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Jordan's only female pathologist champions cause of abuse victims

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN - After over two years on the job, the Kingdom's first and only female pathologist Isra Tawalbeh said her vocation had deepened her convictions and strengthened her character.

Tawalbeh, 33, was appointed as the first female resident forensic medicine specialist at the National Institute of Forensic Medicine (NIFM) in January 2003.

"I feel that my experience in this field has deepened and I have gained a lot of confidence since my first day at work," Tawalbeh told The Jordan Times in a recent interview.

Since her appointment at the NIFM, Tawalbeh has performed over 500 autopsies, visited dozens of crime scenes and attended two executions.

Tawalbeh believes that her field experience has reflected positively on her work with victims of domestic violence, who she tries to emotionally empower because "all human beings are born with guaranteed rights."

"No one has the right to strip someone else's rights and dignity and I inform abuse victims who come to me to speak up for their rights," Tawalbeh stressed.

"I attend their court sessions until I know the conclusion of each case and I try to help the victims in any way possible."

Tawalbeh said she decided to become a pathologist after witnessing repeated cases of domestic violence while working at Al Bashir Hospital emergency section as a general practitioner.

Momen Hadidi, head of the NIFM, said he had noticed a marked improvement in Tawalbeh's medical performance since she started working at the institute.

"Isra is a fighter and has shown a lot of professional improvement since she started working with us," Hadidi told The Jordan Times.

The department has been receiving positive feedback from officials at crime scenes that Tawalbeh visited and courts where she is summoned to testify as an expert, he added.

"There is a heightened sense of comfort and trust among domestic violence victims because a woman is examining them. Many ask for her when they visit our institute," added Hadidi, who was instrumental in Tawalbeh's appointment at the NIFM.

Tawalbeh earned her general practitioner's degree from a Libyan university in 1998. She worked at several medical facilities, including Jordan Hospital, Fuheis Medical Centre and Al Bashir Hospital before joining the institute.

Tawalbeh hails from an erudite family. Three of her siblings are doctors and the fourth is an engineer.

"I draw my strength from my family, especially my husband, who supports me always because he wants to see me succeed in something I love to do and fight for in my life," she explained.