most prisoners actually use is bread, cheese, and fruits/vegetables that are randomly distributed.

As for the second type, it is cooked food that the Prison Administration places in plastic buckets outside the wards or inside it in the area designated for guards- right in front of the ward. This latter type often consists of fava beans, rice, vegetables or lentils, and (red/white) beans- fixed dishes that do not change. The food is left outside the wards from ten or eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon.

The problem with the food in the plastic buckets is as follows: it remains uncovered all day long, which facilitates the access of flies and the accumulation of dirt. Further, there are no utensils with which to scoop the food, so prisoners use their hands or plates, contaminating the food. In addition, the food may spoil before two o'clock on extremely hot days, especially when exposed to the sun. Moreover, the food is often not adequately cooked, not to mention, it lacks variety throughout the year.

“The food is not placed in a fixed place that we can easily reach, it is often put outside the wards, whereas our exercise areas are inside the wards.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“No one depends on the prison’s food other than the prisoners who do not have money or visits through which they can provide food, nor do they share “el ma’isha”, for example, and this is because it is of small quantity and inferior quality.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

2. Food Available for Purchase

A. **“El Ma’isha”**: El mai’isha is when a prisoner who has sufficient food stocks and adequate cookware- compared to the ones provided by the prison- prepares daily meals and sells them for a monthly fee to the other prisoners. It is not uncommon for “el nubashia”¹⁹ to control and monitor “el ma’isha”. The vast majority of prisoners do not rely on prison provided food, but rather participate in “el ma’isha”, whether it is prepared inside or outside the ward, due to the aforementioned “ta’yin” challenges, in addition to the pressure of “nubatshias” who urge prisoners to participate in it.

The practice of “el ma’isha” has arisen due to the lack of a sufficient number of heaters, as well as the discrepancy in the possibilities of providing food and the necessary cookware and utensils. Indeed, a ‘cooking heater’ is assigned to each cell but prisoners who make “el ma’isha” control it arguing that they are responsible for feeding large numbers of prisoners. The Prison Administration relies entirely on the prisoners to purchase and maintain ‘cooking heaters’.

“The roof contains a power plug for each cell, but only those responsible for “el ma’isha” use them, and they consider this as their acquired right. The prisoner who is not subscribed to “el ma’isha” is not allowed to cook unless she gets involved in a big fight and that’s when the Prison Administration allows her to cook for an hour.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

B. **Cafeteria Meals**: The cafeteria does not provide cooked foods nor prepares meals. Its role is rather limited to providing raw foods, meat and vegetables from outside on a monthly basis, in return for vouchers “bounat”²⁰ collected from prisoners who want to make a purchase, and who are often “el ma’isha” makers.

¹⁹ “El Nubatshia” (The Watch Prisoner): The “nubatshia” is a prisoner responsible for the rest of prisoners. “El nubatshia’s” role in Damanhour prison is divided into three different parts (“mosaeyra” of prison, “mosaeyra” of ward, “nubatshia” of cells). See title VI. “Tasni”

²⁰ “Vouchers” (Bounat): They are small papers that the cafeteria gives to prisoners in exchange for a transfer from their deposit accounts, or in exchange for cigarettes. Vouchers are mostly out of use now.

3. Cooking (Prisoners Preparing Food for Themselves)

A. 'Cooking Heaters': In most wards and cells, there are 'cooking heaters', which are cement blocks with a thermal wire attached to it that is connected to electricity. They are used in prisons for the purpose of preparing food. They serve as an alternative to the stove.

The problem with the heaters is that they are small- just a very small square-, are completely insufficient, -each cell allocated only one heater- and easily damaged- especially the thermal wire- which usually gets damaged within a few days of use, and the Prison Administration does not provide spare parts or replacements. Heaters are also not completely safe for use, as they conduct electricity directly to cooking utensils, thus endangering the lives of those using it.

Each cell contains cooking heaters that are placed in the exercise area of each ward. For example, as of 2016, nine heaters were allocated to nine cells that prisoners were permitted to use during the exercise time. There is also one heater inside each cell that is used only for heating food- not for cooking- even during exercise time and prisoners are not permitted to use it until about an hour or more after closing the cell "tamam el adad". If any of the heaters is damaged, whether inside or outside the cells, the prisoners are the ones who provide the necessary spare parts to repair it or bring a new heater as a replacement. The process is not as easy as it sounds- since the prisoners are responsible for its repair- and they must undergo a process of repeated requests and even pleading.

B. Cookware and Eating Utensils: Neither Damanhour Prison nor its sales outlets provide any cookware or utensils for eating, drinking, or even preparing food. It is the responsibility of the prisoner to rely on what her visitors bring, and items are not granted entry either regularly or in large numbers, and therefore prisoners can neither exchange them nor buy what they need from other prisoners.

“The prison does not provide any tools. But we were allowed to let in a cooking pot and a pan from the visit. Getting the permission to admit these tools depends on your relationship with the inspection guards or the Chief Inspector himself.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

4. Clothing and Laundry

A. **Clothing:** The only clothes that a prisoner receives are those that she receives when she enters the prison- the “shull”. Upon entry, she remains without clothes but for her undergarments and the prison gown until the necessary clothes are provided by her visitors- which can only take place after eleven days after her arrival. The prison does not provide clothes- even for a fee- in the sales outlets. Prisoners with few resources-or few visits- suffer from extreme cold in the winter and from sweating while being unable to change their clothes in the summer, unless other prisoners ‘take pity’ and bring them clothes either from the visits or from prisoner-saleswomen without the knowledge of the administration. For reference, sale has been prohibited in Damanhour Women’s Prison since 2015.

“When entering the in-processing cell, the prisoner receives one or two “shulls” with a rectangular scarf that barely covers the head, and the rest of the clothes are brought by the visitors provided that they are all white. But even some white clothes are not allowed or confiscated as they are considered as ‘royal’ (civilian) clothes”.

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

B. **Laundry:** Prisoners with few resources crowd the wash basin located in the exercise area and wash their clothes and sheets by hand and air dry them during the time of exercise because there are no designated places for washing or drying clothes.

As for prisoners with resources, they can pay a monthly subscription for a ‘washerwoman’- a prisoner who collects clothes-, washes them by hand, dries and folds them, and then distributes them back to their owners.

“There are two ways of washing clothes, either you wash them by yourself and dry them on the roof, or you subscribe with a washerwoman for a fee. But in any case, there are no designated places for laundry, it is done using the roof taps.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

V. Healthcare and the Hospital

Rule 24 of the *Nelson Mandela Rules*, states:

- “1. The provision of health care for prisoners is a State responsibility. Prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community and should have access to necessary health-care services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.*
- 2. Health-care services should be organized in close relationship to the general public health administration and in a way that ensures continuity of treatment and care, including for HIV, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases, as well as for drug dependence.”*

1. Basic Infrastructure of the Prison Hospital

The *Prisons Regulation Law* does not contain any details regarding equipping prison hospitals with basic furnishing and equipment, such as stipulating that beds are proportionate to the number of prisoners, or stipulating that the minimum of necessary medical devices, x-ray machines, and medical testing are provided in the hospitals.

The hospital in Damanhour Women’s Prison consists of two floors. The ground floor has only a staircase. The upper floor contains clinics, a pharmacy, patient rooms, and a delivery room. There are also primitive beds that are not proportional to the number of patients in addition to a few simple devices and equipment such as a tonometer and a blood pressure monitor. However, doctors treat them as if they are for ‘safekeeping’ and not for use. Therefore, they are rarely used.

“The front door of the hospital is on the right of the administration building. The hospital consists of two floors, the ground floor only has stairs, and the upper floor is for visits, reservations, and so on. The pharmacy is on the right of the corridor entrance and usually, the hospital director sits there. There is also a room on the right for diagnosis and another one on the left that has an examination bed. And at the end of the corridor, there is a set of rooms for the infirmary.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“The prison makes the healthy person ill.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“The hospital has no adequate devices or equipment. They are all simple things.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

2. Procedures for Transfer to the Hospital

A. **Prison Hospital:** There are no clear guidelines provided by the *Prison Regulation Law* and its internal regulations for transferring prisoners to the prison hospital. Prisoners complain about the reticence and delay by the guards in transferring patients to the prison hospital, as they consistently claim that there is not enough time or that it had been too late.

In fact, the sick prisoner must inform the guards of her need to go to the hospital. That is when the guard passes through the wards every morning during exercise time, in order to make a list of sick prisoners. But if the prisoner gets sick at any other time, there is no way to go to the hospital. She has to wait until the next day.

“We are not allowed to go to the hospital at any time we wish. We inform the guard and she makes a list of sick prisoners and takes them to the hospital. If you miss the guard, you should wait until the next day.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“A prisoner was burnt, I asked them to bring me some medicines from the hospital to treat her, but they only brought a bandage.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

Moreover, there is no way to inform the authorities at night of emergency situations. The prisoners keep calling out to the guards who are with them in the same ward, but they rarely respond. The wards are rarely opened to transfer a sick prisoner. In most cases, the administration ignores the prisoners’ requests and does not take them seriously, even if this leads to the death of the sick prisoner.

“It’s impossible to open the ward after closing it. ‘Are you dying? Just die and in the morning we will take your corpse and throw it under the hospital stairs until we take it to the morgue.’”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

B. External Hospitals: The Prison Administration theoretically permits the transfer of prisoners to an external hospital when necessary. In reality, although the transfer process entails several difficulties, the transfer process in Damanhour is relatively less difficult compared to its counterpart in some other prisons such as El Qanater and Banha.

However, in the absence of a real system that monitors prisons and their respect for human rights, the determination of the precarity of the patient’s condition, and the decision of transferring the prisoner to the hospital are left to the whim of the doctors in charge and the Chief Inspectors amounting to deliberate medical negligence, as exemplified by the following two testimonies:

“Among the negligence situations we experienced, a pregnant prisoner was giving birth and she had labor symptoms, all the water surrounding the baby came down, she was dying. The next day at 10 AM they transferred her to an external hospital in the morning, and of course, the baby was dead. They denied the responsibility for the baby’s death, arguing that his mother was a smoker”.

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“A ‘political prisoner’ got a severe inflammation in the appendix. And since there is no operating room in the prison, they transferred her to an external hospital, but they brought her back to the prison -in the prison transportation vehicle- less than twenty-four hours after performing the surgery. She was handcuffed just like a healthy prisoner. She did not receive the necessary treatment at the hospital and she was brought back before her wound healed. As a result of the overcrowding and heat and unsuitable conditions in the wards, her wound was opened and they accused her of opening it.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

3. Doctors

One of the main causes of the deteriorating health services- according to the ex-prisoners Belady interviewed- in the hospital of Damanhur prison is the doctors’ dual loyalty. Since the majority of doctors are officers who joined the police force after graduating from medical school and were appointed to prisons through the Prisons Authority sector of the Ministry of Interior. Thus, the doctors’ loyalty to the medical profession is compromised by their position as officers. Their lack of devotion to their patients is reflected through their disrespectful and humiliating treatment of sick prisoners and not taking their complaints seriously.

In addition, since there is no serious keeping and maintaining of medical records for the prisoners, in addition to the ease of losing the hospital notebook;²¹ mostly the doctor-officer lacks knowledge of the patient’s medical history and whether their symptoms are a result of imprisonment or the result of a chronic disease the prisoner has suffered from beforehand.

²¹ Hospital Notebook: A small notebook assigned to each prisoner, in which the number of times of accessing the hospital and the prescribed medications is recorded. The notebook must be present every time the prisoner visits the hospital. Prisoners are not allowed to be examined or obtain medication without it (it is considered as a ticket to hospital).

Finally, the doctors do not have the final say; therefore, the Prison Investigations may entirely disregard their recommendations regarding the patients' conditions.

"In the summer, there is no air in the cells at all. This has always resulted in the spread of skin diseases such as scabies, tinea²², and the prickly heat (Miliaria)²³ and other diseases... Of course, it [the prison] didn't provide any medical care in these cases and they left the prisoners without treatment"

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

"We do not receive the adequate treatment in this hospital, in addition to the doctors' bad behavior, especially the director of the hospital."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

Coupled with their dual loyalty, the doctors in the prison's hospital lack working experience as the majority of them are appointed in the prison's hospitals in their residency. Therefore, they lack the necessary skills. In addition, they are no different from the doctors affiliated to the Ministry of Interior, and prisoners often complain from their cruelty and haughtiness while dealing with them, in addition to deliberate medical negligence, while they are said to provide better service for prisoners who have money and resources.

"He treats us like slaves, and he laughs at us while carrying out the medical exams."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

"The majority forget that they are doctors, and act like officers. Still, there are doctors who treat us well, examine us and prescribe medicines."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

²² El Tinea: A skin disease, which is a fungal infection that affects the skin. It is caused by high temperature accompanied by high humidity and weak immune system, which appears in the form of spots lighter or darker than the natural skin color. It usually affects the back, thighs, neck, scalp, feet and upper chest.

²³ Prickly Heat (Miliaria): A skin disease: A heat rash accompanied by severe itching and inflammation as a result of sweat retention. It spreads in the summer and occurs as a result of the obstruction of the sweat glands due to the severe rise in temperature.

As for the number of doctors and their specialties, the prison hospital usually has about five doctors with varying specialties, and they alternate work shifts as each of them works about four days a month, which means that there is always a waiting list for doctors depending on their specialty.

4. Medicine

There is a pharmacy inside the prison hospital that is devoid of most types of medicine but for a few medications including antibiotics and analgesics, which doctors consider to be the one and only treatment.

“The prison’s pharmacy is relatively poor, and it relies on painkillers and antibiotics, but we are allowed to get medicines during and after the visits.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

When needed medications are not available in the prison pharmacy, prisoners are able to order needed medicine from outside through their families or the guards, and then present them to the prison doctor for permission, and finally receive them. However, in the event that the medicine was not found in the pharmacies surrounding the prison, the prisoner remains without medicine until her visitors bring it on the next visit, or another prisoner volunteers to bring it.

“The prison’s pharmacy has only simple medicines, we rely on visits to provide the necessary ones. We inform our families during the visits and one of them goes out and buys it, and sometimes the guards buy for us amicably, but the problem is when the medicine is not available in the outside pharmacy, thus we should wait until the next visit”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

VI. “El Tasni’i” (Optional Employment)

1. Employment for a Fixed Rate

The Prison Administration provides official work for prisoners for a fixed monthly wage. However, working prisoners who provide a ‘service’ to their counterparts receive -in addition to the wage from the administration- another payment from the prisoners themselves which is often represented in food or cigarettes. “El tasni’i” includes working in sales outlets, the hospital, the library, laundry,, prison cleaning, and calling for visits.

In most cases, the Prison Administration limits the opportunity of “tasni’i” to sentenced ‘non-political prisoners’, in exclusion of political and pre-trial detention prisoners. It is worth noting that the prisoner who ‘snitches’ on her colleagues, that is, informs el “nubatisha” and the administration about the goings-on among her peers- enjoys privileges including the priority for employment, especially in positions that allow the prisoner to earn exorbitant amounts of money- such as working as “nubatshias” or in the outlets where she is able extort or swindle money from the prisoners.

“There was a prisoner who was a quite average prisoner, but suddenly she became “mosaeyra” (in charge of the ward), because she was snitching on us”.

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“El Nubatshia” (The Watch Prisoner): The ward’s “nubatshia” is a prisoner who manages the rest of the prisoners. There are three types of “nubatshia” positions in Damanhour: (“mosaeyra” of the prison, “mosaeyra” of the ward, and “nubatshia” of the cells).

A. **“Mosaeyra” of the Prison:** Is usually a prisoner with influence and a strong personality, serving a long sentence. She must serve a sufficient period of her sentence to qualify for the position. She is responsible for the order and supervision of all the wards in addition to the other “mosaeyras” and “nubatshias”. She also nominates other “mosaeyras”. Her role is most prominent in times of crises.

“The mosaeyra of the prison solves the problems that “el mosaeyra” of the ward, “nubatshia” or guards are not able to solve. She is considered as the “kebeera” (head/elder) of the prison and everyone obeys her orders, she does not use force, except in cases that require it.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

B. **“Mosaeyra” of the Ward:** Is the second in the hierarchy of “nubatshias”. She is responsible for a ward: she supervises it, manages the affairs of its prisoners, and connects them to the administration and the inspection guards. Her role does not end there, she also controls the exit and entry of some prisoners from the ward, or orders the “takdeer” (upsetting) of a cell²⁴.

C. **“Nubatshia” of the Cell:** The lowest rank in the hierarchy. She is responsible only for the cell and for implementing order within it, i.e. assigning one of the prisoners to carry out the cleaning tasks, distributing “el tay’in” to the other prisoners, setting sleeping and waking hours, and solving disputes inside the cell.

In most cases, “nubatshias” use their positions to gain influence, power and money.

2. Freelance Work

Freelance work is when a prisoner receives money in exchange for products or services she provides to other prisoners, independent of the Prison Administration. The following are some examples.

A. **Domestic Service ‘Adoption’:** This is when a prisoner works for another prisoner, cleaning her belongings and her bed, and helping her throughout the day. Prisoners in Damanhour prison call the service recipient ‘the mother’ and the worker the ‘daughter,’ as the ‘mother’ provides cigarettes or food in addition to supporting the ‘daughter’ who has lesser means.

²⁴ ‘Upsetting the Cell’: Is a punishment in which the cell is kept closed for a period ranging from one to several days. During closure, they may be prohibited from bringing in cooked food, or any other items, but for “el ta’yin”, or prisoners may be prohibited from going out to exercise, or both.

B. Monthly Meal Preparation- “El Ma’isha”: Where the prisoner prepares or helps prepare lunch on a daily basis in return for a monthly fee from other prisoners who participate in “el ma’isha”. Often, “el nubatshia” takes this task, supervising “el ma’isha” herself, for a high price. She also treats the prisoners who participate in this exchange kindly and provides them with special privileges, which encourages the other prisoners to participate as well.

C. Arts and Crafts ‘Hobbyists’: In this case, the prisoner takes advantage of a ‘hobby’, such as crocheting or making dolls or jewelry. At the beginning of each month, the prison social worker receives ‘a shopping list’ of needed products and tools from prisoners and delivers them to the prisoners and deducts the expenses from her account. The prisoner then makes and sells the decorated products to other prisoners or sends them to her family to sell them as a means of support for them. The prisoner can also exhibit some of her work in the prison’s exhibition in case of visits from the National Council for Human Rights or one of the newspapers.

D. Cleaning the Ward: “El nubatshia” assigns some prisoners- “el nubatshias” daughters- to clean the ward and its bathrooms in exchange for a monthly fee paid by the other prisoners.

VII. Other Facilities and Activities

1. Facilities

In addition to the wards and the hospital, the administration building is the foundation that houses the rest of the prison facilities. There are two social services offices and there is a library inside, and in front of them there are a number of chairs and tables, used for religious lessons. The library is also used as a church. The building also contains a room that is used as a workshop for prisoners and a literacy room called the ‘school’. There are also all the officers’ and the administration’s offices, the visiting room, the in-processing cell and the discipline cells.

Initially, a specified number of prisoners from each ward was permitted to use these facilities on a daily basis. However, the permission became dependent on the instructions of the Chief Inspector, who may allow prisoners to go there freely, limit it, or prevent it entirely. Mostly, ‘political’ and pre-trial prisoners are prohibited from using these facilities.

Newspapers: The administration typically permits prisoners- with prior permission- to subscribe to national newspapers and entertainment magazines.

2. Enrollment in School/Studies

The Prison Administration permits prisoners to complete their studies. In reality, however, the prisoner has to send her relatives outside the prison to complete the procedures that allow her to participate. If she has no one to help her outside, the Social Service Office takes care of the procedures upon a request submitted by the prisoner. The Damanhour Prison Administration is commendable in its efforts to facilitate the procedures for those wishing to complete their studies, which is considered an advantage compared to other prisons.

“Damanhour Prison, compared to all other prisons, is the best prison that encourages prisoners to complete their studies, and tries to make all procedures easy for them.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

3. Celebrations

Some administrations allow prisoners to hold singing parties on public occasions such as public holidays or special occasions such as an acquittal, or an end of a sentence for a prisoner. The Administration may also allow prisoners to buy celebration supplies such as cakes, pastries, and decorating tools from outside the prison through the cafeteria, after obtaining the permission of the Chief Inspector. No other celebration props, such as loudspeakers, are permitted. In all cases, celebrations are usually held during exercise times and are rarely permitted inside the cells.

“Parties are not allowed except for some small gatherings for a birthday or other occasions, and buying a cake from the cafeteria is allowed.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

VIII. Exercise (Going Out in Open Air)

Article 85 of Interior Minister Decree No. 79 of 1961 regarding the organization of prisons states that:

“Sentenced prisoners who do not perform work, pre-trial prisoners, and those in precautionary quarantine, each group is allowed separately during the opening period of the prison to exercise for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. Prisoners are not permitted to go out for exercise on Fridays and official holidays unless the holiday exceeds one day. On the second and subsequent days, they may exercise in the morning only for half an hour, provided that it is under sufficient supervision.”

1. Exercise Area Design

Exercise in Damanhour Prison was designed to be held outside the wards. However, the Prison Administration restricts exercise to areas inside the wards- ‘the prison’s roofs’ that are rectangular areas covered with a layer of black reinforced wire supported by iron struts, approximately 30-50 meters long. If the ward is a single suite, it will have one small roof. But if the ward has more than one suite²⁵, it will have a large roof that may reach twice the surface area designated for the small ward. This space is devoted to exercise, washing clothes and eating utensils, cooking, mingling of prisoners, and storing food supplies. The roof is unclean and unsafe as it is infested with insects and rodents, such as mice. It also floods with rain in the winter, making it difficult to exercise.

“The roof is rectangular in shape, about 50 meters long. In it are el ma’ishas, heaters, laundry, taps, prisoners and mice. It is covered from above with a reinforced black iron wire, through which we can see the sky. But in the winter, we have to cover it with tarpaulins and blankets, and we bring them at our expense, because the rain spoils our ma’ishas. So we strive to reduce the reach of the rain to the cooking heaters and power plugs, so that we do not get electrocuted.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

2. Exercise Duration and Frequency

The duration of the exercise varies according to the type of punishment, and it is divided into two parts: “El makhsous” and the wards.

²⁵ Suite: The area of the ward designated for a specific type of crime, and this term is used in case of combining more than one classification of crimes in the same ward, such as (drugs and crimes against the person).

“El Makhsous”: Are the cells designated for prisoners sentenced to death. “El makhsous” prisoners only go out for two hours a day. The first hour is from six thirty until seven-thirty in the morning and may extend to eight. The second hour is from one to two in the afternoon and may extend to two thirty.

Wards: Prisoners, across the different wards, go out daily and at the same time ‘to exercise’ for about five or six hours except for Friday when the number of hours is reduced to one or two hours at most. In some cases, prisoners are prohibited from going out to exercise if they are under “takdeer” (upsetting the ward)- whether individually or as an entire group, i.e. a cell or entire ward. Prisoners in the in-processing ward or those who are punished with solitary confinement are also prevented from going out for exercise or mingling with other prisoners.

It is worth noting that on official holidays the wards are almost completely closed, with only a few prisoners permitted to go out to fulfill the basic needs of the cells, such as filling water, throwing garbage, and getting food “el tay’in”. However, in rare cases, the Prison Administration may allow prisoners to go out for exercise in these days for a maximum of two hours per day.

IX. Sales Outlets: The Canteen and the Cafeteria

Neither the Prison Regulation Law nor its bylaws address the existence of sales outlets in prison. Although the Interior Minister Resolution No. 691 of 1998 Regarding the Treatment of Prisoners details the provision of meals, clothes, and personal hygiene products, Damanhour prison does not effectively implement this resolution as its goods are of inferior quality and are insufficient variety forcing prisoners to either rely on food brought by their visitors or purchase it from the prison cafeteria.

As to the canteen, the Prison Administration provides the basics at prices slightly higher than the market price, as shown in the testimonies below.

“The food available in the canteen is of inferior quality to the commodity outside the prison. Also, not all the needs are available, but we can say that the basics are there, and the prices were not exorbitant like other prisons, but in some cases, the prices were slightly more expensive than the ones outside the prison.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“Most of the food, vegetables, raw meat, and sweets were provided on a weekly order, and their average prices were reasonable most of the time, and they were paid for by vouchers “bounat”, and sometimes deposits “el amanat”.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

It is worth noting that there is no sales outlet in Damanhour Women’s Prison that sells ready meals and thus prisoners depend entirely on “el ma’isha” and visitations for their meals.

Prisoners usually have no option but to buy from the prison canteen since the Prison Administration prohibits the entry of large quantities of food and items such as cleaning products in the visits.

The canteen, on the other hand, can also be used as a means of punishment for prisoners as the Prison Administration may prohibit them from purchasing hygiene products and food.

X. Visits

Visits are especially important for the mental health of prisoners, as they are the only possible contact with the outside world. Needless to say, phone calls are prohibited.

As for the frequency of visits, a prisoner who is being held in pretrial detention is entitled to visit once a week, while a prisoner who is serving a sentence is entitled to a visit twice a month.

1. Visitation Rooms Design

There are two rooms designated for visitation inside the administration building. The first is approximately 10 meters in length and 5 meters in width and it contains a few benches for sitting, usually insufficient to accommodate all visitors. Thus many many visitors resort to bringing folding chairs or sheets to sit on.

The second hall is a square-shaped room dedicated to “ziyarat silk” (visits ‘behind bars’) ²⁶ - highly guarded visits. They have no benches and their area is about five by five meters. Visits are meant to take place in the first room, but in the cases of overcrowding of visitors, the second room (the ones with bars) is used.

²⁶ Visits ‘behind bars’: These are the visits in which the prisoner is not allowed to meet with their family directly- by social distancing, lack of touch, or through a barrier-either due to the danger posed by the prisoner, emergency circumstances such as the spread of COVID, or other circumstances determined by the prison administration.

“There are two rooms for the regular visit, one of them has a wire that was not used for the most part before Corona, and it is medium in size. The second one is without bars, spacious, and without benches, and the visitors there are either standing or sitting on the ground.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

In 2015 the Prison Administration had allocated a small room- originally designated for carrying out the search of prisoners- for ‘political prisoners’ visits. Then, and by early 2016, ‘political prisoners’ started visiting in the first- previously explained- visiting hall.

“Political prisoners’ used to visit in the inspection room most of the time. This room has a scanning device that inspects the visitation bags and there is a bench we used to sit on at the time of visit, but in late 2015 they started letting all prisoners visit together”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

2. Surveillance and Bribery Requests

‘Political prisoners’, in particular, do not feel that they can talk comfortably and in privacy with their families, especially in the visitation room designated for them, since usually one of the inspection guards brings a chair and sits next to the prisoner during the visit, and if the number of visitors is large, they circulate around the prisoners and their families throughout the visit. As for the ordinary visitation room, the inspection guards monitor visits to a lesser extent. The demand for bribery in Damanhour prison during the visit is much lower than in other prisons- according to the prisoners interviewed by Belady- perhaps due to the fact that those in charge of monitoring the visit are inspection guards, the highest in the hierarchy of guards in Damanhour prison.

“In most cases, the bribe is not asked for directly, but there have been robberies before from visitors’ bags by some of the guards, but not many.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

3. Length of Visits

Article 71 of the *Minister of Interior Resolution No. 79 of 1961, as amended by Resolution No. 3320 of 2014* determines the duration of a visit. The period of regular and special visits that is authorized in the text of Article 40 of the *Prisons Regulation Law* is one hour, and the prison Warden may extend the period if necessary, after the approval of the Director-General of Prisons. However, the duration of the visit, in reality, ranges from half an hour to a maximum of forty-five minutes, depending on the administration's discretion. The duration may also be reduced as a means of punishing 'political prisoners' in cases of disputes between them and the Prison Administration, sometimes lasting only ten minutes.

"The duration of the visit is supposed to be a maximum of 45 minutes, but it can be less than half an hour, and in most cases, we used to have this 45 minutes or even half an hour after long discussions and begging to make the administration agree on this time."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

"Sometimes visits are only 10 minutes"

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

4. Authorized Items

Compared to some other prisons, Damanhour Women's Prison is more restrictive in terms of the permitted items to be brought during visits whether in regards to quantity or type, as follows:

A. **Clothes:** Only white clothes that do not contain colored marks or prints are permitted, except for undergarments. Also, prisoners are prohibited from obtaining "niqab" (face cover) during visits as they are forbidden from wearing it inside the prison. Colored shoes are not permitted either, only white ones, and with the prior permission of the chief inspector. As to quantity, prisoners are limited to a maximum of two pieces per visit, and in case similar clothes are brought in successive visits, prisoners would be temporarily banned from admitting new ones for an undefined period of time.

B. Cleaning and Personal Care Products: Initially, cleaning and personal care products were permitted in quantities to be determined by the Chief Inspector, where he would permit items in quantities he would estimate to last the prisoner for a month. Thus, sometimes he would admit one product and sometimes more. But in the middle of 2015, many personal care and cleaning products were banned to force prisoners to buy them from the prison outlets that in reality either did not sell many of the required products, or provided ones of inferior quality compared to those prisoners obtained through visits.

Prisoners are also permitted to obtain personal care items such as toothbrushes and combs, except for metal scissors, mirrors, and razors in most cases.

As for eating utensils such as paper or plastic plates, spoons, forks, knives, and wooden spoons used for cooking, they are also permitted, whereas metal cookware such as (pots, bowls, trays) are not permitted without the prior permission of the Chief Inspector, and in some cases, prisoners must prove that such items are unavailable to obtain the permission.

C. Food: Usually, obtaining cooked and frozen food and raw meat of unspecified quantities is permitted during visits. However, some types of cooked food, in which contraband can be smuggled, are banned. Examples of such food are bechamel pasta, stuffed food, and some pastries.

As for boxed food, it was initially permitted regardless of its types and quantity. Yet, in the middle of 2015, the administration restricted its entry to force prisoners to buy from the prison outlets and to curb the phenomenon of buying and selling food amongst prisoners themselves. It was therefore limited to: three boxed items, three bottles of water, two types of biscuits, and five small packs of chips, noting that most prisoners receive visits only once every fifteen days.

D. Beddings: No restrictions were imposed on those belongings, as prisoners were permitted to bring blankets, thermal blankets, non-cotton pillows, sponge mattresses- limited to a certain size - and sheets for mattresses.

Finally, in general, the extent to which belongings are permitted or not depends on the whim of the Prison Administration and its personal perspective, as the latter does not abide by laws and regulations.

5. The Visitors' Plight

A. Reaching the Prison:

Visitors from Cairo: Visitors who come from Cairo- the city of residence of most visitors- face a long and arduous journey to reach the prison- located outside Cairo- in El Beheira governorate. As the prison is about 167 km away from Cairo, visitors are forced to get out of their homes late at night to make it in time to check in the visitation roster. Then they start waiting in front of the gates and registering names, then wait inside the prison. In any case, visitors from Greater Cairo incur exorbitant sums of money in order to reach the prison.

"The farther the distance is, the more difficult it becomes, the farther you are and the less money you have, the more difficult and difficult it becomes."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

Visitors from Other Provinces: Rule 59 of the *Nelson Mandela Rules* states that "*prisoners shall be allocated, to the fullest extent possible, to prisons close to their homes or their places of social rehabilitation*". However, the Prisons Regulation Law and its bylaws neglect this detail despite its importance. Article 1 of the law only regulated the distribution of prisoners according to their sentences in different types of prisons (Public, Liman, and Central).

In reality, Damanhour Prison includes prisoners, both 'political' and 'non-political' prisoners who have been estranged from their original prisons, as it includes prisoners whose geographically designated prison is Damanhour. This applies to prisoners residing in Alexandria Governorate, which is approximately 60 km away from Damanhour Prison.

“We are supposed to stay in El Qanater, which is the nearest prison to our place of residence, the location of the trial, the location of the incident, and the police station we were arrested in, but we went to Damanhour.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“We are from a governorate far from Cairo and El Beheira, so my family should leave home before dawn to make it in time and register for the visitation at around 9 am.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“There are no means of transportation to El Beheira nor Alexandria in our governorate. Therefore, my family must go to Cairo first (Ramses station) and ride from (Abboud) Damanhour, and from Damanhour station they would ride a car to the prison, and this can take a total of 8 or 9 hours. There is also a train from Cairo to Damanhour, but it takes longer than the direct trip”.

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

B. Stages of Waiting: After reaching the prison gates, visitors go through several stages of waiting and queues, until finally reaching the visitation room.

C. Queues outside the Gate: Visitors especially complain about the waiting queue outside the prison gate, where they register in the visitation roster, as it takes long hours without seating or canopies to shelter from the sun or rain. Nor are there water circuits.



“There were no waiting places, people used to go to the gate to register, and wait in front of the prison, and there were not many cafes where they could stay, nor were there shelters from the sun, so they would stay in their cars or at the beans restaurant.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“When we were transferred, we found a small canopy outside the prison, and under it was a police car and a lot of trash. Visitors were standing there in the sun and their number was huge.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

D. Treatment of Visitors: Article No. 38 of amendment No. 106 for 2015 of the *Prison Regulation Law* calls for the good treatment of visitors of prisoners. However, it fails to specify the standards of good treatment. In fact, according to testimonies from ex-prisoners, the majority of visitors complain about the lack of a designated waiting area despite having to wait for a long time. They also occasionally complain about random inspection of items, which may lead to spoiling food.

“The thing that annoyed my family the most was inspecting food and visitation items, and because of it, food falls on the ground and spoils, even though families travel for a long time and try to keep the food well conserved.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

6. The Cost of the Visit

In addition to the psychological harm and the physical stress that results from the visits, visitors incur huge financial costs associated with the visit, as the cost of transportation varies according to the governorates' distance from the prison. Given the fact that Damanhour Women's Prison is located on the Alexandria-Tanta Agricultural road, it can be accessed through more than one road, especially from the Delta governorates, but it remains nevertheless an arduous route for visitors as they must use more than one means of transportation, starting with reaching the city center, then taking another means of transportation to the city of Damanhour or Itai El-Baroud, then taking a third means of transportation to prison. Alternatively, they would take a means of transportation to Alexandria if they are coming from a coastal governorate such as Port Said or Damietta, and then head towards El Ab'adia where the prison is located. It is also possible to rent a private means of transportation to go to the prison directly, which is quite costly for the visitors.

As of 2016, The cost of transportation reached 800 L.E. for those coming from governorates distant from El Beheira, and for the relatively closer governorates, the cost of transportation was about 500 L.E., knowing that costs increase with the constant increase in prices.

"Our governorate had no transportation to El Beheira, so my family used to rent a "Mallaki"²⁷ (car) for 800 L.E. from home to prison, and from prison to home."

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

In addition to the costs of transportation, the cost of food and other items for a single visit in 2016 ranged between 1000 and 3000 L.E. Moreover, visitors deposit money in the prison's "el amanat" so that prisoners can buy needed items from the prison outlets. Deposits usually amount to no less than 100 L.E. per visit.

As for the demand for bribes and according to prisoners' testimonies collected by Belady, the practice was not widespread as in other prisons.

²⁷ "Mallaki": a privately owned car (not registered as public transport) that is rented with a driver for the purpose of going to and back from the prison.

XI. The Cost of Living in Prison

Prisoners with lesser means find it very difficult to live with dignity in Damanhour prison, due to the constant need for money:

1. The Most Important ‘Stops’ for Paying Money

A. “El Nubatshia” (Watch Prisoner) and Ward Cleaning Fees: The monthly fee of “nubatshia” ‘watch Prisoner’ and the ward cleaning fees cost a minimum of three packs of cigarettes or other equivalent means of payment. In some cases, some cleaning products are requested from prisoners in addition to the required monthly fee.

B. Obtaining Clothes, Food, Hygiene, and Personal Care Items: The Prison Administration does not provide adequate food, drink, and clothing, as mentioned above, so most prisoners buy them from sales outlets or receive them from visitors.

C. Visits: As of 2016, the cost of a single visit may reach 3000 L.E. or more. This sum is divided between the costs of transportation, provision of food and clothing, and personal necessities, in addition to what is paid to the prisoner responsible for carrying the visiting bags.

D. Other Expenses: The prisoner may have to pay other expenses such as a monthly fee to another prisoner who washes her clothes, irons them, or prepares food for her, whether this prisoner is sharing “ma’isha” with other prisoners or subscribing to it on her own.

2. Prison Currency and the Financial System

Prisoners are not permitted to circulate cash. Instead, they can deal in the following ways:

A. “El Amanat”(Deposit Accounts): Are akin to bank accounts that are supervised by the Prison Administration, and visitors put money in them. Prisoners can then transfer from their “amanat” to sales outlets, or to other prisoners. Sometimes the inverse may happen, and the working prisoner transfers money to her family.

B. “Bounat” (Vouchers): They are small papers that the cafeteria gives to prisoners in exchange for a transfer from their deposit accounts, or in exchange for cigarettes.

C. Cigarettes: Especially “Cleopatra”- is the most common currency in prison as it is considered similar to cash because it is easy to circulate and is independent of the Prison Administration.

XII. Punishment

Typically punishment is directed against prisoners who: Initiate fights, violate prison regulations, or have sexual relations with their colleagues inside the prison.

‘Political prisoners’- especially those classified as ‘Islamists’- often face punishment without committing misconduct as a result of ‘special directives’²⁸ against them by National Security. ‘Non-political prisoners’ may also receive undue punishment when they are persecuted by the Prison Administration.

1. “Ta’deeb” ‘Discipline’ (Solitary Confinement)

Articles 43 and 44 of the Prisons Regulation Law- which were amended by Law No. 106 of 2015 - stipulate the use of solitary confinement as a punishment for violating prison rules, for a period not exceeding fifteen days. They permit the Director-General of Prisons, upon the request of the prison Warden and the writing of a report, to detain prisoners incommunicado for a period not exceeding thirty days. The articles further permit the placement of the prisoner in a ‘specialized highly-guarded room’ for a period not exceeding six months.

Prior to the amendment, the same article permitted solitary confinement for a maximum of fifteen days and also authorized the prison Warden to detain the prisoner in solitary confinement for a period not exceeding seven days. It also authorized placing the prisoner in a special room specified by the regulation.

²⁸ Special Directive: May be negative or positive. Prisoners may get a special directive by the authorities either (A) based on their classification according to their activity in the public sphere, their economic and social status, their affiliation or suspected affiliation to groups or ideological, political or sexual movements, their access to the international community and global media, (b) or based on their access to important persons, especially within the government.

A- In the first case, the ‘negative directive’: The Prison Administration treats prisoners harshly exposing them to various types of violations, including social exclusion, abuse or torture, and deprivation of basic rights.

B- In the second case, ‘positive directive’: The Prison Administration would treat prisoners respectfully and grant them rights, and even offer them special privileges.

By conducting a simple comparison of the law before and after the amendment, it becomes clear that the periods permitted for solitary confinement have multiplied and this is a noticeable and unjustified deterioration in the rights of prisoners and is inconsistent with international rules, especially Rule 43 of the Nelson Mandela rules that prohibit prolonged solitary confinement, as defined by Rule 44 as not exceeding fifteen consecutive days.

It is worth noting that while ‘discipline’ (solitary confinement) is primarily used as a punishment resulting from violating prison regulations or rules, sometimes it is used for temporary accommodation in case of severe overcrowding.

A. Clothes and Personal Items: In ‘discipline’ (solitary confinement), a prisoner enters the cell stripped of all her belongings, including her undergarments. The administration explains that the practice is out of fear that the prisoner may use them to hang herself. However, the administration excludes most ‘politician prisoners’ from this procedure.

“In Damanhour prison, we saw the ‘non-political prisoners’ entering the discipline, and the guards taking their undergarments from them.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

B. Area and Number of Cells: Solitary confinement is located in the administration’s building. “Ta’deeb” was initially composed of two cells that face the visiting rooms. But in practice, most of the time, one of the two in-processing cells is used for ‘discipline’, mainly because it is the most isolated. This cell is located on the other side of the administration building and its area is approximately two by two meters.



“When I entered the discipline, the room was so small. It had two doors, a bar door from the outside separating the discipline and the in-processing cell, and the door of the cell itself. There was a bucket as a toilet, and two water bottles, one for drinking and one for the toilet. It is not allowed to go out, and the door is opened for us only once so that we can empty the bucket and fill the water.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

C. Lightning and Ventilation: There is no sufficient ventilation or lighting inside the discipline cells, whether natural or artificial.

“There was no sufficient air in the discipline, it was very hot, and there was a very small, high window, like the window of the transport car. And there was in a burnt-out bulb”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

D. Water Circuits: The only toilet available inside the cell is a plastic bucket. Although there are water circuits next to the cell, punished prisoners are only permitted to use it for one hour a day to empty the bucket and fill the two water bottles from the water circuits’ tap.

“They used to open for us once a day. We empty the bucket in the bathroom and just fill the water.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

E. Menstrual Cycle: The penalized prisoner is not permitted to bring sanitary pads into the disciplinary cell.

F. Food: Food served in solitary confinement is considered very poor, and is served only once a day in a humiliating manner: It is placed on a piece of cardboard and thrown on the floor in front of the prisoner.

“They used to bring us pepper with some oil that was very dark in color, and a spoonful of rice and they threw them on a cardboard.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“They brought me a spoonful of rice on cardboard and they threw it on the floor, it was so disgusting and humiliating.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

G. Visits: Prisoners in solitary confinement are also prohibited from visiting and exercising and from engaging in any human interaction.

“El Dawa’i”²⁹ (‘Security Purposes’): Although the laws and prison regulations stipulate that solitary confinement as one of the most severe punitive measures, prison administrations do not deem them as adequate leading them to circumvent the laws and invent harsher measures that allow them to exceed the periods designated for solitary confinement. Administrations thus designate other cells for special punishment. In Damanhour Women’s prison, a cell in ward 3 is designated as “el dawa’i” to which prisoners are sent for punishment collectively, and the decision of this punishment depends on the whim of the Chief Inspector where they may leave them there for a long time, that is, until the Chief Inspector permits them to leave.

During their punishment in “el dawa’i” prisoners are prevented from exercising, showering, and leaving the cell. Indeed, detainees held in solitary confinement are in better condition than those held in “el dawa’i” cell where the stay is indeterminate.

²⁹ “El Dawa’i”: A group of cells designed for prisoners who pose a threat to the rest.

2. “El Tashrida” (‘Displacement’ / ‘Forced Vagrancy’) and “El Taghriba” (‘Estrangement’)

A. “El Tashrida”: (a) Internal ‘displacement’: takes place inside the ward, where the prisoner is made to leave her bed or cell and is transferred to another cell in the same ward. (b) external ‘displacement’: takes place outside the ward and the prisoner is transferred from the ward designated for her detention to another ward in the same prison. In both cases, the ‘displaced’ prisoner is stripped of all her possessions: food, drink, clothes, and personal belongings, and is deprived of her right to sleep on a bed.

B. “El Taghriba”: It is the transfer of the prisoner and her ‘estrangement’ from the original prison designated for her detention - which is supposed to be close to her place of residence - to a distant prison. “El Taghriba” in Damanhour Women’s Prison is known to take place suddenly and is only enforced in cases of severe violations.

“ There was a ‘boss’- dealer prisoner when she got into a fight with the Chief Inspector and he beat her, she beat him back, she was as strong as him, nobody could handle her. The Chief Inspector suddenly estranged her to El Qanater after making her think that the problem was solved.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

3. Beating

Article 55 of the 2019 amended Egyptian constitution stipulates that:

“ Anyone who is arrested, imprisoned, or has his freedom restricted must be treated in a manner that preserves his dignity, and he may not be tortured, intimidated, coerced, or harmed physically or mentally, and his detention or imprisonment shall only be in places designated for that that are humanly and healthily appropriate. ”

In addition, Articles 43 to 48 of the *Prison Regulation Law*, enumerate many disciplinary measures such as warnings, deprivation of all or some privileges for a period of thirty days, and solitary confinement. Beating was not among them.

However, and on occasion, the Prison Administration uses beating-severe at times- as a punishment. The beating could come from the Chief Inspector or the guards if the prisoner commits a violation, and often the two penalties of beating and ‘discipline’ are combined.

“There was a ‘non-political prisoner’ who fought with the Chief Inspector. He beat her severely and had kept her hanged from her hands for several days, and there was a distance between her and the ground. She was screaming constantly and cursing him and he was beating her. When visitors asked during the visits about who was screaming, they told them that it was a crazy woman, and when those responsible for human rights visited, they took her to the hospital”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

XIII. Sexual Abuse

Prisoners in Damanhour prison are subjected to verbal and physical abuse at various stages from the moment they reach the prison, passing through the hospital, to the search they are subjected to upon returning from the court hearings.

During the search: Paragraph 1, Article 9 of the *Prisons Regulation Law* states:

“Every prisoner must be searched upon entering prison, and any prohibited items, money, or things of value that he has with him must be taken,” without specifying any criteria for the search that guarantees respect for human dignity and sanctity of the body of prisoners, especially women.”

Initially, during the reception, prisoners are asked to undress and put on prison clothes. Prisoners have long complained that the prison clothes are degrading and see-through. Then the search procedures start and prisoners are then asked to relieve themselves before the guards. One prisoner, who was asked to relieve herself in front of the guard, responded with:

“Over my dead body.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

According to ex-prisoners, the matter is not limited only to the new prisoner. The humiliating search extends to the prisoners at all stages of their transportation to and from the cells, whether leaving to attend hearings, visits, etc, leading to quarrels in case of refusal or even to harassment according to ex-prisoners. One prisoner recounts having a nervous breakdown after returning from one of the hearings at night.

“The search was that we take off our clothes and stay in undergarments, and the clothes and undergarments are also searched and we wear the “shull” again and take off part of our undergarments and stand and squat for about 4 times. Being allowed to wear the “shull” to cover ourselves when changing our clothes depends on the whim of the guard because some guards did not allow us to wear it.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“When I argued with the guard because she wanted me to stand in front of her completely naked, she was about to let the Warden (male) in while I was almost naked, on the pretext that I refused to get searched, and he was standing at the door, shouting, while I was frightened and crying.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“They make the non-political prisoners get completely naked, and they subject them to vaginal search, sometimes with gloves, and sometimes with a plastic bag, and they are forced to defecate in front of the guard, and their defecation gets searched.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

In the Hospital: The Prison Administration does not provide a female doctor for female prisoners who request it, in violation of the provisions of Rule 10 (2) of the *Bangkok Rules*:

“If a prisoner requests to be examined or treated by a female doctor or nurse, a female doctor or nurse must be provided for her, as long as possible, except for cases that require urgent medical intervention. If a medical practitioner performs the examination against the prisoner’s will, one of the prison employees must attend the examination”.

While the Prisons Regulation Law does not take into account the prisoners' possible need to be seen by female doctors.

"When we were in the prison 2015/2016, there weren't female doctors in the hospital"

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women's Prison

XIV. Discriminating Between Prisoners

After examining the conditions of prisoners in Damanhour, we concluded that discrimination between prisoners varies depending on the (a) socio-economic status (b) identification and/or affiliation (or presumed affiliation) to different ideological and/or political groups (or currents), interests or activities in the public sphere (political prisoners). In reality, 'political' prisoners are unofficially classified as either 'civil' or 'Islamist' sometimes even before their arrest or arrival to the prison.

A. **Socio-Economic Status:** Treatment in Damanhour Women's prison varies based on the financial situation of the prisoner in general. Prisoners who have access to money and power can live in better conditions in prison than those with lesser means. Indeed, the economic and social inequality creates a kind of respect from the Prison Administration towards the prisoner who has money. The latter can easily provide food for herself, and make other prisoners work in her service, clean up for her, wash her clothes and prepare food for her. With money, the prisoner can also provide a source of artificial ventilation in the prison, such as a personal fan.

Prisoners with lesser means may also be able to enjoy a better life, if they are able to work either formally or informally. Thus, they can earn money and provide an acceptable living standard for themselves and even earn some extra money to support their families outside prison. But in most cases, the prisoner with lesser means lives a difficult life, in which she either depends on the prison's resources, or works in the service of another prisoner. In all cases, prisoners with power, or those who are favored by the prison guards and the Prison Administration, have the priority in official employment.

B. ‘Political’ and ‘Non-Political’ Prisoners: This classification is unofficial, for authorities in Egypt, officially deny the presence of ‘political prisoners’ in the first place, as communicated by president Sisi’s in his speech³⁰ on January 6, 2019 on CBS³¹. Based on this denial, there are no wards specifically classified by the prison’s administration as ‘political wards’. Usually, ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ prisoners are housed in the same cell, but this does not mean that there is no discrimination between the prisoners. Indeed, Belady has observed that the Prison Administration limits official work and use of facilities (such as the library, school, and going to religious lessons) to ‘non-political’ prisoners. Rather, the Prison Administration deliberately imprison ‘political prisoners’ in exercise areas- rooftop- during the visits of the National Council for Human Rights, in order to hide the prison’s reality and the violations to which they and the rest of the prisoners are subjected.

In any case, discrimination is much less ubiquitous compared to other prisons- such as El Qanater and Banha prisons for women - where the administration treats ‘political prisoners’ in a manner completely different from the others³².

“Prisoners are classified as ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ and ‘political’ themselves are classified as ‘civil’ and ‘Islamists’, but the treatment, living conditions, and places are the same.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

“When the administration wanted to implement a decision to ban something and make the prisoners bound by it, it applied it first to ‘political prisoners’, so that the rest of the prisoners would know that nobody is better than the other.”

An ex-prisoner in Damanhour Women’s Prison

³⁰ [Egypt’s President El-Sisi denies ordering massacre in interview his government later tried to block](#)

³¹ In their denial of the presence of ‘political prisoners’, authorities try to play on the fact that the legal code no longer encompasses political crimes and the political police, at the time of King Fouad, were abolished.

³² For more information, See the profiles of [El Qanater Prison](#) and [Banha Prisons](#) in the Egypt Prison Atlas Website.

Conclusion

In general, and after closely examining the conditions of prisoners in Damanhour Prison, especially with regard to the implementation of legislation related to prison construction and management, we can conclude that the authorities strive to implement some legislation regulating prisons, while they violate the others. They permit prisoners to complete their studies, permit prisoners sentenced to death to exercise twice a day and constantly undergo medical examinations. On the other hand, they violate legislation in other cases, such as failing to comply with the maximum period of in-processing and violating the sanctity of prisoners' bodies during search. We find that the structure of Damanhour Prison is especially lacking particularly in terms of toilet access. Ventilation, is also severely lacking as the windows are high and do not allow sunlight or air to pass through, in addition to the absence of furnishing inside the cells such as beds, aggravating the problem of overcrowding further detracting from the dignity of prisoners and adversely affecting physical and mental health, as they live in tiny spaces designated for sleeping and sitting for more than fifteen hours a day.

As for the compatibility of national legislation with international legislation, the former lacks many of the guarantees stipulated in international rules and laws, and thus the Prison Administration violates those international rules as they are absent from the national legislation. When making a simple comparison between the Nelson Mandela Rules for the treatment of prisoners, the Bangkok Rules regarding women prisoners, and the national prison regulation legislation, we find that the latter lacks many articles that take into account the needs of prisoners, such as articles regulating the provision of clothing and personal care necessities- such as free sanitary pads.

Finally, the discrimination between prisoners on the basis of their economic status results in a direct and significant impact on their lives, forcing 'non-political prisoners' -with lesser means- to serve their counterparts inside the prison in order to provide a livelihood.