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Saudi government: Rape victim had illegal affair

- Story Highlights
- Officials: Woman and her companion were discovered in a "compromising situation"
- Officials: Victim and her companion caused the crime to take place
- Woman convicted of violating law by not having a male guardian with her
- Court more than doubled woman's original sentence of 90 lashes to 200


(CNN) -- Under fire for its treatment of a rape victim, the Saudi Arabian government on Saturday said that the woman had an "illegitimate relationship" with a man who was not her husband, and that both "exposed themselves to this heinous crime."

In a statement, the kingdom's Ministry of Justice said it was "forced ... to clarify the role of the woman and the man who was accompanying her in this case and its circumstances" because of what it claimed were false media reports.

The 19-year-old woman was initially sentenced to 90 lashes for meeting with the man -- described by her attorney as a former friend from whom she was retrieving a photograph.

The seven attackers, who abducted the pair and raped her, received sentences ranging from 10 months to five years in jail.

When the woman appealed her sentence, a [Saudi](#) court more than doubled it. The Qatif General Court also increased the sentence for the rapists, to two to nine years in prison.

The case has drawn international attention, provoked outrage in the West and cast light on the treatment of women under Saudi Arabia's strict Islamic law.  [Watch why official reaction has been muted »](#)

The ministry has previously said the woman's punishment was increased after further evidence came to light against her when she appealed her original sentence.

She was convicted of violating the kingdom's Islamic law by not having a male guardian with her.

The attacks took place in March 2006, when the woman was 18 and engaged to be married.

The government statement said that according to the woman's signed confession, she called a man on her cell phone and "asked to be with him alone, illegally." The two met at a marketplace, then rode in the man's car to "a dark area of the beach, and stayed there for some time," the ministry said.

The group of attackers "saw her in a compromising situation, her clothes on the ground," the statement said. "The men at this point assaulted her and the man with her."

The woman knew that being alone with a man who wasn't her husband was illegal, "and therefore she violated the covenant of marriage." However, the woman was engaged -- not married -- at the time.

After the incident, the woman and the man did not come forward about the assaults or press charges until someone contacted the woman's husband "telling him what happened, and about his wife's affair and adultery," the ministry said. "She then confessed ... the husband therefore came forward to the police and formally complained nearly three months after the incident."

The woman and her companion "exposed themselves to this heinous crime, causing the crime to take place because of their violations of the pure Sharia ruling" -- the country's strict Islamic law.

The case was handled through regular court procedures, and the woman, her male companion and the attackers all agreed in court to the initial sentences, the government said in a previous statement.

The woman's husband told CNN earlier this week that "from the onset, my wife was dealt with as a guilty person who committed a crime. She was not given any chance to prove her innocence or describe how she was a victim of multiple brutal rapes."

Asked about the ministry's statement Saturday, the husband declined to comment publicly.

The woman's attorney, Abdulrahman al-Lahim, has said his law license was revoked to punish him for speaking to the Saudi-controlled news media about the case. Attempts by CNN to reach al-Lahim Saturday were unsuccessful.

Al-Lahim previously said the woman met the man at a shopping mall in order to retrieve an innocuous photograph from him. He has also said the man was blackmailing his client and forced her to have the meeting to save her engagement and avoid embarrassment.

The woman's husband did not find out about the crime until his friends told him the rapists were bragging about it in the Qatif community, The Arab News reported in its Sunday editions, citing a source close to the case.

Earlier this week, the woman's husband blamed his wife's treatment on a judge with a personal vendetta. Al-Lahim told CNN that the head judge in the three-judge panel that considered the case was opposed to his client from the beginning. Both said they believe the man forced the woman to meet with him, but said she was not allowed to present that in court.

The government has said that al-Lahim was punished by a disciplinary committee for exhibiting "disrespectful behavior toward the court."

Under Saudi law, women are subject to numerous restrictions, including a strict dress code, a prohibition against driving and a requirement that they get a man's permission to travel or have surgery.


Al-Lahim has been ordered to attend a disciplinary hearing next month at the ministry, where he faces a possible three-year suspension and disbarment, according to Human Rights Watch.

CNN's Saad Abedine, Mohammed Jamjoom and Octavia Nasr contributed to this report.

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