



**Banha Women's Public Prison
"The Bucket Prison"**

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Banha Women's Public Prison

“The Bucket Prison”

Introduction

The Egypt Prison Atlas, through prison profiles, documents the construction and living conditions of prisons in Egypt, in addition to the illegal detention facilities, to convey a clear image that uncovers the secrets of prisons. That “parallel universe”, whose high walls contain another world, or perhaps a miniature model of society. It conveys the positive aspects that are in conformity with the texts of national law and the rules of international covenants, and documents their shortcomings and violations, in contrast to the approach followed in the biased and inflammatory rhetoric that pervades the scene and contradicts reality. This act of documentation aims to provide an accurate picture of reality, and by that preserve rights while simultaneously urging concerned authorities to respect humanitarian laws and principles.

The prisons page 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.

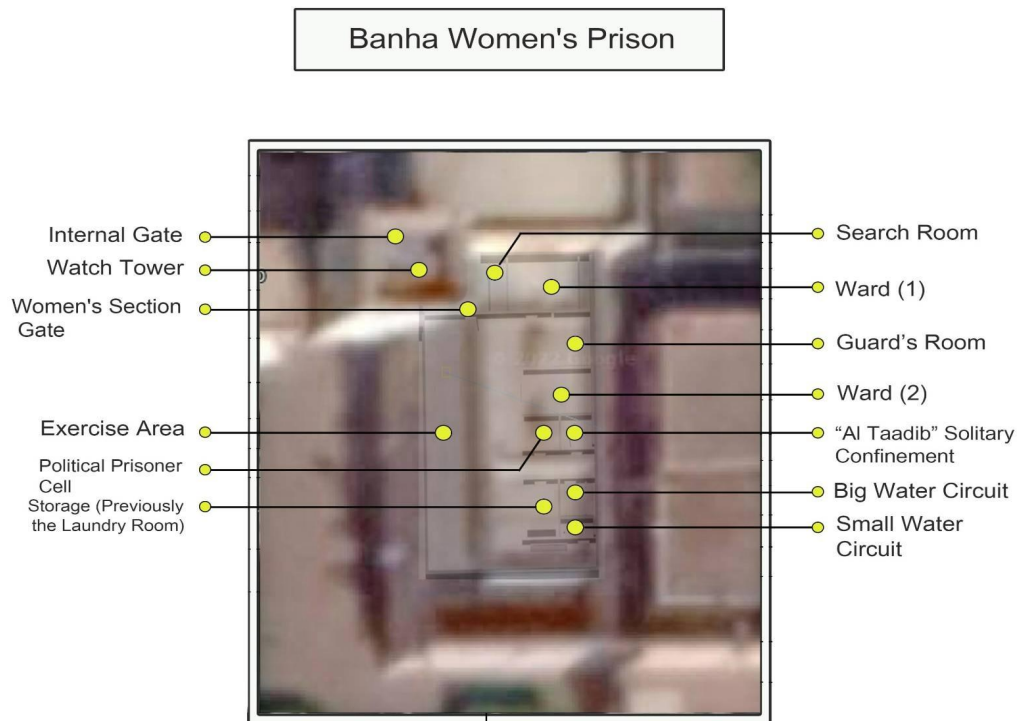
Accordingly, we provide a detailed view in this profile on the Women's section in Banha Public Prison with a special focus on the lives of prisoners imprisoned in the political backdrop.

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 their design, starting from the moment of receiving and searching new prisoners, and concluding with the wards and cells where they live throughout their detention. Finally, in the third section, Belady describes the nature of life inside prison, including healthcare, punishment and sexual abuse that may occur to prisoners inside prison, which is often used as a punishment for prisoners- for reasons that will be explained below.

First: Towards the Prison Gates

I. General Characteristics



A Google Earth figure of Banha Public Prison

1. Basic Information

Governorate: Al Qalyubiya

Type: Public prison.

Data Collection: Data on this prison was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with ex-prisoners and their family members in Cairo, Egypt, between October 2021 and May 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

Banha Public Prison is located in Banha city, Al Zagazig road, Qalyubiya province. It is built in a small area compared to other prisons. It is surrounded from most sides by residential buildings. A prisoner can clearly see the residents of the buildings surrounding the prison.

“Banha prison is located in a very lively area in the middle of Banha city. It is surrounded by buildings. Sometimes, we could see the balconies from the prison.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

The prison from the inside is divided into two sections:

The largest section is for men. A separate profile will be devoted to this section and will be available on the “Egypt Prison Atlas” Website.

The smaller section is for women, which was mostly used for prisoners as a temporary detention facility in special cases, chiefly during exams. It is also used for el taghrib¹ (estrangement)-punishment- of prisoners, by relocating them from their originally assigned prisons to Banha Prison, due to its especially harsh detention conditions.

¹ 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 another prison far away.

3. Security Design

A. Prison Walls: Banha Public Prison is surrounded by several walls, starting with the external wall that surrounds the entire prison, including resting places, and the places designated for the security forces, then the internal wall that surrounds the prison in its two sections- the men's section and the women's section- including visiting areas and detention cells. Finally, we reach the wall that surrounds the Women's section and the places designated for their detention.

"The prison consists of a large external wall, followed by the cells' wall that surrounds all cells, and finally the cell."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

B. Security Forces: The prison is guarded by police forces through the watchtowers surrounding the prison, as well as several persons in charge of the prison security, such as the prison guards.

As for the gates, the security forces of the external gate consist of one or two guards. They are in charge of registering and calling the visitors' names and inspecting the bags, whether they belong to the visitor, or contain the prisoner's needed food and other items. A non-commissioned police officer helps them inspect bags, who is, pro forma, responsible for making the decision to permit or deny the entry of food and other items, while in reality he only implements the decisions of the inspection (officers). The external gate is also guarded by a varying number of soldiers.

As for the internal gate, its security forces consist of several inspectors, accompanied by a person in charge of the security of the entire prison, in addition to the Prison Warden who is constantly present at this gate.

C. Prison Gates: A prisoner passes through about five gates from the moment she enters the prison until she reaches the cell designated for her detention. The prisoner passes the following gates: The external prison gate, the internal prison gate, the women's section gate, the exercise gate, and the cell's gate.

"There is the outermost door from which we enter the prison. After we get in, there's another door that surrounds the prison itself, from which we arrive at the visitation [room]. Then, there is the gate for the place from which you can access the women's section and the other one is for men. All this makes you visible to the buildings [outside] from every corner.

Finally, there's the exercise [area] then the cell's gates."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

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:

"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, without addressing the details of the search method or setting measures that respect the sanctity of their bodies.

In reality, new prisoners in Banha prison reportedly encounter the most violent reception. According to ex-prisoners, its cruelty lies in the search procedures, which in turn are divided into two types: The search of possessions and the ‘body search’.

A- Search of Possessions: The incoming prisoner’s possessions are searched upon entry, specifically at the gate of the women’s section. Such searches are infrequent, due to the prisoners’ arrival from their primary prisons (to attend hearings or examinations), or perhaps ‘estranging’ (taghrib) them from the primary prisons designated for their detention to Banha Public Prison.

All the prisoner’s possessions of food, drinks, clothes, blankets, etc. are searched, and this procedure is usually carried out in the corridor located at the beginning of the women’s section.

Often, the administration of Banha Public Prison adopts an absolute ban against items that are legally permitted in order to torment the prisoners, especially political ones. Some ex-prisoners reported that authorities denied them entry of their possessions.

“When we entered Banha Public Prison, they took all the covers and said that they were prohibited. They even took the blankets. After begging them due to the cold weather, they gave us a blanket for each girl, and they refused to allow more than that.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

“We had boxed food when we went to prison, some ‘feteer’ (flaky Egyptian layered pastry) and other items allowed in all of the other prisons. Despite that, they confiscated all our food, even bread. After begging them many times, they emptied two cans of tuna and put them in a bag for us.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

An ex-prisoners stated that the Administration does not only confiscate food or possessions, but in many cases, they spoil food or tear clothes apart.

“Prohibition is not the only problem. If they permit the entry of items, they throw them and don’t care if they break. They destroy anything before we take it. Let alone that you are not allowed to touch your items as long as they are in their hands.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

B- The ‘Body Search’: Banha Women’s Public Prison has scanning devices that can replace the body search in apparent conformity to the aforementioned legal rule, and despite that, the Prison Administration refuses to use them in most cases. Even if they do, they do not use them as a substitute for the body search.

The search is carried out by female inspectors responsible for the search as follows: they ask the prisoner to enter the visiting room, or the visitation search room, and then order her to fully undress, and proceed to examine every part of the prisoner’s body, including the intimate parts.

The inspector also asks the prisoner to bend over and look down, or order her to squat-and-stand, while naked, and then inserts her hand into the prisoner's genitalia- from top to bottom- and in most cases, the genitals are searched harshly, amounting to assault.

"Upon our entry, the prison guards held us and took off our clothes, even our undergarments. They made us bend down and they inserted their hands from the back to the front. Maybe because if I'm hiding something, it will appear from below."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

"It's the most difficult search, to be honest, much more difficult than all other prisons. The problem is in her [the inspector] hands. The search is very intense as if she's trying to explore if there's something inserted or not, so her touch would be violent. She doesn't superficially search like in the previous prisons. She held my breast violently. She took off my bra and held the breast itself as if I would cut a part of it and insert something in it."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

2. Prison Uniform

After completing the search procedures, the inspector examines the prisoner's uniform and determines its conformity with the prison's official uniform. The Prison Administration does not provide any clothes for the prisoners as they originally arrive from other prisons, except in the case that the prisoner's clothes do not match the official uniform. In this case, the 'shull' is provided, which is a white robe, with the word 'inmate' written on the back, and it is made of 'bafta'- rough fabric. Prisoners complain that the material is see-through and reveals what is underneath.

And if the prisoner has her own 'scarf' and 'galabiya' (robe), she may wear them provided that they are white- as the official color in most women's prisons is white-except if they are on death row- then the official color is red. The Prison Administration prohibits prisoners who wear the face cover 'the niqab' from wearing it, and rarely allows them to wear the long veil "el khimar".

“We went to Banha Public Prison and we brought with us our clothes from our original prison. But, in general, the Prison Administration doesn’t provide prisoners with anything other than the prison’s ‘shull’, if it’s available at all.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

III. Wards and Cells: Living Conditions Inside

1. In-Processing

Article 46 of the internal regulations of prisons² 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 of Resolution No. 79 of 1961 from the same regulation oblige prison administrations to record information regarding the health status of prisoners while they are in the in-processing ward, considering it a quarantine preventative measure, before placing them in their respective wards and cells.

In Banha Women’s Public Prison, the authorities completely fail to implement these laws. First of all, there is no in-processing ward. Second, the law stipulates, as explained above, that prisoners, upon their entry to prison, shall undergo medical testing. However, as a continuation of the chain of negligence, prisoners do not undergo any medical testing, and the housing (placement in wards) takes place as soon as the prisoner enters the prison gates.

“There are no medical tests, no pregnancy tests, or any of this.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

2. Division of Wards and Conditions

Division of Wards

² [Interior Minister Decree No. 79 of 1961 regarding the internal regulation of prisons.](#)

The women's section does not consist of wards as the case in other women's prisons, and it does not have an in-processing ward -as aforementioned- or even a cell designated for new prisoners. But it consists of just three cells that are nevertheless officially named as wards. A fourth cell is designated for solitary confinement (ta'deeb), as follows:

Ward 1: It is a medium-sized room. It is about 3x4 m.

Ward 2: This cell is the largest. It is a square-shaped room, about 4x4.

Ward 3: Is dubbed unofficially as 'the political prisoners cell'. It is a medium-sized room, about 2x3 m. It was not initially prepared for sleeping as it had no beds or beddings.

However, the Prison Administration strove to provide the cell with beds when new prisoners were housed.

Solitary Confinement Cell (Ta'deeb): Is a medium-sized room, in which the prisoner can move freely.

Conditions in the Wards

After completing the search procedures, the prisoner is placed 'housed' directly inside the cell designated for her detention. There is no specific rule that governs the distribution of prisoners, and thus housing is carried out randomly inside the cells.

A. The Wards' Furnishing: The Prison Administration does not consider painting the walls, and so cells in Banha Public Prison remain unpainted. The administration only covers the walls with cement- el mahara- and the dark gray color appears throughout the walls. This directly affects the lighting, which becomes dim, and in turn, affects the psychological health of the prisoners along with their vision.

Most cells contain beds. All, however, are devoid of water circuits, as the Prison Administration only provides a bucket in each cell for prisoners to relieve themselves. Thus, there is no running water in cells.

The first and second cells share a cooking heater³ that is often taken over by prisoners with money and power. The Prison Administration prohibits prisoners from using the heaters inside the cells and obliges them to rely on the heater in the exercise corridor.

Beds: The first ward contains three bunk beds of two tiers, and in prison it is called 'mullah'. The bed is about 70 centimeters in width. The second ward, which is the largest, contains the same number of beds.

As for the third, it is devoid of any places designated for sleeping or sitting. Initially, it was just an empty room. However, the Prison Administration worked on furnishing it with beds at the advent of new prisoners. It has become dedicated almost entirely to detain new 'political prisoners'.

The solitary confinement (ta'deeb) does not contain any beds nor does it have any area designated for sleeping, but the Prison Administration may place a small, thin, square piece of sponge on the cell's floor for the prisoners to sleep on.

"There are no wards in Banha prison, they are only 3 cells. Each cell is different. One of them is a little small and the other is wide and large. Each of them has 3 beds and each bed has two tiers. There's a cell without beds and its ceiling is open, and of course, terrifying insects get in."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

The bed is the space in which the prisoner remains almost all day long except for the hours of exercise. In addition, a prisoner places her belongings on it and hangs the rest on the wall, or puts them on the floor.

The Prison Administration gives prisoners the freedom to choose whether or not to put 'prison mosquito nets'-used primarily in prison as curtains for decoration and privacy- on their beds, but political prisoners are often prohibited from putting them on, if the administration permits their entry, in the first place.

³ 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.

Cells also lack any electric devices such as television sets, radios, and refrigerators- unlike El-Qanater Prison for Women- and the only electric device that exists inside the cells is the kettle that prisoners reportedly only manage to obtain after a long journey of failed attempts and pleas.

“Unlike other prisoners, there are no devices inside the cells, all of this was forbidden, it was only the kettle that we barely managed to obtain after the passage of a long time.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

‘El Bakia’⁴: Does not exist in Al Banha Public Prison, due to the small size of the cells, and the small number of prisoners inside it, unlike El Qanater Women’s Prison, for example.

B. Overcrowding: As Banha Prison for Women is mostly used as a temporary detention facility for special circumstances such as el taghrib, and thus only a small number of women are housed in it, overcrowding may not appear problematic like the other prisons.

Despite the small number of prisoners, a problem emerges that a prisoner may pay money to rent additional space. As a result, more space is available for her-perhaps the entire cell-leaving little space for the rest of the prisoners. Thus, the cell becomes overcrowded despite the availability of spaces.

“There was a prisoner charged with financial crimes. She made an exceptional living for herself with her money, I mean, no one was sleeping in the bed above her at all, she was putting her stuff on top.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

In addition, the cell can become overcrowded because the beds are not enough compared to the number of prisoners, especially political prisoners.

⁴El Bakia: It is the space between beds. It is considered valuable for prisoners in overcrowded wards, as they can furnish them and place important belongings such as a kettle, tea, sugar and a radio. A prisoner may even furnish it with a chair and a small table and host her colleagues there if authorized.

“The cell was very small, and at first they put all the political prisoners together in one cell, and their number was about 9 girls, and all this number was just divided between two bunk beds. Then, they distributed the girls to the two non-political cells.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public 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.

The Prison Organizations Law and its internal regulations lack any provisions that stipulate the importance of having good ventilation inside cells. In general, the degree of ventilation inside Banha Public Prison varies from one cell to another. In the first and second cells, there is a window that allows fresh air, but there is no way to close it in times of extreme cold, directly affecting the ability to provide warmth. The third cell has an open ceiling covered with a blanket. It also has a large window that cannot be closed, which allows excessive air and as result, this cell gets filled with insects easily. The latter cell is a defacto punishment for any prisoner who enters it in the winter, especially since it is devoid most of the time of any beds or furniture.

It should be pointed out that the Prison Administration does not provide any means of heating, or any sources of artificial ventilation, such as fans or vents. However, prisoners with access to money and resources can obtain personal fans for themselves.

“Of course, the window could not be closed, which made the temperature very cold, and of course, there were no artificial sources of ventilation, no fans at all.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

*“Of course, there was racial *discrimination, despite our small number. There was a prisoner who paid a lot of money and was allowed to get a fan”*

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

**Expression used by the witness to describe class discrimination*

Cigarettes: Smoking cigarettes is permitted throughout the day in the cells and there are no designated non-smoking areas. Thus, cells suffer from excessive cigarette smoke even where ventilation meets the minimum requirements. The problem is exacerbated by overcrowding. The Prison Administration offers no solution for prisoners who suffer from respiratory diseases and allergies. It was reported that ‘non-political’ prisoners harass ‘political prisoners’ by blowing cigarette smoke in their faces.

“The non-political prisoners were smoking a lot of cigarettes, and they were blowing them in our faces to annoy us, and when we objected, they [the administration] moved us to the third cell, and there were no beds or anything in it. And When we complained to the Prison Administration, they told us, ‘weren’t you the ones who complained about cigarettes?’”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

“The political prisoners’ cell almost had no smoking problem, but the rest of the cells that we were distributed amongst later were full of cigarettes. The space was very limited and the ventilation was not enough to remove the traces of this smoke”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public 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: Depending on the shape and design of the cells, natural lighting varies from one cell to another. It is almost non-existent in both the first and second cells, due to the

small size of the windows. The only way to get sunlight there would be to go out to the exercise area from nine in the morning until half past three in the evening.

As for the natural lighting in the third cell, it is better than the two other cells due to the large size of its window.

“In the exercise area, which is the corridor, there was sun and the cells were opened every morning, so we used to sit in the sun in the exercise place, from 9 to 3 and a half, exactly like the chickens.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

Artificial Lighting: Prisoners constantly complain about the grave deficiency in lighting. Furthermore, the Prison Administration does not permit prisoners to buy light bulbs. The walls are covered with unpainted dark gray cement which reduces the lighting, and negatively affects the physical and psychological health of the prisoners, as it causes headaches and dizziness for some prisoners.

“There was a serious lack of lighting, and of course, the prison is responsible for providing the lighting, but it was very dim.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

“The walls are not painted and they are covered with cement ‘mahara’. This, of course, would reduce the lighting more and more, and this would give us a constant headache.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

Power outages in Banha Public Prison are consistent throughout the day, which makes life very difficult for prisoners who have fans, especially in the summer. As for the majority of prisoners who do not possess fans, they remain unaffected, as cells are not furnished with any source of ventilation.

*“This power outage used to happen all the time, and regularly.”
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison*

E. Water: The water inside Banha Public Prison is very poor and unfit for consumption, and prisoners do not have access to it in their cells, in the first place, and can only access it during exercise times. This is because there are no water circuits or water taps inside the cells. As a result, prisoners rely mainly on purchasing mineral water from the prison canteen, at exorbitant prices compared to market price, to be able to drink inside the cells.

A prisoner described the water in Banha Public Prison as being similar to sewage, as it emits a very foul smell.

*“The water in Banha prison is like bathroom water or water in a ditch. Seriously, it had a very bad smell. It was very bad, and there was a lack of maintenance.”
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison*

*“Water in Banha Public Prison is outside the cells only. We are not allowed to use the water except when we go out to exercise.”
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison*

In addition to all of the above-mentioned obstacles to water access, prisoners may not be able to access water at all, even during exercise times, due to water outages that are repeated throughout the day, a cause of great suffering, especially for those who do not have the money to buy mineral water from the canteen, or perhaps, have a difficulty to access mineral water-as it will be later explained- in the canteen.

*“The water cuts constantly in the prison, and we used to rely on mineral water for drinking because water is not allowed except during exercise time.”
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public 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.”

The Prisons Regulation Law and its bylaws did not mention any details about water circuits inside prisons, whether in terms of their proportionality to the number of prisoners or in terms of their cleanliness and fitness for human use.

There are no water circuits in the cells of Banha Women's Public Prison. The administration only provides a bucket inside each cell. There are, however, two water circuits outside the cells, that prisoners must wait for exercise times to access.

The first one is a square-shaped room, about 2x2 m. It consists of a squat toilet and a small side of it is dedicated to the shower. It also has an electric water heater, so the prisoner can take a shower with hot water. Prisoners recount that it was very clean compared to the second water circuit.

"The first bathroom was very clean and was all ceramic and had a heater, but the problem was always crowding at the time of exercise, which made it always difficult for us to enter, and we had to wait because the second bathroom was disgusting and full of insects."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

"The bathroom area was rather cramped, and although we were few inside the prison, the prisoners would keep knocking on the door (to hassle others) and enter."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

As for the second water circuit, its area does not exceed one by one meter, maybe less. It consists of a squat toilet, a very small area in which there is a tap that does not work, and it has no water heater. Some ex-prisoners described it as terrible, unfit for human use, and permanently full of insects, rendering it unusable.

"The second toilet was very, very bad to the extreme, and there were many insects in it, so it wasn't used much."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

“The second bathroom had tiles, but they were dirty. It was very narrow- less than a meter in width. It had a tap on the side, and there was no water heater, so it was very difficult for anyone to use.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

In addition to the water circuits, there is a small room- next to the first bathroom- that is about two by three meters. It does not have a door, and it contains a small sewage duct, used to empty the ‘toilet bucket’, and there is a place that was used in the past for laundry.

Finally, next to the second bathroom, there is a small partition with a basin that has multiple taps. Prisoners use it to wash and clean the ‘toilet bucket’.

Usually, and as soon as the cell gates are opened, all the prisoners gather in front of one water circuit in the morning, as the other is not suitable for human use. Here, the problem of discrimination on a financial basis between prisoners, clearly manifests, as prisoners with oney are reported to enter the bathroom first, and take their time, leaving the rest of prisoners with lesser means outside to wait until they finish.

“Of course, the woman charged with financial crimes, and who had money was the first one to enter and the toilet was wiped and cleaned for her. There was an imprisoned woman working for her, so this prisoner would enter the first one to clean the bathroom, then the financial

crimes woman would come with her toiletry and shower bag, enter the bathroom, take a shower, and take her time. It doesn’t matter if we can’t hold it anymore.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

Finally, due to the extreme difficulties posed by inaccessible water circuits, prisoners are forced to waste their time waiting for access.

Menstrual Cycle: Rule 5 of the Bangkok Rules states that female prisoners must be provided with free sanitary pads in their accommodation.

In reality, the Prison Administration does not provide sanitary pads to women during their menstrual cycle, so they rely on visits, or they may be able to send the person in charge of the canteen to buy them sanitary pads, according to the testimonies collected by Belady.

“We used to rely on sanitary pads brought through visits, of course, and sometimes the man from the canteen would bring them to us from outside, but of course, this was very difficult.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

G. Cleanliness: The Prison Administration does not provide any hygiene or cleaning products to clean the cells, so the prisoners depend on themselves for that. The situation differs between the ‘political’ cell and the ‘non-political’ one, according to the testimonies of ex-prisoners. ‘Political prisoners’ depend on themselves in terms of cleaning the cell, and the days are divided among them so that all prisoners participate in cleaning equally, whereas, ‘non-political’ prisoners also depend on themselves regarding cleaning the cell, but if the prisoner has resources or money, she does not participate in cleaning and delegates another prisoner to clean in her stead in exchange for money or food, and to perform various additional services, such as cleaning the water circuit for her, emptying and cleaning the toilet-bucket, and washing her clothes.

Periodic Cleaning: Cells are cleaned almost every month, and the Prison Administration allocates a day, at the request of the prisoners, to clean all prison cells. Prisoners also rely on themselves for periodic cleaning, and for providing cleaning supplies such as pesticides, disinfectants, and soap. The prisoners start the cleaning process by emptying the cells completely, then clean the walls, floors, and furniture, and spray them with pesticides to avoid insect infestation. Despite these measures, and due to the lack of dining halls or places to store food, most cells suffer from infestations from insects such as cockroaches.

Mirrors and Wristwatches: The Prison Administration does not provide mirrors inside the cells, nor do they permit their entry.

The Prison Administration also prevents prisoners, especially 'political' ones, from admitting wristwatches, even though they are permitted by law. Wristwatches have special importance in prison, as they allow for the performance of time sensitive religious rites.

"In Banha prison, I smuggled a wristwatch to know the time during Ramadan. The administration took it from me, because of what happened, we used to have the pre-dawn meal in Ramadan after dawn, and we were really surprised when the morning came and we were still eating."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

Third: Prison Life

The life of prisoners inside Banha Public Prison begins at nine o'clock in the morning, where prisoners go out for 'exercise time' (going out of the cell in open air), get counted, then leave their detention cells and head to the water circuits, usually using only one.

After prisoners finish relieving themselves, or showering, which happens with great difficulty, prisoners begin to clean the 'toilet bucket'. Prisoners spend any spare time left after completing these daily tasks in the exercise yard trying to get sun exposure for as long as possible, since sunlight does not enter the cells. By the end of the time allotted for exercise, prisoners return to their cells at three and a half in the afternoon.

Prisoners spend the rest of the day on the beds allotted to them- if any- in very dim lighting, without any means of entertainment or education- except for books that are permitted entry to students who enroll in school and have exams. There are no television or radio sets inside the cells as in El Qanater Women's Prison. Prisoners remain in this state until they sleep, only to wake up the next day to the same rhythm.

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 which 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.”

Since Banha Women’s Public Prison is a temporary place of detention, the Prison Administration does not provide any places to house mothers with children, nor does it permit their presence.

IV. Food and Clothing

Food: According to the Interior Minister’s Decision 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”.

The food in Banha Public Prison consists of only two meals: Lunch and dinner.

1. Food Provided for Free ‘el Ta’yin’:

Free food (ta’yin) is the food provided by the Prison Administration.

A- Accessibility of El Ta’yin: Prisoners can easily receive the ta’yin food that is placed outside their cells during exercise hours, as all prisoners -save the ones in solitary confinement- have access to exercise.

B- Food Types, Quality, and Diversity: Lunch on Saturdays and Tuesdays consists of a boiled egg, while lunch on Thursday consists of a raw piece of meat, and -daily- some vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, and bread. The Prison Administration does not provide any type of cooked food.

As for dinner, it consists of ‘halawa’(an Egyptian type of confectionery) without any kind of bread.

“Prison meals are generally two, on Saturdays and Tuesdays morning they bring eggs, and on Sundays and Thursdays a piece of meat for each prisoner with raw vegetables, and at night they bring “halawa” and rarely, they bring cheese. Bread is provided in the morning meal.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

“On Eid, we had no food, and it was a holiday, and there were a lot of onions, so we boiled the onions and sat down to eat them out of hunger.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

As prisoners cannot rely on the food provided by the Prison Administration, due to its small quantity and lack of hygiene, their solution is to rely on the food their visitors bring, which in turn is limited to only one meal for each prisoner.

As for the prisoners who do not have access to money, they often provide services for other prisoners in exchange for food.

“It is very difficult to rely on al t’ayin. It’s impossible.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

2. Food Available for Purchase

A. ‘El Ma’isha’: El ma’isha is when a prisoner who has sufficient food stocks and adequate cookware prepares daily meals and sells them for a monthly fee to the other prisoners.

The situation is different in Banha Public Prison. A prisoner cannot rely on al ta’yin, so the majority of prisoners depend on el ma’isha. In all cases, each cell is unique in its living conditions, and the situation varies according to whether the prisoner is ‘political’ or ‘non-political.’ According to the testimonies collected by Belady from several ex-prisoners, ‘political’ prisoners share al ma’isha without discrimination, as they share materials and utensils, and thus the same food. In addition, there is equality and independence as the Administration of Banha Public Prison does not assign nubatshias to women’s cells and leaves them to their own devices.

“Every cell had a unique ma’isha, political prisoners used to cook and eat together.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

As for el ma'isha in 'non-political' cells, it is different from 'political ones', according to the testimonies gathered by Belady. While 'non-political' prisoners do subscribe to el ma'isha, they do not split it equally amongst them. The prisoner who does not have money remains without food- but for the free food provided by the prison- so she is forced to work in the service of another prisoner to be able to obtain food.

"If someone did not have money, she would work for someone charged with financial crimes so that she could eat, and serve her in exchange for a bag of pasta for example."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

B. Cafeteria Meals: There is no cafeteria in the women's section of the prison, but there is a small canteen that contains very few basic goods and products that, barely sufficient to prepare meals.

3. Cooking (Prisoners Preparing Food for Themselves)

A- 'Cooking Heaters': In most of the wards and cells there are 'cooking heaters' - an alternative to the stove- which is a cement block with a thermal wire attached to it that is connected to electricity, and is used inside prisons to prepare food.

The problem is that heaters can be easily damaged, especially the thermal wire, which gets damaged every few days. The prison does not provide spare parts or replacements. 'Cooking heaters' are also not completely safe to use, as they are directly connected to the cookware, endangering the lives of those who use it.

In addition, the number of cooking heaters provided is insufficient, as the one heater that prisoners are permitted to use is located in the exercise area, so prisoners must go out of their cell to be able to cook.

There is also one cooking heater shared by the first and second cells, but prisoners are prohibited from using it inside the cells due to space constraints. As a result, it is not possible

to cook or heat food inside the cells. That one 'cooking heater' is often controlled by the prisoner who has access to money and power, preventing the other prisoners from approaching it. The prisoner who does not have money is forced therefore to work for another prisoner in exchange for using the cooking heater inside the cell.

"Even the use of the cooking heater inside the cell was forbidden, and no one used it except for the woman with money, so sometimes they had to work for her to use it."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

Prisoners can request additional heaters from the administration. However, the procedures are complex and are often met with rejection, so the process of cooking is difficult and requires fighting a lot of battles.

"There was no cooking heater in the political prisoners' cell. They waited for a very long time to have one, and they relied on a shared heater outside in the exercise area."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

In a nutshell, the administration-before 2014- prohibited the majority of prisoners from using the 'cooking heater', because it was not available inside the cell, or it was under the control of the prisoner who had money and power. Prisoners had to use a single cooking heater located in the exercise area. Thus, the problem was exacerbated by the crowding of prisoners to use it, which made it difficult for the 'political' prisoners to reach. Finally, and at the end of 2014, the Prison Administration provided a 'cooking heater' in the cell that housed the majority of political prisoners.

B- Cookware and Eating Utensils: Neither Banha Public Prison nor its Canteen provides any utensils for eating or drinking, but they provide some cookware for preparing food, and so prisoners have to either rely on what their visitors bring or to buy what they need from other prisoners.

4. Clothing and Laundry

A- Clothing: In general, the Prison Administration does not provide clothes to prisoners who were initially assigned to other prisons, but only does so, where the prisoner's clothes are

found to be incompatible with the official prison uniform, and in that case, it only provides the white robe (shull) and scarf. Thus, the prisoner, upon entry, remains without clothes except for her undergarments and (shull) until her visitors provide her with the necessary clothes. Finally, the prison does not provide clothes-even for a fee- in the canteen, and thus prisoners with few resources- or visits- remain under-clothed, suffering from cold in the winter. In the summer, they would sweat profusely and remain unable to change their clothes.

B- Laundry: The majority of prisoners rely on themselves to wash their clothes, crowd around the basin located next to the second bathroom, then hand wash and air dry their clothes during exercise time.

“As for the laundry, we used to wash our clothes at the time of exercising using the taps next to the second bathroom which was not clean, and we were washing the bucket in the same place.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

As for prisoners who have resources, they pay other prisoners to wash their clothes for them.

V. Healthcare and the Hospital

Rule 24 of the Nelson Mandela Rules, states that:

“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 there must be a minimum level of necessary medical devices, x-ray machines, and medical testing equipment.

In this regard, Banha Women's Prison consists of one small room (clinic) with a bed, and it is devoid of the majority of equipment typically found in clinics. It has only one doctor who is not regularly present.

"There is no infrastructure in the hospital, neither devices nor equipment. So If we talk about the concept of healthcare itself, there is no more than this room and there is no hospital in the right sense."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

"There was a room in Banha prison. When a prisoner had a breakdown, she was moved to this room and they brought her a doctor."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

2. Procedures for Transfer to the Hospital

A. The Prison Hospital: There are no clear guidelines provided by the Prison Regulation Law and its internal regulations for transferring prisoners to the prison hospital. In Banha Prison for Women, prisoners complain about the reticence and delay in transferring patients to the prison hospital and attribute this primarily to the doctor's discontinuous presence. Moreover, the administration often ignores the prisoners' requests and does not take them seriously.

Finally, the transfer decision may be subject entirely to security considerations that are often affected by the whim of the Warden, the Chief Inspector, or even the guard

herself. Supreme State Security also intervenes in the decision when the patient is a 'political' prisoner.

"Generally, the guard takes the sick prisoner but of course this is only in specific times because it is just a room, not a hospital"
An ex-prisoner in Banha women's prison

B. External Hospitals: The Prison Administration theoretically allows the transfer of prisoners to an external hospital when necessary. But, in reality, only prisoners with access to money and power are transferred. Thus, external transfer is difficult in general, but even more so with 'political' prisoners.

3. Doctors

The medical staff in the clinic/hospital consists of only one doctor who is not present most of the time.

"There are no doctors but one inside the prison."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

4. Medicine

There is no pharmacy inside the clinic/hospital designated for healthcare. Within the clinic itself there are very few medications such as painkillers and antibiotics. In case a prisoner gets sick and can not find the prescribed medicine, she would be unable to obtain medicine except through visits, where ordering the medicine, and receiving it, takes a lot of time and several steps. The first step starts with waiting for a visit, then, in the second step, she would ask her visitors to bring her the medicine the next visit. In the third step, she would wait for the upcoming visit to receive the medicine. Finally, she would ask the Prison Administration and the specialized doctor to permit the admission of her medicine. These steps would take anywhere from two weeks to a month and sometimes even a month and a half, as the right

to visit varies depending on the prisoner's legal status. If the prisoner is in pretrial detention, she would 'deserve' a weekly visit. However, if she is serving a sentence, she would have the right to a visit every fifteen days.

Yet, even this arduous process may be unavailable to some, especially 'political' prisoners, as the administration can ban them from taking any prescription to the visit or anything that indicates their illness.

"You are already in a prison, so it's expected not to find full care, attention, and the needed medicines."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

"If the doctor prescribed a specific medicine, we wouldn't find it. If it's there, then great. If not, we are obliged to make our families bring it, and then it goes back to the doctor for permission and so on."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

VI. "Tasni'i" (Optional Employment)

I. Employment for a Fixed-Rate:

The Banha Prison Administration does not provide any official work to which prisoners can gain financial compensation.

El Nubatshia "The Watchwoman": Is a prisoner responsible for the ward and its management. In most cases, there are several nubatshias in a single ward. One of them is the leader and has almost absolute authority over the lives of the prisoners, beginning with the organization of housing and even the daily treatment. El nubatshia completely controls whether or not prisoners have access to the Prison Administration or prohibit them from exercising or working. Punishment of insulting, beating, and displacement were imposed on them. El nubatshia may decide to prohibit prisoners from accessing the administration, employment, the hospital, exercise, employment, and may impose punishments ranging from cursing to beatings and el tashrida.

Although there are 'nubatshiyas' in Banha Prison for Women, their concept differs from the prevailing idea in other prisons and also differs from one cell to another. First of all, they are not officially paid, nor do they typically receive regular monthly payments from other prisoners. However, they manage the cell either by virtue of their longer sentence or having been the first to enter the cell.

Second, there are no nubatschias in the cells designated for 'political' prisoners.

"Certainly [access to] money [only] comes from visits. There is no work provided by the Prison Administration for the prisoners unless she works for the financial crimes woman so she gives her some of her vouchers (bounat)."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

2. Freelance Work

Freelance work is when a prisoner receives money in exchange for services she provides to other prisoners, independent of the Prison Administration. Freelance work in Banha Prison for Women is only one of two (a) 'domestic service', where a prisoner who does not have enough money or visits works for another prisoner who has money in exchange for food or vouchers, (b) 'hair dressing' where the prisoner provides services like thread, putting on facial masks and the like for a fee, provided that she does not use sharp equipment like scissors.

"There is no freelance work like in other prisons that have crafts for example or any other work. However, it is normal for a prisoner to work for another and these are considered as personal things between them."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

VII. Other Facilities and Activities

1. Facilities

Prisons typically include several buildings other than cells, such as a library building, a mosque, a church, and spaces devoted to official work. However, Banha Women's Prison in

particular is devoid of most of the necessary facilities that are supposed to serve prisoners' needs.

One of the Ex-prisoners stated to Belady that after a long period of detention without reading a single book, the prisoner demanded-more than once- from the Prison Administration to go with her colleagues to the library building in the men's section. Yet, this demand was met with rejection. However, after the majority of prisoners insisted on the necessity of having any book inside the prison, the administration selected some books and sent them to women's cells so that they could choose amongst them.

"Of course, there was no mosque, playground, or church. There was a library for men and when we needed books and informed them [the administration], someone came and offered us some books that he chose and we picked whatever we wanted."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

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 prisoner will not be able to study.

3. Celebrations

Some administrations allow prisoners to hold 'parties' in which prisoners sit and sing together on occasions such as public holidays or special occasions, acquittal, or an end of a sentence for a prisoner.

VIII. Exercise (Going Out in Open Air)

Article 85 of Interior Minister Decree No. 79 of 1961 regarding the regulation 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 allowed 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

All cells in the women's section share a single area for exercise: a long corridor that ends with a small square touching the three cells allotted to women. Next to it there is another room for guards in charge of guarding the cells, and a small area used as a breakroom for them.

Exercise areas have no roof, causing a lot of pesterance amounting to verbal harassment by the soldiers charged with guarding the prison in the watchtowers.

“Soldiers in the watchtowers were saying dirty words while we were walking in the corridor and it was very rude. It sometimes reaches explicit verbal harassment.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

2. Exercise Duration and Frequency

Prisoners go out to exercise from nine in the morning until half past three in the afternoon on a daily basis. Sometimes exercise hours extend until four. Although this may seem like a long time, in reality it is insufficient as the prisoners do not go out just for walking or practicing sports, but use the time to perform necessary activities. Thus, prisoners spend their exercise time standing in the water circuits' queue, emptying the 'toilet bucket', and queueing again before the 'cooking heater'.

“We used to go out everyday from nine so we have to wash the bucket, and we may go for a little walk then we enter the cell again and it gets locked at 3:30 and sometimes 4.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

There is no specific system to coordinate the the exercise times prisoners at the time of exercise, as their number is often very limited, maybe up to twenty four prisoners according to what was mentioned in the visit of the National Council for Human Rights in March 2016⁵.

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, Banha prison does not have cafeteria, and although it has a small canteen, the ex-prisoners who gave testimonies to Belady did not see it, as they were not permitted to go there. They testify, however, that the Prison Administration would send a canteen staff member to their cells during exercise time to take their orders and deliver them at the end of the day.

“There is a canteen, but we are not allowed to bring what we need by ourselves. There is someone who comes, notes down our requests and brings them by the end of the day.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Prison

The canteen contains very few basic goods and products, and they are bought through the prison’s special vouchers, which are organized by the prison as an alternative to money. These products are sold at very high prices compared to the prices outside the prison.

We could not afford anything but Indomie (instant noodles) or Persil (a cheaper brand of detergent). We once were able to buy mulukhia (a vegetable traditionally cooked in Egypt).

Overall, it contains some basic products, it was not like cafeterias in other prisons.

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Prison

The Prison Administration raises the prices in the sales outlets to the point that they may be multiple the prices outside the prison, as with the prices of mineral water which is needed

⁵[The visit of the National Council for Human Rights to Banha Public Prison](#)

continuously by the prisoners. In 2014, When a bottle of mineral water reached 3 L.E. outside the prison, it was sold inside for 6 L.E. which is twice its real price.

To further encourage the prisoners to buy from its canteen, the Prison Administration prohibits the entry of many kinds of food items and cleaning products brought by visitors, especially those that are sold in the canteen. Further, it permits prisoners to get only one meal per visit.

X. Visits

Visits are especially important for the mental health of prisoners, as they are the only possible contact with the outside world. It goes without saying that phone calls are not allowed. A prisoner who is held in pretrial detention is granted a visit once a week, and a prisoner who is serving a sentence is entitled to two visits per month.

1. Visitation Rooms Design

There is only one area for visitation in Banha Public Prison in its two sections: Men and Women. It is a square-shaped room, medium in size, located exactly at the beginning of the corridor for the women's section, and contains cement benches for sitting. It also contains a wired window at the end of the wall, surrounding the entire room. Due to the large number of male prisoners compared to females, the room becomes severely overcrowded, making the visit tedious for the prisoners and visitors.

"It is a square-shaped room containing cement benches, in which both men and women visit."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

2. Surveillance and Bribery

Prisoners do not feel that they can talk comfortably and freely with their families. Besides the overcrowding in the joint visitation area between men and women, the Prison Administration monitors prisoners, especially 'political' ones.

*"The persons in charge of visitation would be monitoring us closely."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison*

The problems do not end there, as guards always ask for money from visitors all throughout the visit, and this is often done through emotional blackmail, with phrases such as "please me and I will take care of your daughter", or perhaps as an acquired right by forcing the visitors to pay it.

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 as sixty minutes-one hour. However, the duration of the visit to Banha Public Prison depends on the administration's discretion, usually limiting it to about fifteen minutes.

*The duration of the visit depends on their [administration] discretion. It may be for a quarter of an hour, possibly less and possibly more.
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison*

4. Authorized Items

The administration of Banha Public Prison does not permit the entry of many types of food and personal items that are generally authorized elsewhere, especially for 'political' prisoners, as a form of torment.

*"They prohibited the entry of many items, even shampoo. After we begged them many times, they finally permitted its entry."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison*

The Prison Administration also allows the entry of ready-made food within the limits of one meal per prisoner. Although the visit is only once per week or two weeks depending on the situation of the prisoner.

“My family used to bring me food during visits. Despite that, the Prison Administration only permits the entry of one meal.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

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- starting from the road to the prison, to waiting outside the gates and registering names, all the way to waiting inside the prison.

The exhausting journey of the families begins from their homes until reaching the prison, which is located in the governorate of Qalyubiya -Banha. It is a difficult journey that depends on the place of residence of visitors. Subsequently, the visitors wait in queues for a very long time, passing through the most difficult stage of all, the search. Visitors to Banha Public Prison persistently complain about the harshness of its measures that often amount to harassment.

Finally, visitors wait inside the visiting room, which is characterized by constant overcrowding, due to its small size compared to the number of prisoners, their families, and inspectors, who must all fit there.

“We leave home very early on and the distance and duration between our house and prison make the visit very difficult. However, the search remains the filthiest thing that ever happened.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public 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).

This rule is entirely neglected, as the women in Banha Prison for Women are usually assigned to it, with the knowledge, and intention, of placing them far from their homes. Hence, visitors from other provinces face a difficult and exhausting journey to reach this prison, located in Banha, which is considered primarily a temporary detention facility for women.

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

The first stages of the visit begin with the families waiting outside the prison gates without any designated areas for waiting or resting, and without shelter from sunlight, cold, or rain.

It [the visitation] was exhausting to my family. They used to spend a long time outside the prison until they got called hours later.

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

In the second stage, the Prison Administration sends an employee to register the names of the prisoners and the degree of family kinship of the visitors, as only third-degree relatives or closer are permitted entry. In most cases, the Prison Administration prohibits entry, except for the father, mother, and husband.

After about three hours of waiting, the third stage begins when an employee calls the names so that families can pass through the first prison gate, but before that, their belongings must be fully inspected.

After waiting for a while inside the first prison gate, visitors move on to the fourth stage when an employee starts calling names, marking the beginning of the harshest stage, according to the testimony of prisoners and their families: The body search, where every part of the visitor's body is searched, even the intimate parts. Witnesses testify that the search is carried out violently and inspectors may even verbally or physically harass the visitors.

"The search in Banha was one of the most difficult searches that my family has gone through. I mean, Mom was very ill and tired and had a catheter. They didn't take into consideration the fact that she's sick and has a catheter. The inspector searched her in a rough and disgusting manner."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

"My sister told me that they literally harassed her in the search. They [inspectors] would say strange things like: why are you so pretty or you are prettier than your sister. She [inspector] would place her hands on some parts of her body."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

"Upon entering the visitation room, they [the visitors] get searched again. This time, not only he belongings are searched, but also bodies. The body search may lead to harassment, which is the most revolting thing ever. When families reach the visitation room, they still wait for hem to get us out."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

Finally, the last waiting stage for visitors begins, which is the waiting in the visitation room, which is constantly overcrowded and highly humid, due to the large numbers compared to the small size of the room that includes all prisoners' families.

Finally, visitors are forced to pay additional costs to the inspectors. These expenses seem constant at every step. Costs extend to the food that the Administration rejects which inspectors may snatch from the hands of visitors.

“Offering bribes is a given in all prisons. To enter the visitation room, you must pay money more than once. Even the food, they [the administration] would say: ‘Are you going to carry the food all the way back with you?’ So the families would be obliged to give them the food.”
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

C. 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.

There are frequent accounts of visitors complaining of the degrading treatment they experience, especially during the body search that they describe as harsh and humiliating. Visitors are also blackmailed to pay bribes.

6. The Cost of Visitation

In addition to the costs of the exhausting prison journey and the bribes that are forcibly paid, visitors incur huge financial costs to bring food and money to the prisoners. The cost is higher in Banha prison (compared to other prisons) due to the insufficient and poor-quality ta’yin. That is besides the food that is denied entry and gets destroyed by the inspectors. Finally, food that is allowed entry is inspected in a way that may contaminate it, so visitors prefer to provide money instead of food.

“In 2014, at that time, a visit would cost more than 1,500 L.E. and that was a big amount at that time. But, this was the cheapest among other prisons because of the fewer numbers and amounts. Also, they [the administration] didn’t permit the entry of big amounts of food. For example, if they have brought me one kilo of cucumber, I only get half. They would contaminate the rest and would never permit it all.”
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

XI. The Cost of Living in Prison

It is hard for a prisoner in Banha Women's Prison to live without money and visits. Even basic necessities inside the prison such as food or clothing, are either insufficient or entirely unavailable.

1. The Most Important 'Stops' for Paying Money

A. Providing Clothes and Food: The Prison Administration does not provide enough food, drink, and clothing, so most of the prisoners buy them or bring them during the visit.

B. Hygiene and Personal Care Items: The Prison Administration does not provide any personal care, cleaning, or hygiene products such as disinfectants and insecticides.

C. Visits: The cost of a single visit may reach 2500 L.E. or more, according to a statement by one of the prisoners who left Banha Women's Prison in 2015. This sum is divided between the costs of transportation, provision of food and clothes, and personal necessities, in addition to the bribes that visitors are forced to pay to those in charge of visiting procedures at each step.

D. Other Expenses: The prisoner may have to pay other expenses such as paying a monthly sum to a prisoner in exchange for washing her clothes, purchasing medicine or acquiring personal fans.

"The problem inside the prison was more than just money. I mean that even if you have money, you will relieve yourself in a bucket inside the cell."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Public Prison

2. Prison Currency and the Financial System

Prisoners are not allowed to circulate cash. Instead, they deal with 'vouchers' (bounat), small papers that the Prison Administration gives to prisoners in place of the money that their relatives leave during the visit.

XII. Punishment

Typically, punishment is directed against prisoners who initiate fights and violate regulations. However, 'political' prisoners often face punishment without committing misconduct as a result of a special directives⁶ made against them by the National Security. Similarly, 'non-political' prisoners, may also receive punishment if they are targeted by the Prison Administration.

Punishment are as follows:

1. Solitary Confinement 'Ta'deeb'

Article 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. They further permit the placement of the prisoner in a 'specialized highly-guarded room' for a period not exceeding six months.

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

⁶ 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 allowed for solitary confinement have multiplied, a noticeable and unjustified deterioration in the rights of prisoners and inconsistent with international rules, especially Rule No. 43. of the Nelson Mandela rules that prohibit prolonged solitary confinement, as defined by Rule No. 44 as not exceeding fifteen consecutive days.

A- Clothes and Person Items: A prisoner enters the solitary cell stripped of all her belongings except for the clothes she is wearing.

B- The Area: The solitary confinement cell in Banha Women's Prison is a square-shaped single cell. The area of solitary confinement is approximately three by four meters, and it is thus designed in a way that enables the prisoner to move freely inside the cell.

C- Ventilation and Lighting: There is no air vent inside the solitary cell except for a small open window in the ceiling that cannot be closed, and there is no artificial source of lighting -such as light bulbs or lamps- which makes life inside the cell-especially at night- terrifying ,adversely affecting the psychological and physical health of prisoners. Prisoners who have previously been in solitary cell also complain about the humidity inside, which is very high.

D- Water Circuits: There is no water circuit inside the solitary cell, nor is access to the outside one permitted. Further, the Prison Administration does not provide or even permit the use of a bucket for self-relief like in the other cells.

"There is no water circuit and they would not even allow us to bring a bucket inside, so we relieved ourselves on the sponge."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

E- Menstrual Cycle: Prisoners in solitary confinement are not allowed to bring sanitary pads into the cell just as they are not permitted clothes, water, and the 'toilet bucket'.

F- Food: Inside the solitary cell, food is usually served unclean, in very little quantities, and of exceptionally inferior quality.

*"They brought us maggoty and rotten rice. It was only one big bowl for the three of us, but it was kind of a big and deep, [but the food] was rotten and musty."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison*

G- Visits: Prisoners in solitary confinement are completely banned from visiting or leaving the cell for whatever reason.

*"You can not leave solitary confinement. If I have visitors I am banned from going out [to see them]. Solitary confinement prisoners are banned from visits."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison*

2. Al Tashrida 'Displacement' and Al Taghriba 'Estrangement' (Forced Vagrancy)

Due to its especially harsh detention conditions, Banha Prison is considered a prison of extra punishment, in and of itself, and that is why it is a primary destination for women 'estranged' from their original prisons.

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 methods such as warnings, deprivation of all or some privileges for thirty days, and solitary confinement. Beating was not among them.

In fact, the Banha Prison Administration explicitly violates the aforementioned law by brutally beating prisoners, whipping them with the falaka, which is a method for whipping feet by laying a person on the ground on their back, tying their feet to a stick, lifting them up after removing their shoes and socks, and whipping the feet, either with a thick piece of leather or with a wooden stick.

“he first time we got in Banha Prison, we heard about whipping with the falaka, and this is somehow a famous trend.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Prison

Thus, when the guard calls out someone and says, *“put your pants on and come”*; it means that the prisoners’ legs will be hanged on el falaka and that she will be whipped. Note, wearing the pants is to cover the prisoners’ legs and undergarments that will be exposed when the legs are lifted.

“The guard whipped her on her legs to the extent that they got swollen from beating”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Prison

However, some of the prisoners whom Belady interviewed, specifically mentioned that they were not beaten by the Prison Administration or the guards, but they could hear constant screamings from inside the men’s prison while they were being beaten.

“We were not beaten inside Banha Prison, but we were hearing constant sounds coming from the men’s prison because they were beating them brutally”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Prison

XIII. Sexual Abuse

Prisoners in Banha Women's Prison may be subjected to verbal and physical abuse at various stages of their prison journey especially during the search and exercise as follows:

During the search

"It is the most horrible search anyone could ever witness, they strip us naked, they force us to bend down to make an anal search in a very humiliating way."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

"The inspectors' search was basically harassment, even their touch was so cruel. They were constantly saying hurtful comments such as your body looks good even though we were crying from the search's cruelty."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

During the exercise: Prisoners also continuously suffer from verbal harassment by the soldiers who are assigned to guard the prison.

"The exercise corridor was exposed and the soldiers were staring at us and verbally harassing us."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

"During exercise, the soldiers were verbally harassing us because the place was exposed. It was really disturbing because their words were dreadful. This made us uncomfortable in each step we took."

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

XIV. Discriminating Between Prisoners

The living conditions of prisoners in women's prisons vary, according to their implicit classification by the authorities: (a) socio-economic status, (b) affiliation and/or membership (or suspected membership) to various ideological and/or political groups (or movements).

(A) Discriminating Based on Socio-Economic Status:

Treatment in Banha Women’s Prison varies based on the financial status of prisoners as prisoners with access to money and power can have a better life in prison than prisoners with lesser means, as they can have relatively easy access to good food, find other prisoners to serve them, clean up for them, do their laundry and prepare food for them. With money, they can also provide for themselves artificial ventilation in the prison, by obtaining a personal fan.

By contrast, prisoners with lesser means- with no access to money or power- live a hard life. They must work for any other prisoners with money and power so that they can subscribe to al ma’isha or access decent food. This is in case the prisoners are able to work in the first place.

“The situation inside the prison was difficult for everyone, but, the prisoner who does not have money is in a terrible position, and this is because, in terms of eating, it is very difficult to depend on al ta’yin because it is very little in quantity and it isn’t cooked at all. You must serve another one with money to know how to live in the first place.”

An ex-prisoner in Banha Women’s Public Prison

(B) Discriminating between ‘Political Prisoners’ and ‘Non-Political’ Prisoners

It is worth noting that this classification is unofficial, as the Egyptian Authorities officially deny the existence of ‘political’ prisoners. This was what President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi stated in his speech⁷ on CBS on January 6th, 2019⁸. Based on this denial, there are no wards officially classified by the Prison Administration as ‘political wards’, even ‘the political ward’ is a nickname given by prisoners and not by the Prison Administration.

But in reality, and in general, and in Banha Women’s Prison in particular, the discrimination is clearly evident against those who are classified by the Egyptian Authorities as ‘Islamist political prisoners’.

⁷Egypt’s President Al Sisi denies ordering a massacre in an interview his government later tried to prevent

⁸By denying the presence of ‘political’ prisoners in Egyptian prisons, the authorities are trying to play a role in the fact that the law no longer covers political crimes, and that the political police have been abolished since the reign of King Fouad.

Nowadays, 'Islamist political prisoners' are generally prisoners who are- or are suspected of having- an ideology and/or affiliation with Islamist movements/groups that particularly support former President Mohamed Morsi, affiliated with the Rabaa sit-in, Al-Azhar protest. It must be noted that prison administrations do not classify prisoners on their real identifications, but rather, on the classification of the legal cases in which they are implicated.

Banha Prison for Women, manifestly discriminates between 'political and non-political prisoners', as they deal with 'non-political prisoners' in a manner that shows some flexibility and perhaps, kindness, in general- and when there are no quarrels and conflicts- whereas they deal with prisoners classified as 'Islamist political prisoners' harshly and cautiously.

Further, Islamist political prisoners are constantly reprimanded in every step they take inside the prison by prison employees, who use such infamous phrases, such as: "*You deserve this, you have done this to yourselves*".

"The guards were treating non-political prisoners very nicely. They would sit and joke with them and even eat together. Whereas political prisoners were treated with extreme cautiousness and it reached to cruelty."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

"Throughout our time in prison, we used to see guards and people in the prison saying to political prisoners that they have done this to themselves and so on, although non-political prisoners were sentenced in serious cases."
An ex-prisoner in Banha Women's Prison

Moreover, 'Islamist political prisoners' -especially ones who come together as defendants in a single case, and unlike 'non-political prisoners', are generally not permitted to remain

together in the same ward, and are distributed over multiple wards to be housed with 'non-political prisoners'.

According to prisoners with whom Belady has documented, the Prison Administration separates them in order to weaken them so that they do not feel powerful. Yet, with the influx of 'political' prisoners to Banha Public Prison who persisted in asking to be 'housed' together, the Prison Administration conceded, and allocated a single cell to 'house' them.

Finally, it should be noted that discrimination against prisoners classified as 'Islamist political prisoners' is a widespread practice in most Egyptian prisons. Further, administrations discriminate between political prisoners themselves, according to their categorizations as LGBTQI+ activists, Islamists, and civil⁹ political prisoners. The fact that this was not documented in Banha prison is probably due to the small number of political prisoners found in it, and not to the absence of a similar discrimination system.

Conclusion

After examining the conditions of prisoners inside Banha Women's Prison, we conclude that the prison, which authorities mostly use as a place for 'estrangement' (taghriba), is a double punishment in and of itself, as detention conditions in it are particularly brutal.

As for conformity to the law, the Prison Administration violates the national Legislation on the Organization of Prisons, as it fails to provide work to prisoners, three balanced meals, or access to facilities such as a library.

⁹ [For more information, see El Qanater Prison profile.](#)

Further, the Prison Administration violates the most rudimentary human rights norms, specifically the ones stipulated in the Nelson Mandela Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and the Bangkok Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners, such as providing access to water circuits that are fit for human use, safety from physical harm, as exemplified by the brutal beatings of some prisoners, in addition to exposing prisoners to psychological, sexual, and economic violence, especially through the stark discrimination between prisoners based on their socioeconomic status and political background.

In light of these massive violations suffered by prisoners in Banha Women's Prison, Belady commends the decision taken by the Prison Administration in 2017 to close the entire Women's section of Banha Prison and the transfer of the prisoners in it to other prisons, in addition to the Interior Minister's decision, that was declared on the occasion of the opening of the "Reform and Rehabilitation Center in Wadi El Natroun" in October 2021, to close twelve prisons, including Banha Public Prison in its entirety.