

Speaker: *Ronen Shehman*

Presentation title: Let's talk about sex: The Influence of Judges' Gender and Age on the Verdicts of Sexual Offence Cases

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This study seeks to systematically examine whether judges' identity— in terms of gender and age — is linked to their verdicts in sexual crime cases. We hypothesized that the presence of a female judge in panels of sex crime cases would increase conviction rates. This was expected due to women's affinity with the issue in question and their desire to benefit their social group. In addition, we also hypothesized that age would also be linked to conviction rates such that younger judges would be more likely to convict compared with their older peers. This was expected due to changing social norms regarding sexual consent and the growing normative severity of sex crimes. To test these hypotheses, we collected data from unanimous verdicts in cases of sex crimes in Israel from the last 20 years, excluding cases with male victims ($n = 367$). While initial analysis indicated that a panel of three female judges tends to convict more than other panels, this effect disappeared when judges' age was added to the model. With respect to age, we found, contrary to our hypothesis, that older age of the senior judge in the panel was associated with a greater likelihood of conviction. The findings demonstrate the importance of conducting empirical research on the connections between judge identity and convictions as the results contrast with latent intuitions and theories we have about inter-generational change in the context of sex offences.