

## **Tajik Women Turn to Crime**

**Author:** [IWPR](#)

Their lives shattered by civil war, more and more women in Tajikistan

By Lidia Isamova in Dushanbe (RCA no. 48, 19-Apr-01)

Female crime rates have soared in Tajikistan as women left destitute by

almost five years of civil war flock to enlist in the booming drugs

trade.

According to the Tajik Narcotics Control Agency (NCA), of the 166 drug dealers arrested in 2000, more than a third were women.

Once enlisted, they find it almost impossible to quit. Those who do risk being betrayed to the Tajik authorities or murdered by Afghan drug dealers.

The dealers are notoriously ruthless. If payment for their goods is late,

they take girls hostage. The Tajik security ministry in the Shuroabad area says 18 women and girls were kidnapped at the border and taken into Afghanistan over the last year. Most of them were drug couriers who defaulted on payment.

The Afghan dealers take full advantage of a woman's desire to provide

for her family. Promising easy money, they assure them the law would

never treat them as sternly as men. Such is their ignorance, the women even bring in their children believing that underage persons can escape prosecution.

According to the NCA, a 13-year-old Tajik boy was detained in Uzbekistan in 1999 carrying 10 grams of raw opium and sentenced to 6 years in prison with no right to amnesty. The agency reported that 85 Tajik women have been caught outside Tajikistan carrying narcotics.

They often resort to desperate measures to avoid detection. Two months ago, a Tajik woman detained at Moscow's Domodedovo airport made her son swallow 100 grams of heroin in capsules. Another put 200 grams of the drug in a blanket wrapped around her nine-month-old baby daughter.

Some female traffickers have died in transit when narcotics capsules broke inside their bodies. This year alone customs officers and doctors have saved the lives of 12 who've sought to conceal drugs in this way.

Women are increasingly involved in other forms of crime. Interior ministry figures revealed to IWPR showed that the number of them charged with criminal offences in 2000 numbered 1,112, an increase of 8 per cent over the previous year.

The civil war left thousands of women without fathers, husbands or sons

to provide for them. Impoverished and vulnerable, many resort to crime because they have few other options.

There have been instances when young women murder their new-born

babies and dump their bodies in garbage cans. According to the interior

ministry, there were 25 cases of this kind in Dushanbe alone in 2000.

Statistics also show that in 2000 the number of abandoned babies tripled compared with 1999.

Prostitution also has proliferated in the wake of the civil war.

Housewives and very young girls are driven to the trade by poverty and

find a ready market in the big city. Police found 16 brothels in 1999 and estimated the number is now 100 or more. Among their ready customers are members of the Russian mobile infantry unit deployed in the city.

Prostitutes can earn up to 50 US dollars a night. Homeless girls are

happy to exchange sex for a night's board and lodging. Although there are few accurate statistics authorities believe the average age of prostitutes has fallen

sharply, sometimes to 11 or 12.

Most of them are orphans or children sold by their parents. Some

families consider themselves lucky to trade a girl child for a sack of

flour. More frequently, girls are simply kidnapped and raped.

But it's not just the poor who are being driven into crime. There have been cases recently of affluent women murdering their husbands and lovers. Typically, they hire a contract killer - the most notorious

recent case being the murder of deputy chairman of the Tajik customs committee, Ali Imomnazarov. He was killed by a car bomb planted on behalf of his spouse. Fifteen similar contract killings were recorded nationwide in 2000.

Lidia Isamova is a regular IWPR contributor

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