

Perceived Psychosocial Determinants of Female Criminality in South East Nigeria

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Abstract The study investigated perceived psychosocial determinants of female criminality. 150 respondents comprising 82 females and 68 males selected from the three (3) Metropolitan Local Governments in Enugu State were used as sample. The participants were within the age bracket of 25-55 years with a mean age of 35 years. A 15 item questionnaire designed to measure perceived psychosocial determinants of female criminality was used for data collection. Survey research design was adopted while Chi-square statistics was used for data analysis. Findings revealed that broken home was perceived as a determinant of female criminality $X^2= 126.84$ $P<.001$. A significant outcome was also observed on poor parental monitoring as a perceived determinant of female criminality $X^2= 161.6$ $P<.001$. Findings were discussed in relation with the literature reviewed and recommendations were also made.

Keywords: *poor parental monitoring, domestic violence, perantant rejection, low self esteem, feeling of insecurity, female criminality, south east nigeria*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Crime, according to the Oxford dictionary, is defined as a serious offence committed which is punishable by law, or an illegal act committed as a whole. Example include: drug crime (for example, use, transportation, purchase and sale of illegal drugs); violent or street crime (for example, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, kidnapping, larceny and auto-theft); organized crime (for example, unlawful activities of members of criminal organizations that supply illegal goods and services); political crime (for example, crimes by the government and crimes against the government); victimless crime (for example, personal use of illegal drugs); white-collar crime (for example, crimes that persons commit while acting in their legitimate jobs and professions such as embezzlement, corporate price-fixing etc. (www.cliffnotes.com)). However, violent crimes such as murder, armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism are the most inhumane crimes that continue to plague Nigeria. Lately, kidnappings for ransom and terrorism have taken the Centre stage leading to bloodshed and economic set-backs. The causes are not farfetched as studies have associated family roots to the incessant increase in violent crime. Above all, the astonishing part of it is the involvement of females in committing these crimes. In the early age, concept of female criminality was a unique matter to society because the society was male

dominated and the women had a little scope to contribute with the works of men. Their main duty was house work and rearing children. As they couldn't go outside, the concept of crime was unknown to them and they were frightened to do any illegal work. But due to the change of time and development in the field of science and technology, the negative and dominating attitude towards women began to disappear. Today, women represent the fastest growing criminal population, growing by almost a third over the course of the 1990 s, and almost a third of all incarcerated women report having been on welfare in the period just prior to their arrest. And yet despite this apparent dramatic increase in the criminal behavior of women, the study of women's criminality remains in its infancy especially in Nigeria.

The term female criminality refers to crime which is committed only by females. It was believed till a few decades ago that crime is predominately a male phenomenon and the world of crime is only a man's world. The subject of female crime was totally neglected but nowadays the subject of female criminality has come into focus as the rate of female criminality is increasing at an alarming rate. The women no longer see themselves as uncompetitive with men and they are involved in every activity with men and as a result, they are not getting fear to do risky and illegal jobs like crime. Most often the female are not directly associated to commit these crimes but are directed by some situational factor like psychological and social cause which influences them to commit these crimes (Schwartz 2006).

Studies have implicated poor socio-economic background, and other factors such as low self-esteem, unemployment, and peer pressure as determinants of female criminality (Young 2008; Reisig, Holtfreter & Morash 1994). Though females are not involved in crime like males, statistics have shown that their level of involvement is on the increase (Young 2008), a situation that require all hand to be on deck. Since it is obvious that the level of female criminality is increasing, it is important to investigate the major determinants of this ugly trend. To give answer to this question, this study will look at the psychological and sociological factors perceived to be determinants of female criminality. Biological theory of female criminality holds that the female physiognomy thought is most likely to determine her criminal propensity. To Thomas Williams (1907; 1923) women are more passive and less criminally capable; however, lack of social approval and affection makes them seek excitement, wealth and luxury. Sociological theory (Adler, 1975), of female criminality attributed female increasing involvement in crime to women emancipation. Blocked Opportunity theory of female criminality postulated that juveniles are forced into delinquency as a result of blocked opportunities. Strain Bond theory of female criminality views female involvement in crime as some sort of 'weakness' and not as a result of blocked opportunities (Merton, 1938). Social Bond theory of female criminality opined that the vulnerability to commit crime is largely dependent on the female social class (Hirsch 1969). Economic theory of female criminality asserted that economic conditions are a strong determinant of female criminality. To Aristotle, crimes are committed mostly for acquiring superfluous things. Labeling theory of crime postulated that criminal behaviors become crime when labeled by others as crime. Labeling theory (Lemert, 1951) holds that female criminality thrives because women are less perceived as delinquents than men. To Sutherland (1947), structural variables such as poverty, residence and associations are important factors that influence female involvement in crime. Liberation theories of crime contended that female expansion from traditional roles to illegal activities may not be unconnected with social equality. Power Control theory of female criminality argues that socialization and parental control processes in the home influences the likelihood of females becoming delinquents. Gender Ratio theories of female criminality holds that oppression of women plays significant role on female increasing violent criminal behavior. Few research works carried out on female criminality and other related research findings indicate that broken home, domestic violence and other psychosocial factors contributed to the violent criminal behavior female folks exhibit today. Few research works carried out on female criminality and other related research findings indicate that broken home, domestic violence and other psychosocial factors mentioned in the questionnaire contributed to the violent criminal behavior female folks exhibit today.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study intends to investigate the psychological and sociological factors perceived to determine the increasing involvement of females in criminal activities.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

It is a known fact that crime is a global phenomenon. However, crime is an undesirable element that was perceived to be male affair especially violent crime. Recently, studies and statistics have revealed high level of female involvement in crime across the globe. This female involvement has been generating series of questions on what lured the female folk into crime especially violent crime such as armed robbery. In Nigeria today, it is no longer news to hear on electronic or print media about the activities of females in crime. Nevertheless, various theories have been propounded on the etiology of crime and criminal behaviors. The major issue here is, do these theories apply to female criminality. Therefore, the researcher observed that little or no research has been conducted to determine why females involve in crime. To answer this question, the present study will empirically look at perceived psychosocial determinants of female criminality.

1.4. Hypotheses

Broken Home will significantly be perceived as a factor that determines female criminality.

Poor parental monitoring will significantly be perceived as a factor that determines female criminality.

2. Method

2.1. Design / Statistics

Based on the fact that participant's opinion were observed and measured. No variable was manipulated. The appropriate design adopted was survey research design. Thus, chi-square statistics was used to test the hypotheses.

2.2. Participants

A total of 150 respondents were randomly sampled for this study. The participants were made up of 82 females and 68 males between the age bracket of 25 and 55 years. The mean age of the participants was 35 years while the Standard Deviation was 5 years. Educational Qualification of respondents ranges from OND (50), HND/B.Sc. (87), M.Sc. (10), and Ph.D. (3). Occupational status of the participants indicates that 46 were traders, 77 were civil servants, 15 were politicians, and 8 were students while other professions were 4. All the participants were Christians from Igbo ethnic background with the basic knowledge of crime. 50 participants were selected from each of the three (3) Local Government Councils that made up Enugu Metropolis

2.3. Instrument

A 15 item questionnaire designed to measure Perceived Psychosocial Determinants of female criminality was used. The questionnaire has a three (3) response format with a direct scoring of "Yes", "Undecided", and "No". Hence the critical value is the basis for interpreting each item. Items with scores equal to or higher than the critical value indicate a strong determinant of female criminality while

scores lower than the critical values indicate a weak determinant or factor.

The items were validated on facial bases. The initial 21 items were exposed to 3 lecturers in the Department of Psychology Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), who validated the items on a facial base. Hence, items accepted or rejected by 2/3 of the lecturers who served as expert judges were accepted or rejected respectively. Thus, this brought the initial 21 items to 15. In addition, a pilot study was carried out using 30 participants (15 females and 15 males) selected from inhabitants of Enugu North L.G.A. Data collected yielded a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Reliability of 0.83.

2.4. Procedure

A total of 180 copies of the questionnaire were distributed within a period of six (6) weeks to selected participants for this study. Participants were sampled from the inhabitants of Enugu Metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used since only available and willing respondent were used. The participants whose cooperation was encouraging were guided wherever they are confused while completing the questionnaire. It was not a take home questionnaire; hence respondents responded to all the items and submitted to the researcher immediately. Finally, out of the 180 copies that were distributed, only 150 copies that were correctly filled and returned were used for data analysis.

3. Results

Table 1. Summary table of chi-square (χ^2) on broken home as a perceived determinant of female criminality

X	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² / E	X ²	P
Yes	115	50	65	4225	84.50		
Undecided	19	50	-31	961	19.22	126.84	<.001
No	16	50	-44	1156	23.12		

Table 1 above showed that X² calculated value of 126.84 is found to be greater than χ^2 critical value of 10.96 at P<.001 indicating a significant outcome. Thus, broken home was found to be a perceived determinant of female criminality.

Table 2. Summary table of chi-square (χ^2) on poor parental monitoring as a perceived determinant of female criminality

X	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² / E	X ²	P
Yes	123	50	73	5329	106.58		
Undecided	20	50	-30	900	18.00	161.6	<.001
No	7	50	-43	1849	36.98		

Table 2 above showed that X² calculated value of 161.6 is found to be greater than χ^2 critical value of 10.96 at P<.001, also indicating a significant outcome. Thus, poor parental monitoring as a factor was also found to be a perceived determinant of female criminality.

Table 3. Summary of chi-square (χ^2) on other perceived psychosocial determinants of female criminality

S/No	Items	X ² Calculated	P
1.	Domestic violence	188.40	<.001
3.	Single parenting	108.36	<.001
4.	Poor child/parental relationship	196.80	<.001
5.	Faulty discipline by parents	104.90	<.001
7	Parental rejection	169.00	<.001
8	Feeling of insecurity	111.72	<.001
9	Low self-esteem	108.36	<.001
10	Poor socio-economic background	135.88	<.001
11	Lack of parental care	177.88	<.001
12	Oppression of women	10.08	<.001
13	Perceived inferiority Gender	7.00	<.001
14	Poor parenting style	188.12	<.001
15	Peer pressure	139.08	<.001

From Table 3 above, the following factors were also perceived to significantly determine female criminality. Domestic violence (188.40) P<.001; single parenting (108.36) P<.001; poor child/parental relationship (196.8)

P<.001; faulty discipline by parents (104.9) P<.001; parental rejection (169.0) P<.001; feeling of insecurity (111.72) P<.001; low self-esteem (108.36) P<.001; poor socio-economic background (135.88) P<.001; lack of parental care (177.88) P<.001; oppression of women (10.08) P<.001; perceived inferiority gender (7.00) P<.001; Poor parenting style (188.12) P<.001; peer pressure (139.08) P<.001.

4. Discussion

Obviously, the two hypotheses tested in this study were accepted. The first hypothesis which stated that broken home will be perceived as a determinant of female criminality was accepted. In other words, broken home was found to be perceived as a determinant of female criminality. Majority of the participants believed that broken home as a factor determines female criminality. However this assertion may not be doubted, this is because, broken home exposes children to various ills, for instance, children from broken home lack parental love from both parents. They normally experience agony of single parenthood. When children live only with the mother or father, they could see themselves as those who are not balanced with parental nurturance. This may expose them to abnormal behavior and other personality problems that will make them vulnerable to criminal behavior. In addition, the second hypothesis tested which stated that poor parental monitoring will significantly be perceived as a factor that determines female criminality was also accepted. This means that poor parental monitoring is a variable that predicts female criminality. In other words, females whose parents did not monitor very well have high tendency of involvement in criminal activities than those whose parents gave proper monitoring. This may not be far from the truth because childhood is the foundation of life. Therefore, if a child is given proper monitoring by his/her parents such a child will have a good knowledge of good and bad behavior as well as the consequences of the latter. Parental monitoring gives the parent an ample opportunity to observe the behavior of their children at tender age. It also gives them the avenue to channel the energy of their wards towards positivity. Conclusively, it can be averred that good parental monitoring helps the parents to monitor the activities of their children with a view to knowing when

they deviate from normality to abnormality. However, previous studies have also implicated factors such as unemployment, low socio-economic well-being etc. as predictors of female criminality (Schwartz 2006).

4.1. Implications of the Study

The study has obvious implications. First and foremost, the present study has exposed that criminality knows no gender. This study, especially from its empirical reviews revealed that female involvement in criminality is at an increasing rate. In addition, the study was able to showcase some factors that contribute to this ugly menace as perceived by the public. The study will do a good job towards the control of female criminality and criminality in general. With the knowledge of psychological and sociological causes of female criminality as exposed in this study, stakeholders will know the best way of tackling female criminality. The present study also made it open that parental activity such as parental care, monitoring, parenting style etc. have significant role to play in promotion of female criminality. Therefore, the study will serve as an eye opener to parents who lack these attributes to turn a good leave. Above all, the present study will serve as an empirical study for future researchers in similar fields.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the outcome of this study, the researcher hereby recommends that parents should take their children upbringing as a priority in their life. In addition, there is need to look at issues such as broken home, domestic violence etc. with a view to finding lasting solution towards ameliorating them. This has become imperative having identified it as causes of criminality. Above all, parents should be paying attention to the activities of their children with a view to knowing when they keep bad gang. They should also know the type of friends their children keep. Government on its part should address the issue of economic hardship and unemployment. This will help reduce poverty and improve standard of living and in turn reduce crime. Religious leaders should also preach more

on morality than prosperity. Finally, our youths should change their attitude toward material things and as well change their view on get rich quick syndrome. These recommendations if implemented may help reduce to the barest minimum not only female criminality but crime in general.

5. Conclusion

Based on the outcome of this study, the researcher hereby conclude that broken home, poor parental monitoring, domestic violence, lack of parental care, poor socio-economic background etc. are perceived factors towards female criminality.

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