



IRAN
HUMAN
RIGHTS

WOMEN AND THE DEATH PENALTY IN IRAN

A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

In 2024, two years after the start of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement, Iran recorded a grim milestone in its execution of women. With 31 women executed, this marks the highest annual figure since Iran Human Rights began monitoring the death penalty 17 years ago. An unknown number of women remain on death row, many of whom, including Kurdish activists Verisheh Moradi and Pakhshan Azizi, might face execution in the coming months. Since 1979, the Islamic Republic has used executions as a tool of political oppression to instill fear and maintain its grip on power, with thousands of women and men executed following sham trials. While the majority of those executed have been men, the stories of women and the gender-specific dimensions of the death penalty in Iran have largely remained hidden.

To draw attention to this overlooked issue, Iran Human Rights has published its latest report, “Women and the Death Penalty in Iran: a Gendered Perspective” which reviews the executions of women between 2010 and 2024. The report sheds light on the gendered aspects of the death penalty, exposing systemic inequalities and societal factors that perpetuate the suffering of women on death row. On publication of this report Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, Director of Iran Human Rights, said: “The execution of women in Iran reveals not just the brutality of the death penalty, but the depth of systemic gender inequality in the judicial system. We call on the international community to act urgently to address the systemic injustices and gender apartheid faced by women in Iran and to intensify efforts to save those on death row.”

According to the report, between 2010 and 2024, at least 241 women were executed in Iran, primarily for murder or drug-related offences. Among them were nine child brides, three of whom were under 18 at the time of their alleged crimes. These figures however, only tell part of the story. The Islamic Republic shrouds its executions in secrecy, with only 26% of women’s executions officially announced. This lack of transparency has worsened in recent years, with an average of just 12% disclosed since 2021. Women from marginalised ethnic minority regions, such as Sistan and Baluchistan, are disproportionately represented, underscoring the intersection of systemic discrimination, poverty, and judicial bias.

Many of the women executed for murder acted out of desperation in response to violence, rape or coercive control. About 70% of women sentenced to death for murder, are charged for murdering their male partner. Trapped in abusive marriages, they were often driven to acts of self-defence. Yet Iran’s legal system rarely acknowledges such mitigating circumstances. Women’s testimonies are worth half of men’s, and laws fail to recognise domestic violence or marital rape, leaving these women defenceless in court. Those accused of murder face *qisas* (retribution in kind), where the victim’s family are given the responsibility of deciding between forgiveness, blood money, or execution, often resulting in death sentences.

Life on death row is compounded by societal stigma and systemic neglect. Many women are abandoned by their families, deprived of legal and emotional support, and left to endure inhumane prison conditions. Poverty and illiteracy, particularly among ethnic minority women, further exacerbate their vulnerability, as they often lack the resources to navigate the judicial system or defend themselves against unfounded charges. Drug-related offenses have also claimed the lives of at least 107 women between 2010 and 2024. Despite amendments to Iran’s Anti-Narcotics Laws in 2017 that initially reduced such executions, the practice has resurged, reaching a nine-year high in 2024. Many of these women were coerced into drug offenses or unaware of their involvement, yet they faced the death penalty under the Islamic Republic’s oppressive legal framework.

Each statistic in this report represents a human story—a life impacted by systemic injustice, societal stigma, and a lack of avenues for redress.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic has used the death penalty as a primary instrument to instill fear and maintain its grip on power. At a minimum, tens of thousands of prisoners, including women, have been executed following sham trials. While the vast majority of those executed have been men, significantly less information is available about the women who have faced this inhuman punishment. Even less attention has been given to the gender-specific aspects of the death penalty in Iran.

This report examines how the death penalty in Iran uniquely affects women, with a focus on executions carried out between 2010 and 2024. The majority of these women were sentenced to death for charges related to murder or drug offences. As an attempt to estimate the number of women sentenced to death during a given period, we have also conducted a systematic search of official Iranian media from January 2022 to January 2024.

It is important to note that this report does not cover the large number of female political prisoners executed during the 1980s or women subjected to stoning or hanging for adultery in the first three decades of the Islamic Republic.

There has been limited research about the mass execution of political opponents in the 1980s. Thousands were executed in show trials during this decade, including the mass-executions of 1981 and 1988, described by the UN Special Rapporteur Javaid Rehman as crimes against humanity and genocide.¹ Women, in particular, faced harrowing fates—many subjected to rape before execution—a dark facet of history that requires deeper investigation.

The practice of stoning, though not included in this report, serves as a stark example of the gender biases entrenched in the Islamic Republic’s judicial system. Officially not practiced since the end of 2000s, it was a method disproportionately used against women accused of adultery. These women were buried up to their chests, making any attempt to escape impossible, while men, buried to the waist, often invoked defences like polygamy or temporary marriages. Such brutal practices highlight the historical and ongoing gendered disparities in Iran’s legal system.

This report seeks to shed light on the contemporary experiences of women facing the death penalty, focusing on the discriminatory laws and societal factors that perpetuate their suffering. Due to the scarcity of official data on women on death row, we rely on verified cases and systematic analysis to uncover trends and bring attention to the realities faced by these women.

¹ “Atrocity Crimes” and grave violations of human rights committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (1981–1982 and 1988): Detailed findings of Mr. Javaid Rehman, the Special Rapporteur on situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, July 2024: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/iran/20240717-SR-Iran-Findings.pdf>

SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

The lack of transparency in Iran’s judicial system poses significant challenges for obtaining reliable data. This report is based on a combination of official and unofficial sources. Official sources include announcements by Iranian media, judiciary outlets, and state-run agencies, though these cover only 26% of women’s executions between 2010 and 2024. Unofficial sources involve information verified by Iran Human Rights through eyewitnesses, families, lawyers, and other human rights organisations. Only cases corroborated by at least two independent sources are included in this report.

There is no public data on the exact number of women on death row in Iran. The number of women sentenced to death in a given time period can provide only an indirect indication on this issue. For the period between January 2022 and January 2024, a systematic review of three primary Iranian media outlets was conducted to identify women facing charges punishable by the death penalty. These data are presented in the last section of this report. The collection of information on women’s cases is particularly difficult, as many are abandoned by their families, leaving them without external advocacy and reporting. This report follows IHRNGO’s 2021 Report on Women and the Death Penalty in Iran.²

GENDER APARTHEID & DISCRIMINATORY LAWS

A lack of due process and fair trials plagues the Iranian judicial system, with confessions often obtained under torture serving as the primary method of proving guilt, regardless of gender.³ In addition, Iran’s judiciary is deeply rooted in gender apartheid, where systemic discrimination affects women’s chances of fair trials and increases their vulnerability to the death penalty. The head of the judiciary and all judges in criminal and Revolutionary Courts with the authority to issue death sentences are men, ensuring a lack of gender impartiality in the legal system. The discriminatory laws disproportionately targeting women include, but not limited to:

Right to Divorce: Article 1133 of the Civil Code of the Islamic Republic, grants the right to divorce to the man with three exceptions in Articles 1119 (where specific conditions set prior to marriage are breached), 1129 (where husband refuses or is unable to pay living expenses) and 1130 (where continuation of marriage causes hardship upon wife).⁴ However, Articles 1129 and 1130 require the woman to go to court to seek a judge to compel the husband to divorce which is not accessible to the majority of women on death row who are from deprived backgrounds. Many women remain trapped in abusive marriages, leading to desperate acts that result in death sentences.⁵

Marital Rape: Marital rape is not a crime, leaving women without legal recourse against crimes committed within their marriages. This legal vacuum perpetuates abuse and contributes to systemic inequality faced by women. In some cases, women subjected to marital rape may act in desperation, committing acts of violence against their abusers, which can result in severe punishment, including execution.

Domestic Violence and Coercive Control: The absence of effective laws to protect women against violence and coercive control leaves women in abusive relationships without any legal protection. When women act in self-defence against violent spouses, their actions are rarely viewed in the context of prolonged abuse. Instead, these women face harsh penalties, including the death penalty. The “Preserving the Dignity and Protecting Women Against Violence Bill,” which has been in legislative limbo for over a decade, underscores the systemic neglect in addressing this issue. Additionally, state reporting often uses euphemisms like “family conflict” to describe domestic abuse, further minimizing its severity and prevalence.⁶

Child Custody: According to Article 1169 of the Civil Code, after divorce, the mother has custody of the child or children until the child reaches seven years when custody transfers to the father or father’s family. This lack of custodial rights can force women to remain in abusive relationships to maintain access to their children. In cases where women act in self-defense or desperation to protect their children from abuse, these actions are often not recognised as mitigating circumstances in court, leading to harsh sentences, including the death penalty.

Inheritance Laws: Women inherit half as much as men under Iranian law. This economic disparity leaves many women financially dependent, reducing their ability to escape abusive environments or afford legal representation when facing criminal charges.

Age of Criminal Responsibility: The age of criminal responsibility for girls is 9 and for boys 15 lunar years (8.7 years for girls and 14.6 years for boys). This disparity subjects young girls to harsh sentences, including execution, for actions often taken under duress or as a result of systemic inequality.

Witness Testimony: A woman’s testimony is considered half as credible as a man’s in court. This systemic bias undermines women’s ability to defend themselves effectively, particularly in death penalty cases where testimonies are crucial to determining guilt.

Polygamy and Adultery: Men can take multiple wives and enter into temporary marriages (*sigh*eh), which they often use as a defense against accusations of adultery. Women, however, face disproportionate scrutiny and severe punishments, including the death penalty, for similar accusations.

Child Marriage: The legal age of marriage for girls is 13, but exceptions allow even younger girls to be married with court approval. Child brides are often victims of abuse and desperation, leading to cases where they commit acts of violence against abusive spouses or family members. These situations frequently result in death sentences, compounding the systemic inequality these girls face.

Immunity: In *qisas* (retribution-in-kind for murder) cases, the father and grandfather of the victim (Article 301 of the IPC) and a man who kills his wife and/or her lover in the act of adultery (Article 302) are granted immunity from *qisas*. Women in these scenarios are punished by death.⁷

These discriminatory laws collectively demonstrate how deeply ingrained gender inequality exacerbates women’s vulnerability within Iran’s judicial system, particularly in death penalty cases.

² <https://iranhr.net/en/reports/25/>

³ Thorough analysis in 2023 Annual Report on the Death Penalty: <https://iranhr.net/en/reports/37/>

⁴ Civil Code of the Islamic Republic: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1928/en/102142>

⁵ See for example: Maryam Karimi who with the help of her father, had tried everything to divorce an abusive and violent man: <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/4668/>

⁶ See for example, the case of Zahra Esmaili on page 14.

⁷ See for example, the case of Zeinab Khodamoradi: <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/4554/>

SOCIETAL FACTORS

The conditions faced by women on death row in Iran are dire, exacerbated by societal ostracization and inadequate prison facilities. Many women are abandoned by their families due to the stigma associated with their arrest and charges, leaving them without legal or emotional support. This isolation increases their vulnerability and diminishes their chances of receiving a fair trial or external advocacy. In addition, human rights groups often have fewer sources from women's prison wards, which limits their ability to organise campaigns to save the lives of women on death row.

In addition to discriminatory laws, societal factors further aggravate women's vulnerability to the death penalty. As with global statistics, poverty is the underlying factor which also encompasses other factors like education.⁸ While the law requires children to attend school until their secondary education is completed, this is not the case in practice, particularly for girls. According to official data, there was two times more illiteracy amongst women than men in Iran, with the gap beginning to shrink between 2017-2021. The illiteracy rate was reported as 9% in Iran, with the highest rate reported amongst women in the provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan and Sistan and Baluchistan (above 20% or one in five).⁹ The same applies to unemployment rates, with twice as many women as men unemployed among jobseekers. This statistic excludes housewives and women who have never entered the job market.¹⁰

Ethnic regions such as West Azerbaijan and Sistan-Baluchistan are overrepresented in the women's death penalty cases, particularly for drug-related charges. These areas are also among the top five most impoverished and deprived regions in Iran.¹¹ Furthermore, Farsi is not the mother language of many ethnic minorities in Iran. The judiciary does not provide translations or interpretations to ensure defendants understand their rights and charges, instead, they use the language difference to violate defendants' rights. The combination of these societal and institutional failures compounds the challenges faced by women accused of charges punishable by death penalty in Iran.

DEATH ROW CONDITIONS

Not all prisons in Iran have dedicated women's wards, resulting in many women on death row being transferred to more distant prisons, which complicates family visits. This is in addition to the fact that many women on death row are abandoned by their families, leaving them isolated and without support. Furthermore, there is limited information and fewer resources available about the conditions in women's prison wards.

One of the prisons where many women on death row are held is Qarchak Prison, located in Tehran province. Thanks to the efforts of women's rights defenders who were transferred there as a punitive measure, more information about the prison has come to light.

⁸ Death penalty disproportionately affects the poor, UN rights experts warn: <https://shorturl.at/t2cqO>

⁹ <https://ecoiran.com/بخش-اخبار-اقتصاد-کلان-۴۳۹۹۷/۷۹-بیسوادی-یک-پنجم-زنان-در-سه-استان-کشور>

¹⁰ <https://www.eghtesadonline.com/fa/news/843841/این-استان-۸۰٪-را-دارند>

¹¹ <https://iranopendata.org/res/get/datasets/IODS2/2023/iod538.pdf>

Prisons like Qarchak—described in IHRNGO's recent report as “hell for women and children”¹²—exemplify the inhumane conditions faced by incarcerated women. Overcrowding, unsanitary facilities, and lack of access to basic hygiene products, including menstrual supplies, are rampant. Inadequate medical care and exposure to sexual and physical abuse further degrade the dignity of these prisoners. The lack of proper infrastructure for women in facilities like Qarchak has been documented as a site of systemic abuse and neglect, reflecting the broader failures of Iran's penal system to address the specific needs of women detainees.

WOMEN EXECUTIONS

Despite numerous reports about the death penalty in the last 46 years in Iran, disaggregation of execution numbers by gender is a relatively new phenomenon in the Iranian context. It dates back to IHRNGO's first annual report on the death penalty in 2008.¹³ We encourage all organisations that have published annual or periodic reports on the death penalty before 2008 to revisit their data and disaggregate it by gender. In the following sections, details of all women executions between 2010 and 2024 are presented. It is important to emphasise that these numbers represent the minimum documented cases, and the real figures are likely much higher.

FACTS & FIGURES ABOUT WOMEN EXECUTIONS

- At least 241 women were executed between 2010- 2024
- At least 31 women were executed in 2024, the highest number in more than 15 years
- 121 (50%) of the women executed were either identified only by the first letter of their name/surname or not identified at all
- Only 63 (26%) of the executions were announced by official sources
- The lack of transparency has been increasing in the last 4 years, with an average of 12% of women's executions being announced by official media since 2021
- 114 of women executed were sentenced to qisas (retribution-in-kind) for murder
- 107 of the women executed were sentenced to death for drug-related offences
- 4 women were executed for the security-related charges of *moharebeh* (enmity against god) and *efsad-fil-arz* (corruption on earth), two of them Kurdish political prisoners and one a Jewish woman
- 9 of the women were child brides
- 3 of the child brides were also child offenders
- The charges against 16 of the women are unknown
- The execution of women took place in 27 of the 31 provinces in Iran

¹² Qarchak Prison: Hell for Women and Children: <https://iranhr.net/en/reports/39/>

¹³ Iran Human Rights 2008 Annual Report: <https://iranhr.net/en/reports/6/>

TRANSPARENCY OF WOMEN EXECUTIONS

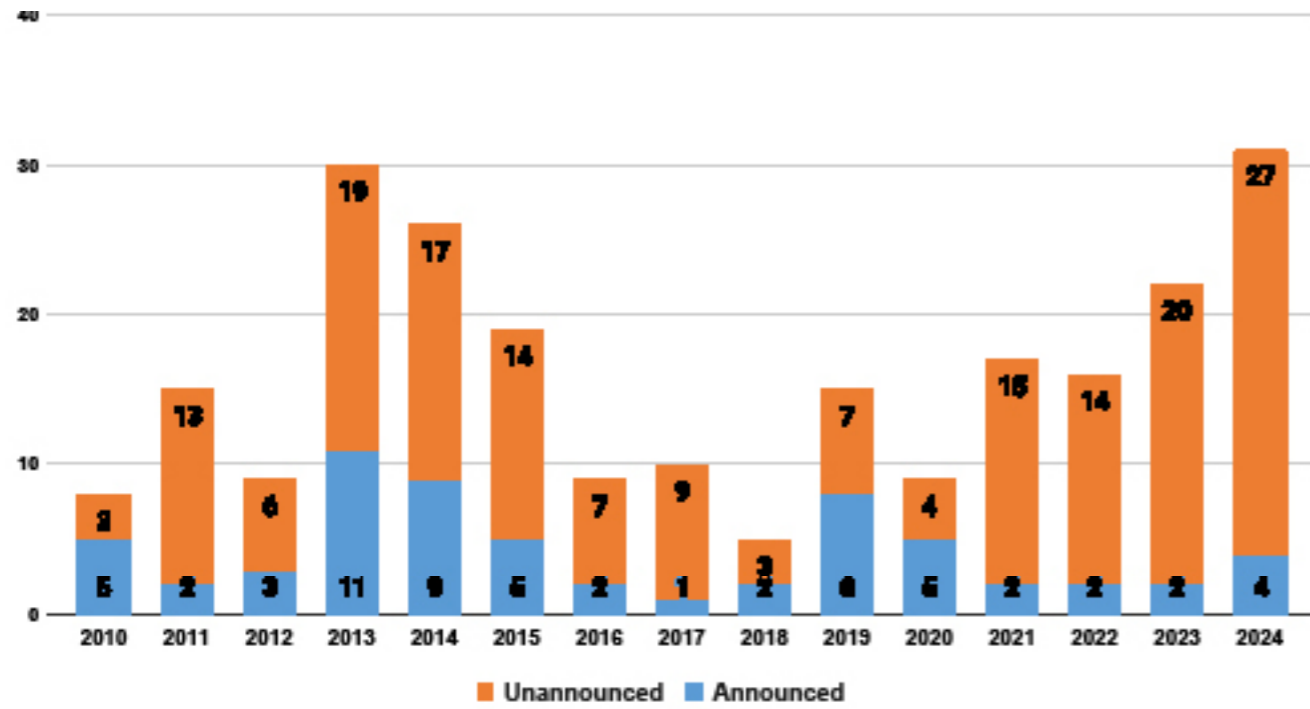


Figure 1: Of the 241 recorded executions of women between 2010 and 2024, 63 cases or 26% were announced by official sources in Iran. The proportion of announced executions has been declining since 2021, with an average of just 12% of reported executions being announced by official media. This decline is partly attributed to the secrecy surrounding drug-related executions, as official media announced only one out of the 23 cases of women executed for drug offenses during this period.

TRANSPARENCY OF WOMEN EXECUTIONS PER PROVINCE

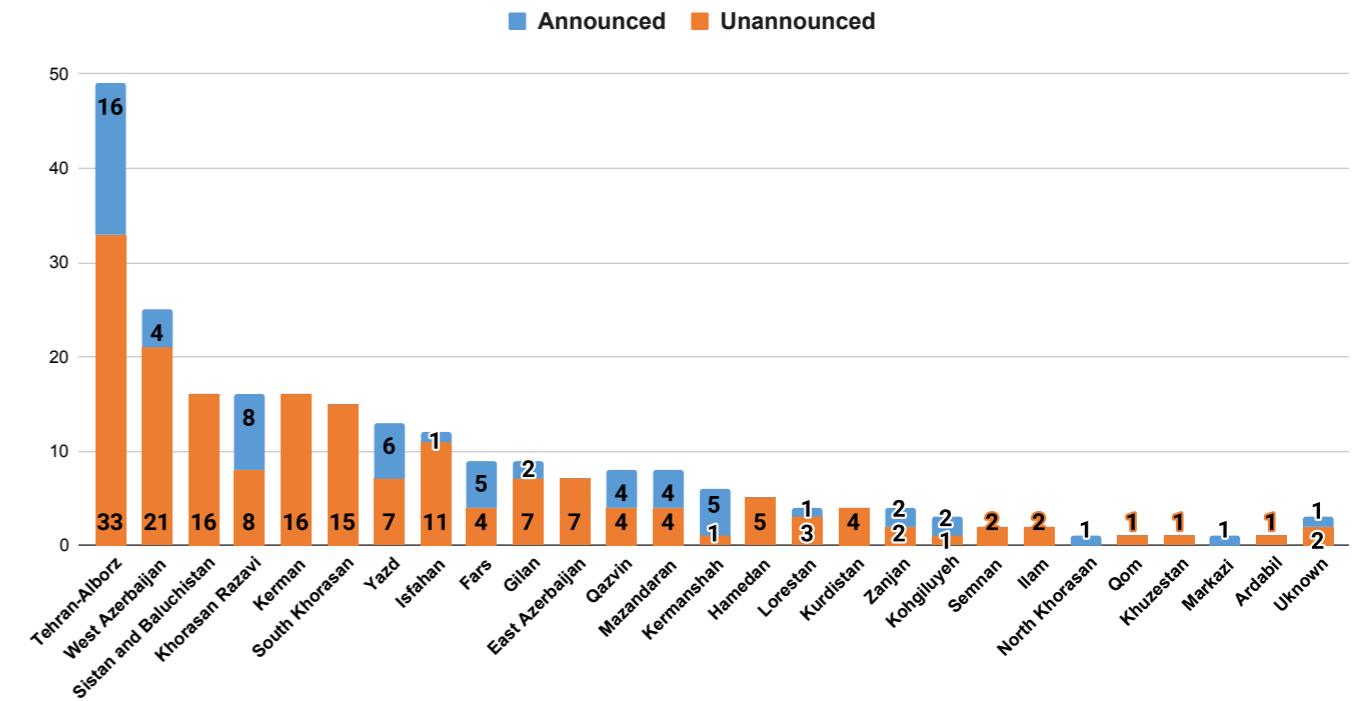


Figure 3: Women were executed in 27 of 31 provinces in Iran. While 33% of the executions in Tehran/Karaj and 50% of those in Khorasan Razavi were announced by official media, only 16% of the executions in West Azerbaijan and none of the executions in Sistan and Baluchistan, Kerman, or South Khorasan were reported. These provinces, in addition to being among the most deprived regions in Iran, are also the sites of executions of women belonging to ethnic minorities. Similarly, none of the executions in other ethnic provinces, such as Kurdistan, East Azerbaijan, and Khuzestan, were announced by official sources.

2010-2024 WOMEN EXECUTIONS

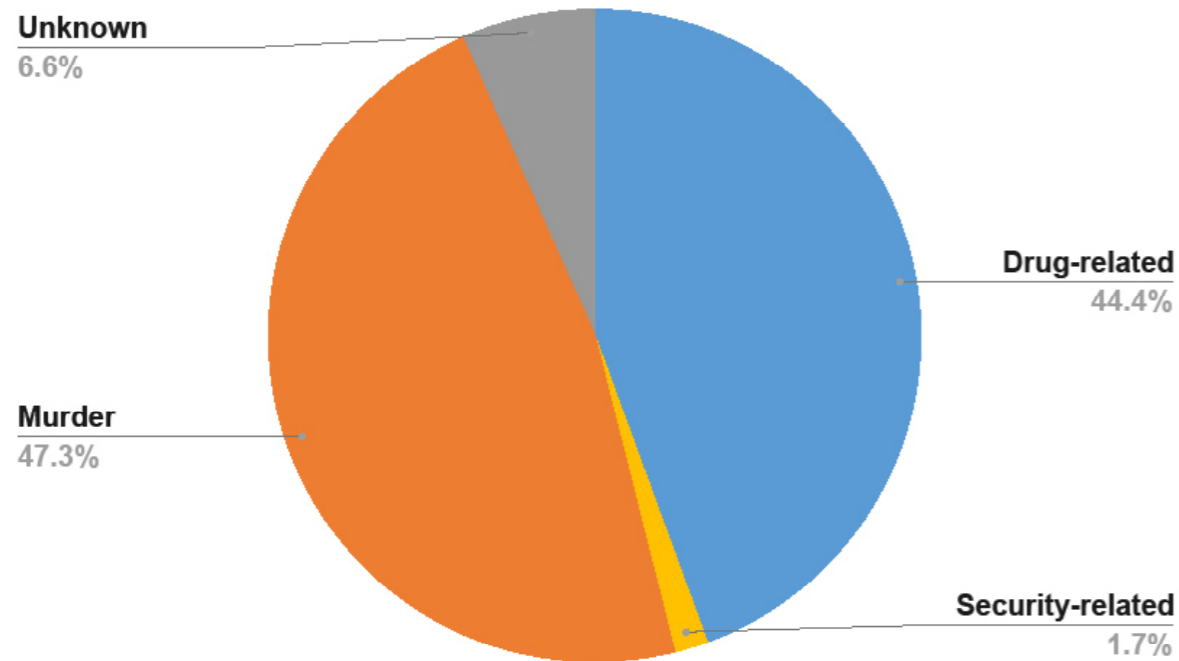


Figure 2: Murder and drug-related charges have accounted for more than 91% of all executions in the last 15 years in Iran. Charges for 6.6% of the women executed during this period remain unknown. This lack of information is largely attributed to the absence of reliable sources within women's prison wards and societal factors such as abandonment by their families, cultural stigma surrounding their crimes, and limited media or advocacy attention on women's cases.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF CHARGES

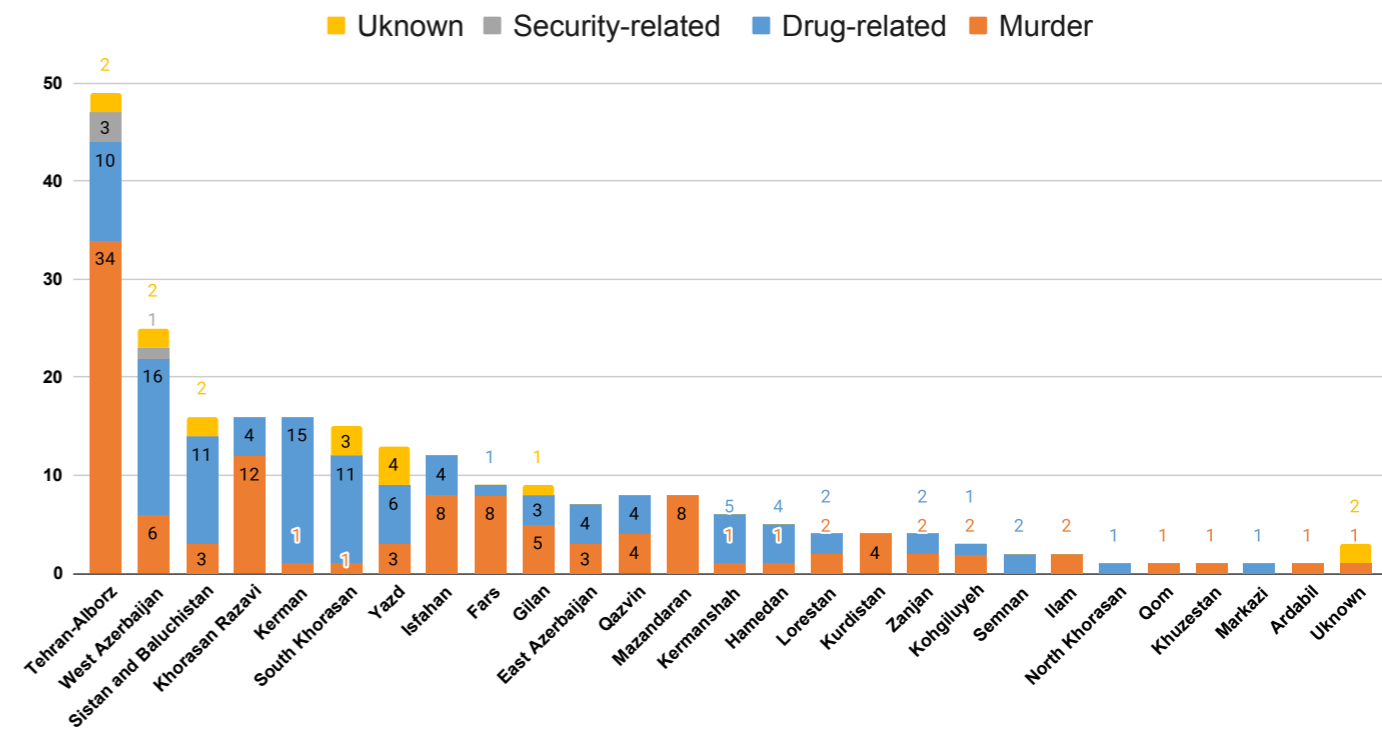


Figure 4: The highest number of women executed for murder charges occurred in Tehran/Alborz prisons (34), followed by Khorasan Razavi (12), Isfahan (8), Fars (8), and Mazandaran (8). The highest number of executions for drug-related charges were carried out in West Azerbaijan (16), Kerman (15), Sistan and Baluchistan (11), and South Khorasan (11).

MURDER EXECUTIONS

Once convicted of murder by the Criminal Court, defendants are sentenced to *qisas* (retribution-in-kind) - or an eye for an eye - per Sharia law. The Islamic Penal Code considers *qisas* to be the right of the victim's family and places the responsibility for execution in the hands of the victim's family who must choose between a retribution execution, accepting *diya* (blood money) or forgiving the defendant. As there is no legal cap on *diya*, more and more murder defendants are being executed due to the inability to pay the demanded sums.¹⁴ When execution is selected, the victim's family is not only encouraged to watch the hanging but to personally carry out the execution.

FACTS & FIGURES ABOUT MURDER EXECUTIONS

- At least 114 women were executed for murder charges between 2010- 2024
- 32% of the executions (37 cases) were reported by official sources
- Of the 114 executions, the details of 75 of the cases have been established and 39 are unknown
- Over 69% of the 75 women were charged with the murder of their husband/fiancé/ lover/temporary marriage
- 8 of the women were confirmed child brides
- 3 of the child brides were under 18 years of age at the time of committing the alleged murder (child offenders)
- 11 of the women were confirmed to have suffered from domestic violence at the hands of their husbands
- 4 women are confirmed to have suffered from mental illnesses
- 4 of the women had committed murder in self-defence against rape
- 1 of the women was an aroose-khoon-bas - a bride offered by one tribe to the opposing tribe to stop the bloodshed in conflict

¹⁴ See for example the case of Zahra Feizi: <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6971/>

WOMEN EXECUTED FOR MURDER

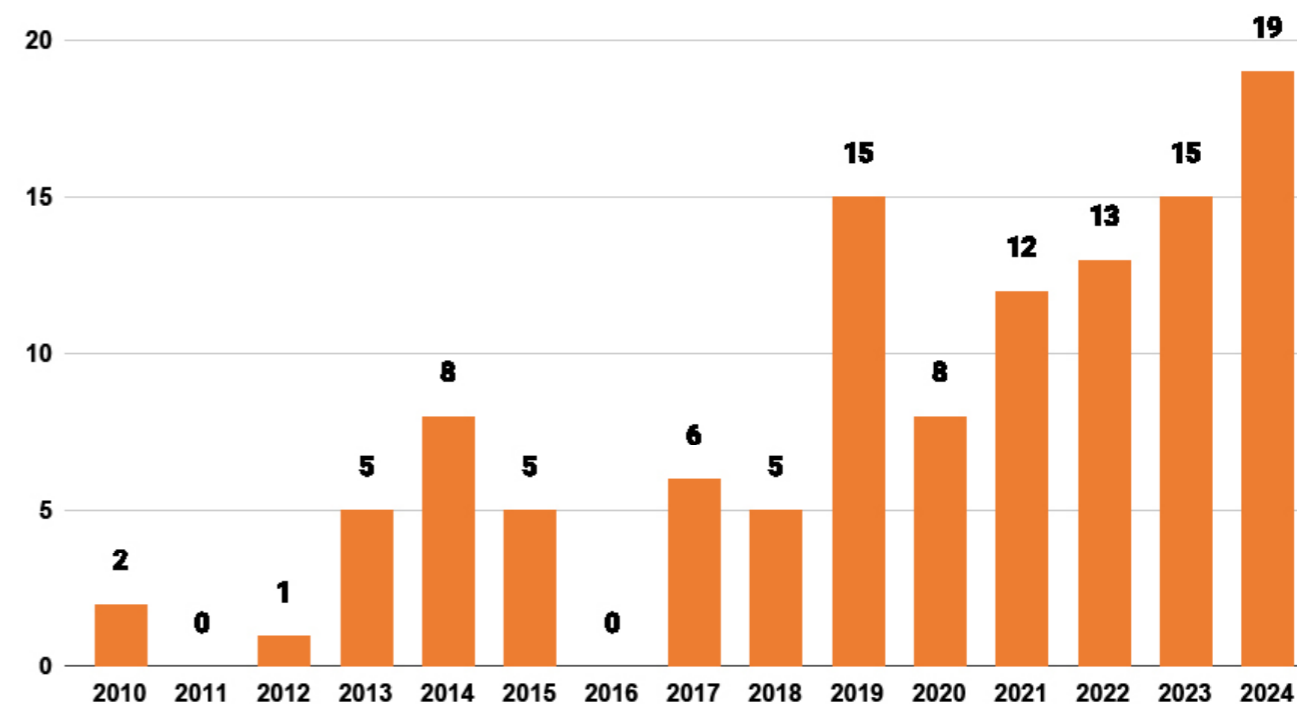


Figure 5: The execution of women for murder charges is currently at its highest since IHRNGO began systematically recording executions in Iran.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF MURDER EXECUTIONS

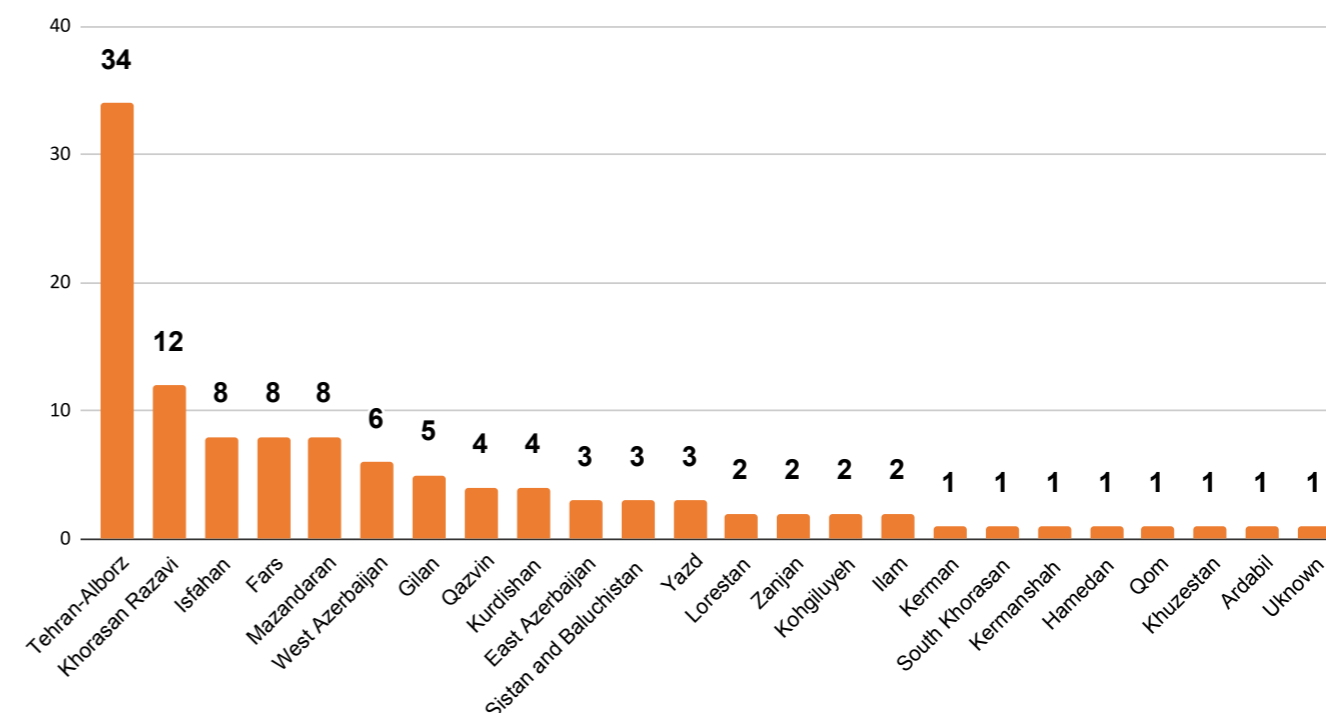


Figure 6: Women were executed for murder charges in 24 provinces. The prisons in Tehran/Alborz provinces were the site of 34 executions (30%) for murder charges, followed by Khorasan Razavi (12), Isfahan (8), Fars (8) and Mazandaran (8) provinces.

CASES

ZAHRA ESMAILI



Zahra Esmaili was forced to marry her neighbour, a powerful and married Ministry of Intelligence official after falling pregnant as a result of him raping her, according to her former cellmates. He was physically violent to her and her children, had constantly threatened and tried to kill her through strangulation, pills and would have sexual relations with different sigheh women in front of her and the children. He had also attempted to rape their daughter on multiple occasions which Zahra had been able to prevent. She had filed multiple requests for divorce and her injuries were registered with the Forensic Medical Organisation to no avail. After he set a date for her murder, Zahra and her daughter decided to take action. The alleged murrder took place onn 16 July 2017. As plaintiffs,

her children were against the execution but her husband's family insisted on *qisas* with her mother-in-law personally carrying out the execution in Rajai Shahr Prison on 19 February 2021.¹⁵ Her lawyer later revealed that Zahra had suffered from a heart attack after witnessing the group of men executed before her. Yet they still hung her lifeless body.

SAMIRA SABZIAN



Samira Sabzian was a child bride at 15 and for years, suffered physical and mental abuse at the hands of her much older alcoholic husband. Her children were 7 years and under a year old when she was arrested for the murder of her husband. To obtain the forgiveness of her husband's family, Samira had refrained from seeing her children for the ten years she spent on death row. Her final visit was the first time she saw her children who were then aged 17 and 10 years old. Despite all efforts, Samira was executed in Ghezelhesar Prison on 20 December 2023.¹⁶

LEILA GHAEMI

Leila Ghaemi was a mother who came home one day to find her husband and his friends raping her young daughter and strangled him to save her daughter. Leila was arrested and her daughter placed in state care by her husband's family who demanded retribution. Leila was sentenced to *qisas* for the murder while according to a former cellmate, the authorities were aware of the circumstances of the murder.¹⁷ She was held in Qarchak Prison for at least six years prior to her execution at Ghezelhesar Prison in a group execution with at least seven men on 2 October 2024.¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/4627/>

¹⁶ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6415/>

¹⁷ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/7220/>

¹⁸ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6968/>

DRUG-RELATED EXECUTIONS

Drug-related offences are under the jurisdiction of Revolutionary Courts. Prior to the 2017 Amendment to the Anti-Narcotics Laws, drug-related offences led to the most number of women executions in Iran. The Amendment led to three years (2018-2020) of no woman executions being recorded until it was reversed in practice in 2021. The number of women executed for drug-related offences is now at a nine-year high and set to further increase.

FACTS & FIGURES ABOUT DRUG-RELATED EXECUTIONS

- At least 107 women were executed for drug-related offences between 2010-2024
- Of those, 24 cases (22%) were announced by official sources
- Executions took place in 20 provinces
- Baluch women are overrepresented in drug-related executions
- Drug-related executions are dominated by underlying poverty issues

WOMEN EXECUTED FOR DRUG-RELATED OFFENCES

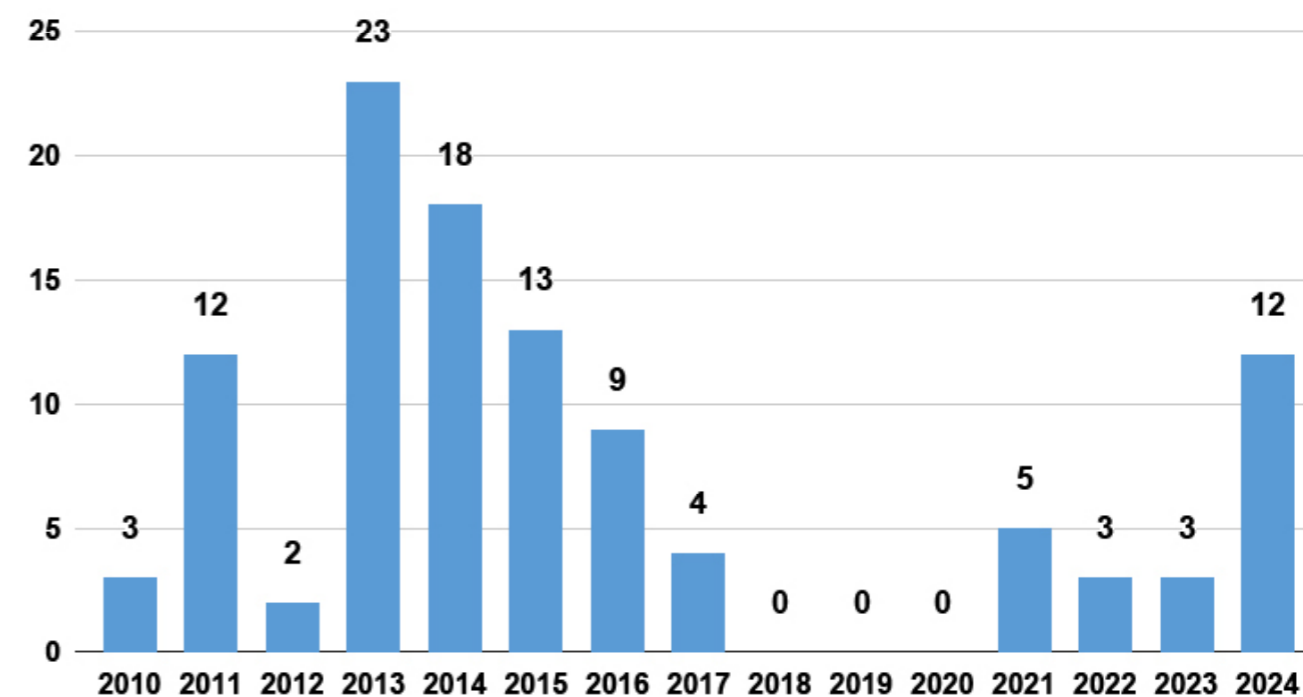


Figure 7: The execution of women for drug-related offences is currently at its highest in the last nine years. There was a sharp decline in drug-related executions after the 2017 Amendment to Anti-Narcotic Laws, with no women executed for the charges for the three years preceding the Amendment. However drug-related executions for women resumed in 2021 and is currently at its highest since 2015.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF DRUG EXECUTIONS

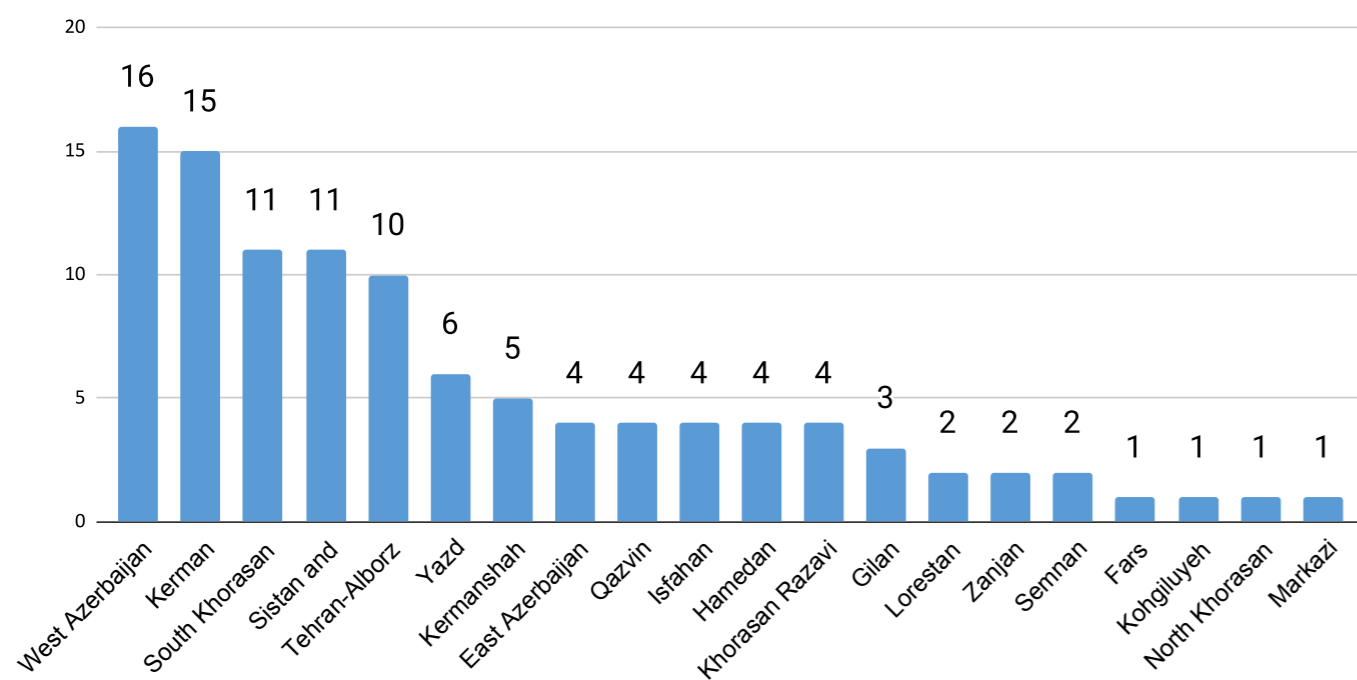


Figure 8: Drug-related executions for women were conducted in 20 provinces. The highest number of executions for drug-related charges were carried out in West Azerbaijan (16), Kerman (15), Sistan and Baluchistan (11), and South Khorasan (11). These are the provinces with high scores for poverty and illiteracy. Women executed in Sistan and Baluchistan province, and many of those executed in the prisons of Kerman and South Khorasan belong to the Baluch ethnic minority.

CASES

ZARKHATOON MAZARZEHI

Zarkhatoun Mazarzehi, a Baluch ethnic minority, was a widow trying to raise her daughter without support. She had agreed to transport raw materials for cosmetics when she was arrested at a Kerman checkpoint on 30 December 2017. Zarkhatoun vehemently denied being in possession of illegal drugs at every opportunity. She was denied access to a lawyer and sentenced to death for drug-related charges by Branch One of the Kerman Revolutionary Court in March 2022.¹⁹ Zarkhatoun was executed in Kerman Central Prison on 15 November 2023.²⁰

MARJAN HAJIZADEH

Marjan Hajizadeh was from an extremely poor family and a child bride forced to marry her husband. At 19, she was arrested for drug-related offences with her husband on a motorway in Zanjan. According to IHRNGO sources, Marjan was unaware that her husband was carrying drugs and was innocent of the charges. Yet, she was executed in Zanjan Central Prison on 11 April 2024 aged 22.²¹

¹⁹ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/5150/>

²⁰ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6314/>

²¹ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6640/>

PARVIN MOUSAVI



Parvin Mousavi, another woman from a deprived background, was her family's breadwinner while her husband and eldest son were behind bars. She was paid 1 million tomans (approx €15) to transport with two others what she was told was medicine which turned out to be 5 kilograms of morphine. She was the third defendant in the case, with the first already executed but the second released. After her first transfer for execution, Ejei (IR Head of Judiciary) "himself told her in front of all prisoners that she would be released."²² Yet, she was executed in Urmia Central Prison on 18 May 2024 at the age of 57.²³

SECURITY-RELATED EXECUTIONS

The security-related charges of *baghy* (armed rebellion), *efsad-fil-arz* (corruption on earth) and *moharebeh* (enmity against god) have been used against political opponents since the inception of the Islamic Republic. No execution of women for security-related charges was recorded in Iran from 2011 until December 2023.

In 2024, at least three female political prisoners have been sentenced to death for charges of *baghy*. Sharifeh Mohammadi, a workers rights activist in Rasht Central Prison,²⁴ Pakshsan Azizi, a Kurdish civil activist in Evin Prison²⁵ and Varisheh Moradi, a Kurdish women's rights activist in Evin Prison,²⁶ are all currently on death row.

FACTS ABOUT SECURITY-RELATED EXECUTIONS

- At least 4 women were executed for the security-related charges of *efsad-fil-arz* and *moharebeh* between 2010-2024
- Of those, 2 were reported by official sources
- Shirin Alamhooli was a Kurdish political prisoner
- Adiva Mirza Soleiman Kalimi was a Jewish political prisoner who was on death row for 29 years before being executed with Zahra Esmaili
- 3 of the women were accused of espionage

NASIM NAMAZI

Nasim Namazi was arrested around 18 months prior to her execution. Very little is known about her except that she was sentenced to death for charges of "moharebeh and *efsad-fil-arz* through collaborating with the Zionist regime to disrupt national security" by the Revolutionary Court. Nasim was executed with her three male co-defendants in Urmia Central Prison on 28 December 2023 though the Judiciary's Mizan news agency claimed they were executed a day later.²⁷

²² <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6712/>

²³ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6718/>

²⁴ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6779/>

²⁵ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6817/>

²⁶ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/7122/>

²⁷ <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6441/>

OFFICIAL MEDIA RESEARCH OF WOMEN AT RISK OF DEATH PENALTY

Due to a lack of transparency, there is no official data about the number of women on death row in Iran. There is also less information available about women on death row through unofficial sources than men on death row. In a systematic research of state news outlets over a two-year period (January 2022-January 2024), IHRNGO identified 47 women arrested or indicted for death penalty charges. Some of the women were already sentenced to death. It is important to note that the following information including facts of the case and charges are those reported by Islamic Republic officials and have not been verified through independent sources. According to IHRNGO research, facts are often changed in such reports to demonise women and portray them as perpetrators. The statistics presented here do not include the women death penalty cases reported by human rights organisations in this period.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS:

- 47 women at risk were identified through official reports
- Of those, 8 were sentenced to death (6 for murder and 2 adultery), 6 were being tried at the time of the report (5 murder and one adultery), 10 were indicted for death penalty charges (all for murder) and 23 were arrested for death penalty charges (21 for murder and 2 drug charges)
- The charges against 42 women were murder or accessory to murder, 3 adultery and 2 drug-related
- 29 of the women (69% of those with murder charges) were charged with or facing charges of murdering their husband/fiancé/lover/temporary marriage partner
- 11 women (26% of those with murder charges) suffered domestic violence
- One woman was a child bride
- 31 of the reported cases (66%) were in Tehran/Alborz provinces
- Only 2 women were identified by name
- One woman's confessions were aired on television prior to legal proceedings, violating her right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF DEATH PENALTY CASE

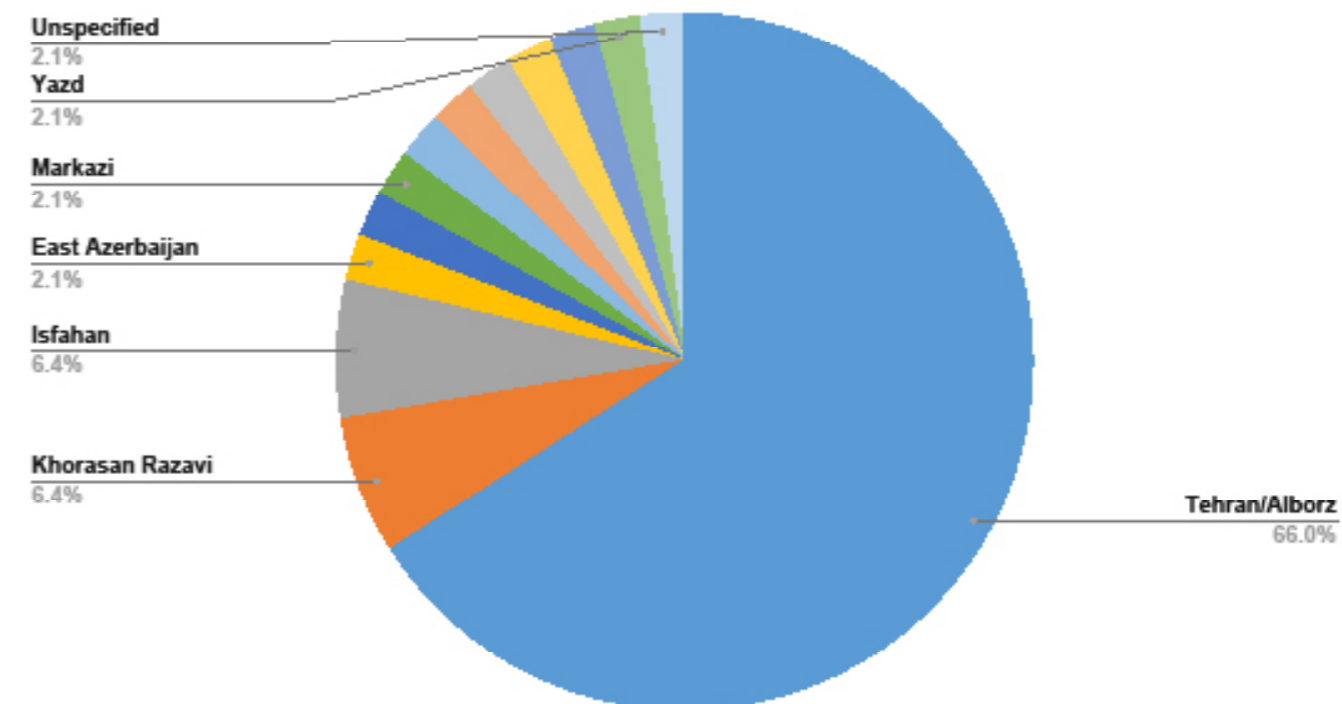


Figure 9

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF EXECUTIONS 2010-2024

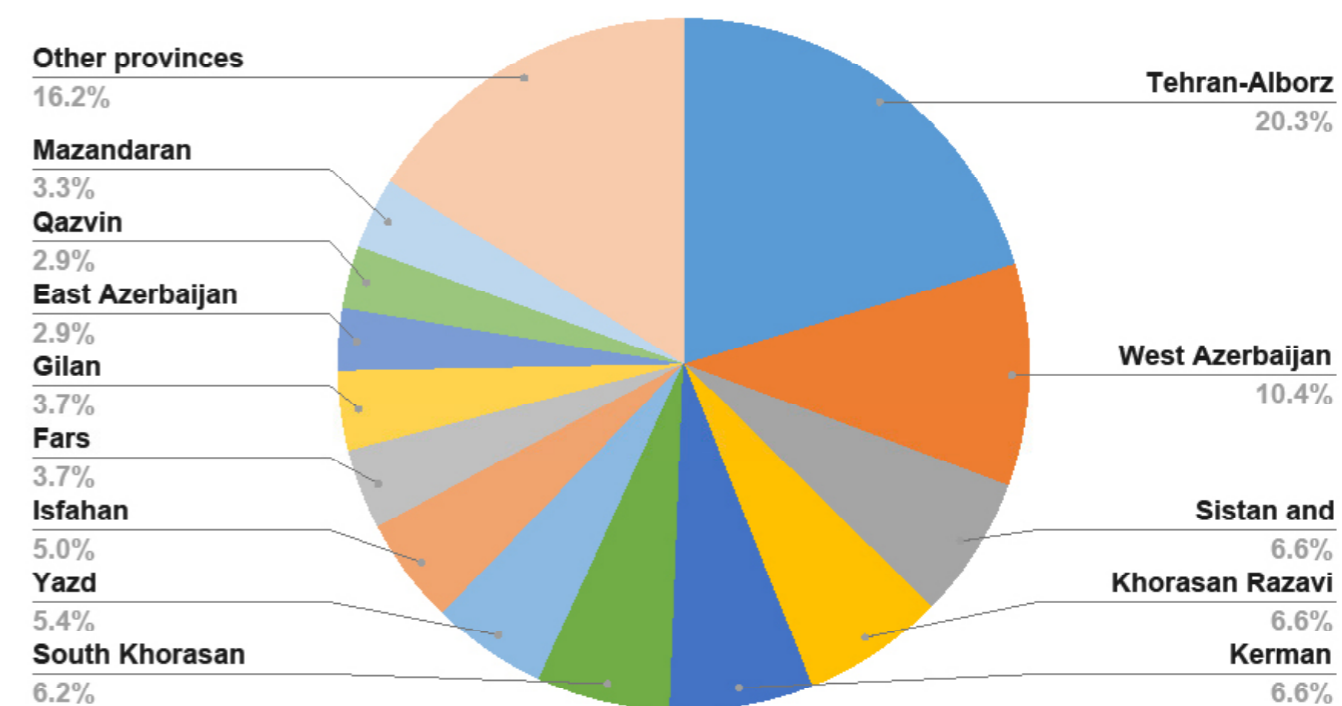


Figure 10

The disproportionate concentration of death penalty cases reported in Tehran and larger cities, with 66% of cases originating from Tehran/Alborz alone (Figure 9), highlights an apparent bias in media coverage. This is striking when compared to the broader distribution of executions across Iran. Between 2010-2024, executions of women took place in at least 27 of Iran's 31 provinces, about 20% of them in Tehran/Alborz (Figure 10), demonstrating that women face the death penalty in both urban and rural areas. However, media focus on Tehran suggests an underreporting of cases from smaller or more remote regions. This regional disparity indicates that the true number of women sentenced to death across the country is likely much higher than reported.

DEATH PENALTY CHARGES REPORTED BY OFFICIAL SOURCES

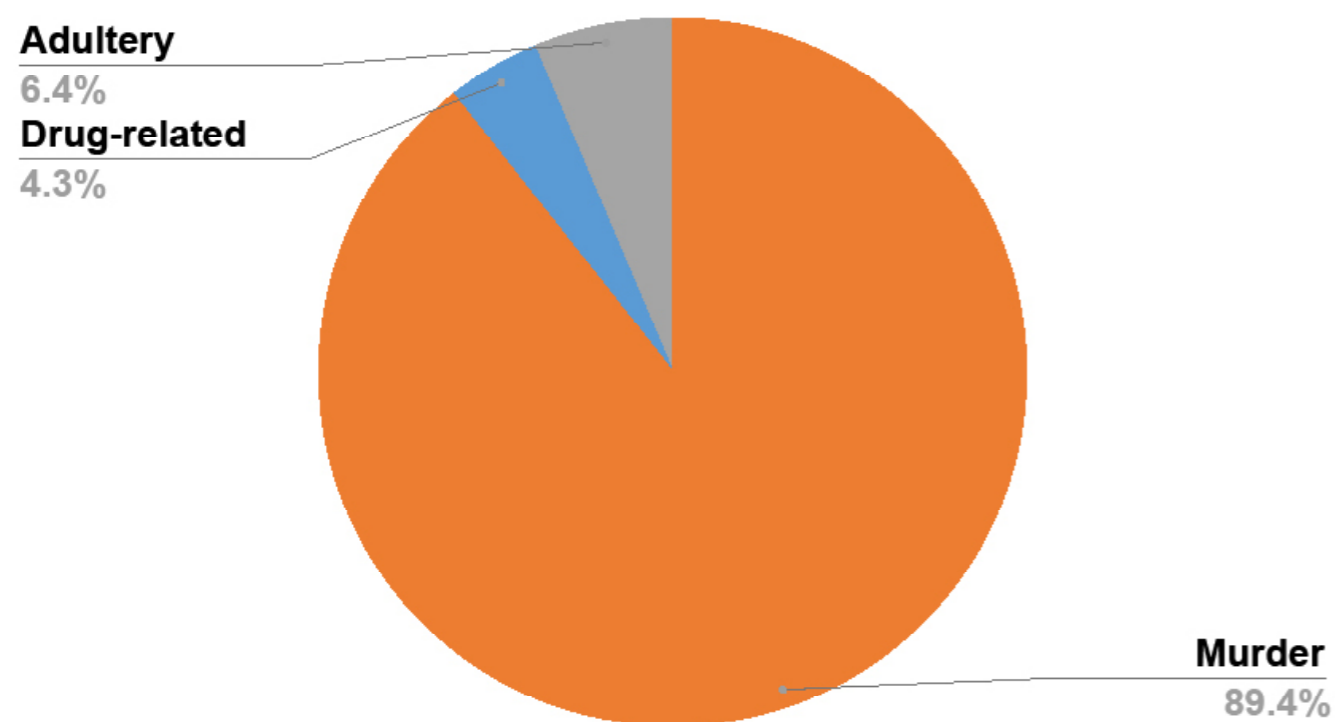


Figure 11

Additionally, nearly all reported cases involved murder charges, despite data showing that almost half of women executed between 2010-2024 were convicted of drug-related offences. This discrepancy suggests that drug-related death sentences for women are significantly underreported. Given the higher level of stigma and lack of familial support associated with drug offences, it is plausible that these cases are less likely to be publicised or pursued through official channels.

The gap between reported death penalty cases and recorded executions underscores systemic opacity in Iran's judicial system. In cases that are reported, names and the facts of the case are changed, making it difficult to find and support the women. The information reported by state media only reveals a fragment of the true picture. Consequently, the number of women at risk of the death penalty between 2022 and 2024 is certainly higher than the 47 reported cases. The underreporting of drug-related cases, in particular, calls for a more comprehensive approach to documenting and addressing these injustices.

Finally, the cases reported in official media confirm many of the gendered aspects of the death penalty highlighted in this report. More than 69% of the death penalty cases against women involved murdering their male partner, reflective of the aforementioned legal and societal biases. However, the likely contributing factors of domestic violence and the impact of discriminatory laws are not adequately addressed in these reports and codewords are used to conceal the violations inflicted on women. This omission can be attributed to the judicial system's refusal to acknowledge these factors as mitigating circumstances, which serves to perpetuate the perception of women as perpetrators rather than victims of systemic inequality and gender apartheid.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

These recommendations are directed towards the international community and all countries with diplomatic relations with the Islamic republic:

Equal Age of Majority and Criminal Responsibility: Urge Iranian authorities to set 18 years as the age of majority and harmonise the age of criminal responsibility for boys and girls, ensuring compliance with international standards.

Abolish Discriminatory Laws: Call on Iranian authorities to repeal laws that perpetuate gender discrimination, including unequal diya (blood money) and inheritance rights.

Criminalise Marital Rape and Address Domestic Violence: Urge Iranian authorities to introduce and enforce robust legal protections against marital rape and domestic violence, including laws that recognise these factors as mitigating circumstances in criminal cases.

Ban Child Marriage: Call on Iranian authorities to establish and enforce a minimum marriage age of 18 for both sexes without exceptions, criminalising child marriages.

Ensure Fair Trials: Call on Iranian authorities to guarantee due process by ending the use of confessions obtained under torture as evidence and by providing access to independent legal counsel for all defendants at all stages including the interrogation phase for security-related defendants.

Enhance Transparency: Call on the Iranian judiciary to publicly report all executions, including comprehensive details of the charges and mitigating factors considered in sentencing.

Support Networks for Women on Death Row: Establish mechanisms to provide financial, legal, and psychological support for women on death row, particularly those abandoned by their families.

Promote Awareness of Women's Rights: Collaborate with international and local NGOs to raise awareness about the gendered impact of the death penalty and discriminatory laws in Iran.

Document and Publicise Cases: Encourage international organisations and human rights defenders to

document cases of women on death row, with a focus on unreported or underreported cases such as those involving drug-related offences.

Engage with Global Advocacy Networks: Collaborate closer with Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO), World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, and similar organisations to pressure Iranian authorities to implement legal reforms.

Support Local Women Human Rights Defenders: Provide resources and protections for women human rights defenders who are at risk for their advocacy efforts.

Gender Sensitivity Training: Support human rights organisations to provide gender sensitivity and human rights training for civil society activists in Iran and diaspora.

About Iran Human Rights

Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) is a non-profit, politically independent organisation with members and supporters inside and outside Iran. The organisation started its work in 2005 and is registered as an international non-governmental organisation based in Oslo, Norway. Abolition of the death penalty in Iran as a step towards the universal abolition of the death penalty is the main goal of Iran Human Rights.

IHRNGO has a broad network among the abolitionist movement inside and outside Iran. Besides supporters and collaborators among the civil society activists in the central parts of Iran, Iran Human Rights also has a wide network in the ethnic regions which are often not the focus of the mainstream media. In addition, Iran Human Rights has a network of reporters within many Iranian prisons, and among Iranian lawyers and the families of death-row prisoners. This enables Iran Human Rights to be the primary source of many execution reports in different Iranian prisons, as well as of reliable reports on the atrocities committed by the Islamic Republic in the nationwide protests. Iran Human Rights has been a member of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP) since 2009 and a member of its Steering Committee since 2011. Iran Human Rights' close collaboration with abolitionist networks inside and outside Iran makes it a unique actor in the struggle against the death penalty in the country with the highest number of executions per capita.

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