Criminality and Gender: An Investigative Study of Female Offenders in Rivers State, Nigeria

Alfred S. Ekpeyong, PhD & Palmo Yenigha
[1]Department of Sociology, Faculty Social Science, Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Bayelsa State.
[2]Department of Sociology, Faculty Social Science, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
Email: alfny93@yahoo.com

Abstract

Women criminality has been on increase in the last decade, which was hitherto not so in the study of crime. Prior studies have focused more on criminality of men with little or no attention being made to examine the patterns, trend, and control of women criminality, especially in Rivers State, Nigeria, where there has been increase in crime and criminality in the recent past. This study, therefore, investigates and analyzes the patterns, trend and control of women criminality in Rivers State. Masculinity and Opportunity theories provided the framework. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The four correctional centers in Rivers State were purposively selected: A total of 222 respondents were drawn and randomly selected for proportional administration of questionnaire using Yamane's (1967) formula. Eight key informant interviews were also conducted among correctional centre officers including one judge, one magistrate and two lawyers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data were content-analyzed. Most of the offences committed before incarceration were armed robbery, attempted murder and domestic violence, drug trafficking, manslaughter, murder, assault, house and store breaking, theft/stealing, human trafficking, drug, forgery related and other crimes. The causes of their crimes were associated with greed, poverty and unemployment; these were significantly related to the crimes committed by women inmates. Findings on the current control measures for crime in the correctional centers revealed that it started with apprehension, prosecution and imprisonment (76%). Increasing rate of women criminality was associated with socioeconomic and societal structural conditions. The study recommends among others that there is need to address the fundamentals of gender equality in employment, while also promoting women empowerment. It also recommended that the criminal justice officials should not be lenient in the administration of criminal justice. By so doing, women criminality would be drastically reduced.

Keywords: Crime, criminality, deviant behavior, men & women.

Introduction

Women involvement in crime is increasing in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. Unfortunately, women criminality, until recently used to attract little concern. This was because society was greatly dominated by men. Thus, there was little or no room for women to compete with men. Therefore, women criminality was not considered problematic (Suleiman, et al, 2016). Even though women criminality has been acknowledged, as far back as the fourteenth century, few women who were convicted of petty theft/stealing, pick pocketing and prostitution as well as few incidences of women who murdered their lovers or husbands in defiance of the patriarchal society (Campaniello & Gavrilova, 2018), it constituted an insignificant fraction of recorded crimes. Women, it was observed, until recently, performed less visible criminal roles such as assisting their male partners by serving as watch dogs, or baits to entice victims (Dehart, 2018; Brennan *et al*, 2010).

In most traditional Nigerian societies, women crimes were not often serious as to call for formal action. Informal control mechanisms were therefore employed to dispose of such offenses (Ameh, 2013). Also, as in many parts of the world, and as a result of the low crime rate of

women, criminologists focused their attention on male criminality (Dehart, 2018). However, since the 1970s, there has been considerable concern in several countries about the involvement of women in crime (Ameh, 2013; Bowles *et al*, 2012; Brennan *et al*, 2010). Recently, women in Nigeria have been getting involved in crimes that used to be called 'male crime'. Like their women counterparts in developed countries, Nigerian women are being arrested, tried, and found guilty of such crimes as murder, grievous harm and wounding, assaults, armed-robbery, drug trafficking, child abandonment, child stealing and so on (Okafor, & Uzoh, 2019; Ozuru & Ogunwande, 2020).

Prison records show the percentages of female inmate population in all Nigerian prisons as follows: 2.2 percent in 1975; 2.7 percent in 1976; 2.9 percent in 1977; 3.4 percent in 1978; 3.6 percent in 1979; and 3.7 per cent in 1980 (Ozuru & Ogunwande, 2020). Although the proportion of Nigerian women in the criminal population is quite small compared with men, this small proportion still surprises ordinary Nigerians as there is the belief that women are naturally incapable of engaging in any serious criminal activity (Ozuru & Ogunwande, 2020).

A recent and serious dimension in women criminality in Nigeria is the involvement of women in violent crimes such as murder, armed robbery and kidnapping. Also, there are worrisome reported cases of drug trafficking across several national borders. It has been frequently reported in the mass media that the number of Nigerians (males and females) arrested and convicted abroad for criminal activities especially drug trafficking is on the high increase. Women criminals employ unusual methods to conceal their crimes. Women have been found using their private and reproductive organs to smuggle hard drugs from one country to another. Some have even gone to the extent of using dead babies as containers for illicit drugs (Anyogu, 2013). Some women drug traffickers have been caught concealing drugs in hair attachments, hem of dresses, raw meat, lady shoes with high heel and loaves of bread. Some women have also been reported of stuffing fresh fish with cocaine before it is smoked while some swallow the drugs while in transit.

Crime in Nigeria used to be considered a gender issue, but nowadays, women no longer play a secondary role. They participate in activities like men to earn a living or control their families, especially when raising a family. Because meeting up family life goals is difficult to achieve in contemporary societies, criminal tendencies have become crucial in women's circles. In spite of the preceding trend, the issue of rising women crime has been an ignored phenomenon, resulting in the lack of theoretical data on female crime (Mohammed *et al*, 2014). In social psychology, female criminal behavior is accompanied by changes in roles (DeHart, 2014).

Furthermore, historical attention to "crime and female crime" began with the consequences of Freda Adler, Rita J. Simon, Smart and Leonard, Heidensohn and Morris (DeHart & Moran, 2015). These texts share a series of common concerns: first, the increasing visibility of women in criminology; second, to address the relationship between women and crime, not only as criminals, but as victims; third, to understand crime as a male-dominated activity. It is not the result of gender differences, but the product of gender differences (Oluwadare, 2011). On the other hand, feminist criminologists also try to explain the nature of female crime from their perspective. Although, many of the early texts tend to treat women and crime as an independent and separable topic in criminology, this study fundamentally carries out a comprehensive and holistic review of female crime theories to identity; understand the type, pattern and trend of increasing women criminality in Rivers State.

Research Questions

In line with the focus of this study, the following research questions have been posed;

    i.   What crimes do women commit?

    ii.   What are the factors responsible for women criminality?

   iii.   Are there specific factors that were associated with the crime perpetrated by the women inmates?

   iv.   How can women criminality be controlled/prevented?

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the pattern and trend of women criminality. The specific objectives are;

    i.   To understand the crimes that women commit.

    ii.   To determine the factors that are responsible for women criminality.

   iii.   To examine the specific causes of crime perpetrated by female victims before incarceration.

   iv.   To suggest the ways in which women criminality can be controlled/prevented.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework which this study subscribes to is the masculinity theory by Freda Adler's 1975. The famous criminologist Freda Adler's book "Sisters in Crime: The Rise of a new female criminal", published in 1975, helped develop the theory of masculinity. The central theme of this theory is that criminality of women is beginning to change in both quantity and quality. This is not due to the change in the nature of women, but rather because the opportunities for women to commit crimes have increased.

In fact, Adler's masculinity theory is a new interpretation of masculinity complex in the field of sociological theory. It comes from Sigmund Frued's "penis envy" theory, which opines that "women rebel because they are subordinate to men in society." According to Freud's (cited in Mohammed *et al*, 2014) theory, women who cannot "adapt" to their absence and desire penis in the culturally prescribed manner of submissive motherhood and sexual performance, try to gain symbolic masculinity by actively resisting their "natural" female roles.

Klein stated, "She is aggressive and rebellious, and her pursuit of achievement is an expression of her desire for the penis" (Mohammed *et al*, 2014). They engage in behaviors (traditional and criminal) that they consider to symbolize masculinity to compensate for their lack of anatomical signs of masculinity. They deny their female role and femininity, and identify with male role and masculinity. In short, they "strive to be a man" (Klein, cited in Mohammed *et al*, 2014). Among the three major traditions of masculinity theory, the first was developed by Cesare Lombroso, a well-known criminologist and father of biological teachings, who noted that biologically speaking, crime is mainly a male-dominated phenomenon, and male characteristics are the culprit of these crimes (Harrington & Nee, 2005: 03).

Regarding the internal physicochemical characteristics, women are more conservative and play a neutral role, which is why the crime rate is lower than that of men (Lombroso & Ferraro, 1895). According to Lombroso (cited in Mohammed, et al, 2014), delinquent women have a "male skull", excessive body hair, an abnormal physique, and brain capacity more similar to men than non-criminal women (Mohammed *et al*, 2014). This theory forms the basis for this study, since it is believed that crimes are mainly the product of inconsistent and changing thoughts that arise from the indirect role of women in family affairs (Simpson, 2000:04).

In modern times, the acceptability of early biological theories is considered to be low for two reasons. First, the theory has sexual and gender bias (Simpson, 2000:04). Second, if male characteristics are the only factor that causes crime, then why don't all men commit crimes? (Harrington & Nee, 2005:4). For this reason, in addition to the biological explanation, a theory

of masculinity based on the explanation of social structure has been developed, which focuses on the relationship between crime and female masculine characteristics. This reflects the idea that different socialization processes will cause more differences between men and women, which is a more important cause of crime than biological characteristics. In addition to the theory of masculinity, Freda Adler also believes that since the 1970s, women have increasingly participated in social movements and women have participated in more crimes, which has changed the role of women in the family. All these factors promote the masculinization of women's roles in society (Harrington & Nee, 2005; Ahuja, 1996).

Description of Study Area

This study was conducted in correctional centres domiciled in Rivers State. The study area also consisted of four correctional centres, namely; Federal Correctional Centre (Medium Security), Ahoada, Federal Prison (Medium Security), Degema, Federal Correctional Centre (Medium Security), Port Harcourt and Elele Farm correctional centre. The correctional centre in the state were selected based on the lack of empirical studies being conducted on the subject matter in the state as well as the need to understand the tenacity of women criminality within the purview of criminality in Nigeria.

In terms of the geographical location of Rivers State, the state is located between Latitude 4° 44'59 North and Longitude 6°49'39E. It also covers a land mass of 11, 077 KM^2. On the administrative divisions of Rivers State, the state was first and foremost created on May 27, 1967 by the then military regime headed by General Yakubu Gowon (Rtd). Thus, Bayelsa State was made to be part of Rivers State where Port Harcourt was made the capital of the state. It was later in the year 1996 Bayelsa State was created from River State by the then Late General Sanni Abacha's military regime. However, River State is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the South, Abia and Imo State to the North, Akwa Ibom State to the East as well as Bayelsa and Delta States to the West.

Further administrative divisions of Rivers State revealed that when the state was created in 1967, it was a constituent of 15 Local Government Areas (LGAs) but when Bayelsa State was created from the state in 1996, six (6) additional LGAs were created to make up the 23 LGAs existing in the state. These LGAs are Abua-Odual, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Akuku-Toru, Andoni, Asari-Toru, Bonny Rivers, Degema Rivers, Eleme, Emohua, Etche, Gokana Rivers, Ikwerre Rivers, Khana Rivers, Obio-Akpor, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, Ogu-Bolo, Okrika, Omuma, Opobo-Nkoro, Oyigbo, Port Harcourt, and Tai Rivers.

According to the population update of the National Population Commission website, the projected population of Rivers State as at 2016 is 7,303,900. In her ethnic composition, the state consists of Ekpeye, Okrika, Kalabari, lkwerre, lbani, Ogba, Etche, Khana, Gokana, Eleme, Ndoni, Abua, and Odual. Further regrouping of her ethnic groups are Ijo descendants group, which include Kalabari, Bile, Okrika, Ibani, and Nkoro; Igbo descendants group include Ekpeye, Ikwerre, Ogba, Egbema, Ndoni, Etche and the Igbo; the Ogoni group are Khan, Gokana, Eleme, and Ogoni; as well as the Obolo, which include Andoni and Opobo ethnic group.

Topographically, Rivers State is characterized by creeks, lagoons, rivers, lakes and swamps due to her low-lying plains. Rainfall is seasonal and sometimes variable but usually heavy in the state. The state is characterized by high rainfall due to her proximity to the coastal region. The mean monthly temperature is in the range of 25°C to 28°C, while the mean annual temperature for the State is 26°C. The months with hottest weather condition are February to May. The difference between the dry season and wet season temperatures is only about 2°C.

Relative humidity is high in the State throughout the year and decreases slightly in the dry season (Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group, NDBMG, 2019).

On the description of the vegetation of Rivers State, the state was originally occupied by rainforest but modified by anthropogenic activities. Most places in the state are riverine areas, which are further divisible into three (3) main hydro vegetation zones, namely; the beach ridge zone, the saltwater zone and the freshwater zone.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was a cross-sectional survey design. The use of the design was based on the systematic procedure and principles it allows in the process of sampling a representative sample with a view of generalizing the results at one point in time. However, in order to examine the patterns, trends and control of women criminality in Rivers State, the respondents were recruited from the existing correctional centre's in Port Harcourt (Rivers State) as quantitative approach for the study, while criminal justice administrators such as judges, lawyers, police, officials of the correctional centre's, etc. were interviewed so as to corroborate and clarify the trends, patterns and control of female criminality in Rivers State.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study was mainly women who were inmates in correctional centers of Rivers State. This comprises both awaiting trials females and those already convicted and serving different terms in Rivers State Correctional Centers. According to the records of the four correctional centers existing in Rivers State, there were over 500 female inmates' awaiting trials or already convicted in total. In addition to the female inmates, officials of the criminal justice such as the police, lawyers, judges/magistrates, and officials of the correctional centres were included in the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Since it was impossible to study all the female inmates in Rivers State, there was need to draw a subset which would be representative of the target population. Therefore, the sample size for the study was two hundred and twenty-two (222).

The study adopted multistage sampling method, and the stages are stated below;

Stage One: Stage one consisted of the purposive selection of Rivers State as the study locale based on the high prevalence of female inmates in her correctional centre as well as lack of empirical study documenting the patterns and trends of female criminality.

Stage Two: This stage also involves purposive selection of all correctional centres in Rivers States, namely; Federal Correctional Centre Ahoada, Federal Correctional Centre Degema, Federal Correctional Centre Port Harcourt and Elele Farm Correctional Centre.

Stage Three: In the third stage, stratified sampling was used to select female inmates from the list of all inmates in each of the selected correctional centre.

Stage Four: The fourth stage involved the selection of female inmates using simple random sampling technique for the administration of semi-structured questionnaire, while purposive sampling was used for the selection of key informants based on their experiences in the management and control of crimes in the state.

Methods and Instrument of Data Collection

The study adopted mixed methods. In the first method (quantitative approach), semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather both numerical and non-numerical data from the randomly selected female inmates in their respective correctional centres. This instrument was divided into sections: Section 'A' was concerned with the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents; Section 'B' concentrated on the extent of women contribution to crime records in Rivers State; Section 'C' presented questions on the patterns of crime committed by women in Rivers State as reported and recorded by the police and Correctional centres. Section 'D' explored the trends of Women criminality in Rivers State between 2015 and 2020; and Section 'E' examined the reasons advanced by women convicts and offenders for their criminality.

In the second method (qualitative approach), interview was conducted with high court judge, magistrate, constitutional lawyers and officials of the correctional centre using guide.

Results of the Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table 1 deals with the Socio-demographic status of Respondents of the study. It tells us the age distribution, educational levels, religion, ethnic group, Marital Status, Number of years spent in custody, Custodial status, those employed before incarceration and Occupation before incarceration. The section also contains the frequencies and percentages.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

Variables	Response categories	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage (%)
Age Mean age=32.39±9.08	18 – 24	44	19.8
	25 – 34	96	43.2
	35 – 44	39	17.6
	45 – 54	43	19.4
Educational Level	No formal education	-	-
	Primary	13	5.9
	Secondary	119	53.6
	NCE, ND, Diploma	55	24.8
	HND, BSc, B.Eng. B. Tech, BA	22	9.9
	Postgraduate	13	5.9
Religion	Christianity	188	84.7
	Islam	22	9.9
	Traditionalist	12	5.4
Ethnic Group	Andoni/Nkoro	17	7.7
	Ekpeye	26	11.7
	Ijaw	49	22.1
	Igbo	46	20.7

	Opobo	41	18.5
	Ikwere	43	19.4
Marital Status	Single	101	45.5
	Married	13	5.9
	Divorced/separated	93	41.9
	Widow	15	6.8
Number of years spent in custody	Less than 5 years	159	71.6
	5 years and above	63	28.4
Custodial status	Awaiting trial	50	22.5
	Convicted	172	77.5
Employed before incarceration	No	82	36.9
	Yes	140	63.1
Occupation before incarceration	Farming	9	6.4
	Civil service	58	41.4
	Artisan	32	22.9
	Business woman/trader	35	25.0
	Others	6	4.3

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics. In the age category of the respondents, the mean age was 32.39±9.08 years, while the highest percentage of age group was those between the age of 25 and 34 years (43.2%) with those who were between the ages of 45 and 54 being the least percentage (19.4%). On the educational attainment of the respondents, while there were no respondents who had no formal education, the highest percentage of respondents had attained secondary school (53.6%) with those who had postgraduate being the least percentage (5.9%).

Table 1 further indicates that the majority of the respondents were Christians (84.7%) as compared to other religious affiliation. In terms of the ethnic group membership of the respondents, the highest proportion of the respondents was Ijaw by ethnic group (22.1%, followed by those who were from Igbo ethnic group (20.7%) and Ikwere ethnic group (19.4%).

In the marital status category, the table shows that the highest proportion of the respondents were single (45.5%), followed by those who have been divorced/separated (41.9%), while the least proportion were those who married. On the number of years spent in custody, it was revealed that the majority had spent less than 5 years (71.6%) in the custody, while others have spent 5 years and above in the custody. On the report of their custodial status, on the other hand, the majority have been convicted (77.5%), while 22.5% of the respondents were awaiting trials.

Whether the respondents were employed before incarceration or not was ascertained. The table revealed that the majority has been employed before incarceration (63.1%), while 36.9% of the

respondents have not been employed before incarceration. Thus, the table shows that the occupation of the respondents before incarceration were civil service (41.4%), business woman/trader (25.0%), artisan (22.9%), farming (6.4%) and others (4.3%).

Patterns of crime committed

This study investigated the patterns of crime committed before incarceration. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by the crime committed

S/N	Crime committed	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage (%)
1	Manslaughter	15	6.75
2	Murder	13	5.8
3	Assault	13	5.8
4	Armed robbery	26	11.7
5	House and store breaking	13	5.8
6	Forgery	21	9.5
7	Theft/stealing	18	8.1
8	Drug trafficking	21	9.5
9	Human trafficking	15	6.8
10	Drug abuse	4	1.8
11	Attempted suicide	9	4.1
12	Arms trafficking	10	4.5
13	Bribery and corruption	4	1.8
14	Domestic violence	10	4.5
15	Kidnapping/hostage taking	24	10.8
16	Other crime	6	2.7
	Total	222	100

Source: Data from Field Work, 2024

Table 2 reveals a variety of offenses or crimes committed by females. Manslaughter, murder, and assault each accounted for 6.8% of the cases, while armed robbery was the most prevalent crime at 11.7%. Other notable offenses included forgery (9.5%), theft (8.1%), and drug trafficking (9.5%). Human trafficking and kidnapping were also significant, each comprising 6.8% and 10.8% of the cases, respectively. Domestic violence, arms trafficking, and attempted suicide each represented smaller portions of the crimes, ranging from 4.1% to 4.5%. Less common offenses such as drug abuse, bribery and corruption, and other crimes constituted smaller percentages of the total cases, ranging from 1.8% to 2.7%.

From the qualitative data gathered, it was further revealed that female criminality has been on the increase right from 2015 till 2020 when asked from the officers of the correctional centers. Among other participants, two of the participants stated that there has been no year in which female criminals would not be prosecuted by the police and brought to the correctional centers, and this has been on the increase particularly since 2015. In one of the statements:

> *When you talk about female criminality, it is now a common phenomenon. As you can see from the record I showed you, you will realize that the total numbers of inmates in the year 2015 – 2021 except 2020, the figures are not the same and it shows an increase every year. For example, in 2015, they were just eight female inmates; in 2016 they were 19 female inmates; in 2017 they were 25 in this correctional centre. But in 2020,*

because of the Covid-19 infections and the lockdown, they were just four in number (KII/Correctional Centre Officer/Degema/2021).

In addition to the narratives of the above officer of the correctional centre, it was also explained that female criminality is on the increase based on records gathered over the years on criminal cases. Another interviewee said:

I will tell you categorically that gone are the days when you couldn't see female being involved in criminality. We have seen females going to rob banks with riffles; we have seen females going to rob on the roads with sophisticated weapons. As you know and because of the high rate of unemployment, you see them perpetrating crimes. Therefore, we have them here increasing on yearly basis as the records have shown. It is just that female terms may not be as long as their male counterparts (KII/Correctional Centre Officer/Port Harcourt/2021).

From the perspective of a Judge interviewed, it was also supported that female criminals are on the increase. It was even added that the mode of *operandi* of a female criminal are the same with their male counterparts in the perpetration of crimes. In his submission, he said thus:

We have dealt with cases of female criminality on several occasions in the court. If you go through case files, you will discover that it is always increasing. Talking to you as a Judge, different forms of criminalities perpetrated by the males are also perpetrated by the female ones. That is the reason you see them ending up in jail just as their male counterparts. Believe it or not, female are also hard criminals. You see them involved in violent crime, property crime, white-collar crime, and organized crime and consensual or victimless crime (Judge/Rivers State/2021).

Given the above narratives of female criminality based on the criminal records in the past years, it can be deduced that female criminals are on the increase both in the perpetration of crimes and demonstration of the skills. Hence, this suggests that their physique and gender does not serve as barrier to the perpetration of crimes as viewed by earlier scholars in criminological studies.

The next table, table 3 analyzes in on the qualitative aspect of the study to confirm the truity of the hypothesis.

Table 3: A Chi Square Statistical Test Showing the Relationship between Crime committed and the likely causes of the crime committed

S/N	Crime committed	Likely causes of crime committed				
		Poverty	Greed	Unemployment	Others	Total
1	Manslaughter	6 (9.5)	-	9 (14.3)	-	15 (6.8)
2	Murder	4 (6.3)	-	9 (14.3)	-	13 (5.9)
3	Assault	-	4 (5.0)	9 (14.3)	-	13 (5.9)
4	Armed robbery	18 (28.6)	-	8 (12.7)	-	26 (11.7)
5	House and store breaking	-	9 (11.2)	4 (6.3)	-	13 (5.9)
6	Forgery	-	8 (10.0)	9 (14.3)	4 (25.0)	21 (9.5)

7	Theft/stealing	-	9 (11.2)	9 (14.3)	-	18 (8.1)
8	Drug trafficking	13 (20.6)	8 (10.0)	-	-	21 (9.5)
9	Human trafficking	6 (9.5)	9 (11.2)	-	-	15 (6.8)
10	Drug abuse	4 (6.3)	-	-	-	4 (1.8)
11	Attempted suicide	-	9 (11.2)	-	-	9 (4.1)
12	Arms trafficking	4 (6.3)	6 (7.5)	-	-	10 (4.5)
13	Bribery and corruption	4 (6.3)	-	-	-	4 (1.8)
14	Domestic violence	4 (6.3)	-	-	6 (37.5)	10 (4.5)
15	Kidnapping/hostage taking	-	18 (22.5)	6 (9.5)	-	24 (10.8)
16	Other crime	-	-	-	6 (37.5)	6 (2.7)
**	Total	63 (100)	80 (100)	63 (100)	16 (100)	222 (100)
Pearson Chi Square = 302.966						
Liklihood Ratio = 293.515						
Linear-by-Linear Association = 0.023						
Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = 0.000						
Significant at 0.05; figure in parenthesis is in percentages						

Authors Computation, 2024

Table 3 is the qualitative aspect of the study when respondents were asked to explain the specific or likely causes of female criminality, it was reported the most common cause of female criminality was greed, followed by other reasons and unemployment. This could be seen in the expression of one of the officers interviewed in correctional centers, it was maintained that greed was the major cause and not usually poverty as we use to think. According to his explanation:

> *I quite agree with many who will want to justify their perpetration of crimes by saying they are unemployed. But I can vividly say that greed is the major cause, especially among women who are now inmates today. Instead of some of them to cut their clothes according to their size, they go extra mile and began to compare themselves with others who they do not know the sources of their wealth. That is one aspect. Second aspect of the causes could be attributed to other reasons such as poverty and unemployment. But for me, crime has levels. There are levels of crime that will be committed that we know that it is truly as a result of poverty, but not for kidnapping, 419 in high places, particularly for women. Hope you understand me? But some of the women you see as inmates here today committed those crimes as a result of greed (KII/Correctional Centre Officer/Degema/2021).*

Similar narratives were expressed by another officer, who noted that although unemployment could be a cause of female criminality but most of the female inmates are usually associated with greed. In his expression:

> *… Although, one can attribute women criminality to unemployment. Most of the women we have serving their terms, I can tell you that over 70 per cent of them committed the crime as result of greed. If they justify their crime and associated it with unemployment,*

it may not have landed them in the correctional centers. Ask me why? The day some them were arrested for the term they are currently serving was not the day they started. I am not saying it is good to perpetrate crime in whatever way, but once you have committed a particular crime and it becomes habitual, then, it becomes greed and not as a result of unemployment. We have people who were not employed initially but now they are employers of labor. They can start something in a small scale and later improve on it to become bigger. After all, that will sustain their families. If everybody waits for big and to start big there will be problem. Therefore, most of them are here because of their greed (KII/Correctional Centre Officer/Port Harcourt/2021).

On the other hand, while it is a common notion that criminality can be attributed to unemployment, greed (rational choice) or poverty (which may relative or absolute), some of the female inmates may be there as a result of false accusation. For example, one of the correctional officers interviewed described the experienced of an ex-inmate, which the female was actually alleged of committing murder and was sent to the jail. But when the true picture of the case was revealed, the lady was released. In his explanation:

There is no doubt about an individual inmate having the propensity of attributing their criminal acts to unemployment, poverty and greed. However, I would want to also add that there are a lot of inmates who have been sent to jail due to cases they did not actually involve in. Sometimes ago here, because a lady had no lawyer to defend her in a case of murder, she was sent to jail. But when the truth of the case was revealed, the whole matter got exposed and the magistrate ordered that the lady should be released (KII/Correctional Officer/Elele/2021).

Based on the findings from the qualitative study, it could be explained that unemployment could be a cause of female criminality. However, more than half of the causes of female criminality in Rivers State have been attributed to greed, which suggests that there were more female inmates who were of the desire to have more than enough or even take the possession of something belonging to other fellows rather than working for them.

From the perspective of qualitative findings, crime control measures were ascertained. Different views on crime control measures, especially for the female inmates were revealed. While most of the crime control measures for the females were similar to those of the males, there seems to be differences in the techniques used by the correctional officers to apprehend or punish female offenders. For example, one of the correctional officers interviewed stated thus;

First thing we need to know is that before the rechristening (I mean before they renamed it Correctional Centre), it was called prison and when anyone is in prison whether physically, spiritually or otherwise, such a person is already serving severe punishment. But because of what they have found out later that apprehension or severe punishment in the prison should not be the major focus, and that rehabilitative system should be brought in; that calls for apprehension, restoration and rehabilitation. As such, what we do is to punish them (inmates) generally, then we counsel them to restore and also rehabilitate them through the introduction of vocational training. In fact, we allow some of them to write national examinations which was not there when it was truly a prison (KII/Correctional Centre Officer/Degema/2021).

In another expression of a correctional centre officer, it was revealed that control measures for female criminality are both apprehensive, restorative and rehabilitative. Precisely, he said that:

Before now, all inmates were expected to serve their terms with severe punishment. For instance, in passing judgment after a judge must have heard a crime case; you recall

> *the Judge or Magistrate would say "I sentence you a-six moth jail with severe punishment." Meaning that the offenders are to go to prison to serve the punishment meted for that offence in order to serve as deterrent to other intending offenders. However, in this dispensation, it is now apprehension, counseling and rehabilitation. What do I mean by these? An inmate will serve some punishment, counseled and advised to take some vocational training depending on the age of the inmate. The idea is that once the inmate has been punished, he/she will be counseled on how to go with life and at the same time taught some skill acquisition programmes so that the time spent in the correctional centre will not be a total waste. These are also applied to female inmates (**KII/Correctional Centre/Port Harcourt/2021**).*

Conversely, the judge, one of the interviewees insisted on punishment of any offender including female criminals as the preoccupation and expectation of the society. In his description, he narrated that whether male or female offenders, if they are not punished for their offences severely, it will not make sense of what the law says on the offence the offender has committed. Therefore, the law in the control measures for female criminality should be followed or adopted. According to him:

> *I must state here that law should be strictly followed when we come to the punishment of offenders whether male or female. The law does not discriminate whether the offence is committed by a male or female. Once an individual commits an offence and he/she is apprehended, prosecuted and tried in the court of law and found guilty. The next thing is to punish the offender. That is the law. But what we do as judges is to look at the circumstances and also consider the gender and age of the offender, then pass the judgment. The law does not say we should do that. My emphasis is that any offender of the law is to be punished according to the law. If you don't do that, everybody will feel free to commit that same crime (**KII/Judge/Rivers State/2021**).*

Discussion of findings

This section discusses the study's findings in line with its specific objectives. The findings indicated that majority of female inmates were aged between 25 and 34 years, with most having attained only secondary school education. Additionally, a significant proportion practiced Christianity, and the majority belonged to the Ijaw ethnic group. Single women constituted the largest group among the inmates, and most had spent less than five years in custody. Prior to incarceration, many had been employed, primarily in civil service, business, or trade roles.

Regarding the patterns of crime committed before incarceration, a variety of offenses were reported, including armed robbery, kidnapping, forgery, and drug trafficking. Notably, some respondents were involved in crimes typically associated with men, indicating a globalization of female criminality. Recidivism among female inmates was relatively low, with a large proportion having no previous criminal record.

Spatially, crime among women was most prevalent in semi-urban areas, followed by urban centers and villages. Victims of crimes perpetrated by women included unknown individuals as well as acquaintances such as neighbors, parents, and co-workers. Economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, were cited as significant contributors to criminal behavior among women.

In terms of control mechanisms, many female offenders were arrested on the street or in public places, and majority were not granted bail before incarceration. Rehabilitation efforts within correctional centers primarily focused on vocational training, with computer skills and hairdressing being the most common programs. Despite emphasis on rehabilitation, some respondents perceived their terms in correctional centers as effective.

Conclusion

This study investigated and analyzed the patterns, trends and control of women criminality in Rivers State, Nigeria. It is evident that the perpetration of women criminality is on the increase compare to previous era when most of the crimes were mainly perpetrated by the males. It was also observed that most criminal violence that were perpetrated by women were as a result of the structural issues and challenges the country is facing economically. As such, more females are currently involved in criminality, hence, their incarceration.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward for policy makers and the government on criminality in general, and specifically on women criminality.

  i.   Fight Women Impoverishment and Gender Inequality: In order to ensure that female criminality is addressed, the fundamental problem of poverty among women supported by culture and gender inequality as showcased by unemployment and relative deprivation require urgent attention and need to be addressed by the government through women employment generation, poverty alleviation programmes as well as promoting gender equality.

  ii.   Proper re-integration of Ex-convicts into the Society: In order to reduce the rate of recidivism, especially among women, members of the society must be enlightened on how ex-convicts need to be cared for, absorbed and supported rather than view them as enemies of societal progress through community sensitisation and campaigns.

  iii. Fairness and Justice for Women Inmates: Through the data generated from this study, the criminal justice administrators should endeavor that women offenders are punished the same way men offenders are punished.

  iv.   Provision of Supports for Female Inmates: Through formidable welfare programmes, government and all stakeholders in crime control should provide welfare packages in support of female inmates through soft loans and subsidies in order to ameliorate their hardship.

  v.   Encourage Higher Educational Qualification for Women: The society should encourage women to aspire for higher educational qualification through scholarship and initiation of educational support programmes for women. This will help to discourage or reduce women criminality.

  vi.   De-emphasise 'Quick-money Making Culture' and Encourage the Culture of Hard Work: Efforts should be made by the society to discourage 'quick-money making culture' while the norms of honesty and hard work are promoted and encouraged through sensitization.

Reference

Adler, F. & Simon, R.J. (1975). The Crime of Women. Prentice-Hall.

Ameh, F. (2013). Criminal Justice System and Women Criminality in Nigeria: A Critical Examination. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization,* 10, 20-28.

Anyogu, M. A. (2013). Drug Trafficking by Women: Challenges and Solutions. Journal of Drug Policy and Practice, 7(2), 102-115.

Bowles, R., Flygare, A., & Svante, A. (2012). Women's Crime and Criminology: Perspectives on Gender. SAGE Publications.

Brennan, I. R., Breitenbach, M. M., & Dieterich, W. C. (2010). Women Criminality: The Origins of Women's Deviance and Criminality. Oxford University Press.

Campaniello, N., & Gavrilova, N. (2018). Women Criminality in Nigeria: Historical Trends and Contemporary Patterns. *Journal of African Criminology and Justice Studies*, 12(1), 1-15.

Dehart, D. (2018). Gender and Crime. In Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology (pp. 741-745). Springer.

DeHart, D. & Moran, C.R. (2015). Gender, Crime, and Criminology: Research and Theoretical Perspectives. Wiley.

Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology. (2014). Springer.

Heidensohn, F. (1985). Women and Crime. Macmillan.

Mohammed, L. B., Umar, I. N., & Bilyaminu, S. (2014). Women Criminality and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 7(2), 123-135.

Morris, C. (1987). Women and Crime. Basil Blackwell.

Okafor, J. C., & Uzoh, C. A. (2019). Women Criminality: Historical and Contemporary Trends in Nigeria. African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 13(2), 45-62.

Oluwadare, O.O. (2011). Gender and Crime in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Gender and Law,* 5(3), 245-260.

Ozuru, H. A., & Ogunwande, O. (2020). Women Criminality in Nigeria: A Comparative Study. *Journal of African Criminology and Justice Studies*, 14(1), 78-93.

Smart, C., & Leonard, P. (1978). Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique. Routledge.

Suleiman, U. D., Attoh, F. M., & Yakubu, A. A. (2016). Women Criminality in Nigeria: Causes and Control Strategies. *International Journal of Innovative and Applied Research*, 4(1), 46-5