

ARTICLE

# Sociological Profiling of Armed Robbery Convicts in Kirikiri Female Prisons, Lagos, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Increasing female involvement in violent crime is a concern in Nigeria; still, it is unclear what informs this sudden surge in a society that supposedly socializes feminine gender to be soft, caring, and compassionate. This article explores the sociological profiles of women involved in armed robbery, drawing case examples from 32 convicts in a Nigerian female penitentiary. It was found that women were made susceptible to deviance by some social factors such as familial variables, neighborhood characteristics, gender discrimination, neglect, and violence. Both primary and secondary social groups were found to be major facilitators in the initiation into crime, development of criminal career, entry into armed robbery, and maintenance of life as a robber. This article concludes that gender-based inequality in all social facets and the unfavorable socio-economic conditions in Nigeria increase the vulnerability of women to be recruited into criminality. A revival of the family institution, gender-neutral parenting, government's intervention for improvement of socio-economic wellbeing, and gender education are suggested.

**Keywords** armed robbery; crime; gender; prisons; sociological profiling; socialization

## INTRODUCTION

Armed robbery is a global phenomenon. No country, developed or developing, is immune to it. However, the rate of incidence of robbery differs from country to country. Armed robbery, described as an aggravated form of robbery or theft that involves the use of a lethal weapon to perpetrate violence or the threat of violence (intimidation) against the victim (Griew 1996; Tobazuaye 2017), is a serious crime that can permanently traumatize its victims both physically and psychologically.

In many countries, it is a statutory offense with a prison sentence ranging from five years to life imprisonment (Rennison and Melde 2013), and even to the death penalty in some countries depending on the extent of violence meted out to victims (LaFace 2003; Allen 2005). Armed robbery is regarded as a quintessential male crime with low involvement of females who, however, are reported to be responsible for a non-trivial amount of robberies each year (Rennison and Melde 2013). This

view, in the face of increasing reporting of female involvement in armed robbery, has presented a compelling circumstance for scholars interested in gender and violent crimes. Specifically, Messerschmidt (1993:107) described armed robbery as the “ideal opportunity to construct an ‘essential’ toughness and ‘maleness,’” which implies that women involved in this crime must transgress both legal and social boundaries to commit these acts.

In spite of the growing trend in political feminism in Nigeria, there is still a dearth of serious research done on the issues of gender, crime and criminal justice from the perspective of feminism in the country. Crime, in the country, is perceived as a male affair, so female offenders are seen as less of a problem for society (Oluwadare and Agboola 2011; Obi et al. 2014). However, there has been a recent surge in female involvement in armed robbery across the country with daily reports of activities of female robbery gangs filling pages of newspapers and being reported in other channels of the media (Kwabuggi, Haganagiwa, and Kilba 2017; Ekpimah 2017; Tobazuaye 2017). Specifically, the National Bureau of Statistics (2018) reported a consistent increase in the figures of female admittance into penitentiaries across the country, although the proportion of female prisoners as against their male counterparts, stands only at 2%. Meanwhile, there have been reported cases of armed robbery gangs with female leaders (Dachen 2017a,b; Ekpimah 2017) or all-female robbery gangs (Ogenyi 2016) being arrested across the country. Hitherto, reports on female involvement in armed robbery in the country had been limited to helping robbery gangs as informants and custodians of arms and ammunition (Obi et al. 2014; Abdul-Rasheed et al. 2016). However, the trends and patterns of their involvement have changed over time to gun handling during robbery operations and leading gangs (Tobazuaye 2017).

The literature on gender and criminality in the country had initially posited that the rate of female involvement in violent crime is negligible because of the influence of gender socialization (Oluwadare and Agboola 2011; Ameh 2013; Kwabuggi et al. 2017). A girl-child in Nigerian society is usually socialized to be soft, caring and compassionate. This has been perceived as the reason behind the passivity in the roles played by women in violent crimes. Evidently, the gross inadequacy of prison facilities for women in the country, with just two female-only prisons and some mixed-gender prisons, attests to the low provisions made for female criminals. However, the increase in female involvement in violent crimes in the country at present questions the acclaimed strength and effect of gender socialization on Nigerian women. This current study, therefore, explores the sociological profiles of women involved in a violent crime like armed robbery. This is with the aim of exposing socialization gaps and social background factors that predispose females to engage in armed robbery initially perceived as the exclusive preserve for the male gender.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Armed Robbery and Female Involvement in Nigeria*

In Nigeria, incidences of crime have remained high in the face of the ever-enduring insecurity that has plagued the country since it became an independent republic. Cases of armed robbery, pickpocketing, and shoplifting have continued to be on

the increase across the country (CLEEN Foundation 2013; Gabriel 2016; Olonisakin, Ogunleye, and Adebayo 2017; Tobazuaye 2017). The rate of armed robberies in the country is so high that the fear of being robbed both during the day and night has come to shape the behavior of the majority of people (Aborisade 2017). People live in absolute suspicion and constant presentiment of an impending danger (Igbuzor 2017; Aborisade and Adedayo 2018). Several businesses and economic activities that are supposed to operate well into the night are forced to close early due to fear of being attacked by armed robbers. Indeed, commercial activities in various parts of the country have been crippled and private businesses are folding up as a result of the soaring rate of armed robbery incidence, instigating fear of crime (Adebakin 2016; Omoyibo and Akpomera 2016; Oladeji and Folorunso 2017; Aborisade 2018).

Existing literature on female criminality in Nigeria has suggested that women's involvement in violent crimes is involuntary, defensive, the result of some mental disorder or hormonal imbalance inherent in female physiology (Jaggar and Rothenberg 1984; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Rafter and Heidensohn 1995; Oluwadare and Agboola 2011; Rennison and Melde 2013). However, there have been widespread reports of women taking active roles in armed robbery incidents in the country to suggest a debunking of earlier explanations offered on reasons why women engage in violent crimes. In fact, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that women are taking leadership roles in armed robberies across the country (Obi et al. 2014; Abdul-Rasheed et al. 2016; Tobazuaye 2017), while pushing the boundaries in a way no one ever imagined. Aside from females being reported as members of armed robbery gangs, several reports have also indicated that some females actually led their gangs to robbery scenes (The Nation 2015; Dachen 2017b) and that several all-female gangs also operated within the country (Ayodeji and Mojeed-Sunni 2013; Ekpimah 2017).

In criminological literature, the premise upon which the ignoring of female offenders has been built is that if women were to be considered, then the particular criminological theories involved could somehow accommodate them without too much difficulty (Tierney 2010). This explains attempts made by some early feminists to incorporate their ideas into existing theoretical frameworks as a progressive step (e.g. Shacklady Smith 1978), though subsequent writers have been more skeptical (Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Rafter and Heidensohn 1995). In addition, feminist criminologists have been at the forefront in pointing out that when women and other marginalized groups are ignored, devalued, or misrepresented, society in general and the understanding of crime and justice, in particular, suffer as a result (Brownmiller 1975; Jaggar and Rothenberg 1984; Moir and Jessel 1997; Lilly, Cullen, and Ball 2007). Available prison statistics, as well as reported police and court cases, show that Nigeria now has a breed of female criminals who are terrorizing the public, acting in cahoots with male accomplices (Abdul-Rasheed et al. 2016; National Bureau of Statistics 2018).

### ***Social Determinants of Female Criminality: Theoretical Perspectives***

Liberal feminists have asserted that the cause of crime is a product of gender socialization (Barry 1979; Jaggar and Rothenberg 1984; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Farley 2004). They stressed that the dominance of males and the subordination

of females reflect how each of the gender has been brought up culturally and socially. According to Jaggar and Rothenberg (1984) and Dworkin (1997), male children are socialized to be aggressive and dominant in most cultures; they are supposed to be combative and ready to defend or protect their own. It is in this same line of orientation that men behave aggressively while women are more subtle due to the training they receive to be loving and caring. They supported their claim with crime statistics that show that men commit more aggressive offenses than women. They then concluded that the crime that each gender commits is often consistent with its role expectations. Meanwhile, radical feminism has viewed crime as part of the biological fact that men, by nature, tend to be more aggressive and dominant (Banwell 2014).

In history, Nigerian society has centered the lives of women around the home, relegating their function to just home management and other menial roles (Aghatise 2002). Even in present-day Nigeria, opportunities for women in the workplace, in politics, in athletics, and the military are more limited than those of their male counterparts (Ibrahim and Muktar 2016). Women that attempt to participate in seemingly male-dominant activities are generally perceived as deviants and reprimanded accordingly (Oluwadare and Agboola 2011; Igbuzor 2017). Oppenherm-Mason (1994) and Braide (2002) also highlighted the discriminatory orientation and socialization process brought on a girl-child, which for instance, ignores certain acts of deviance in the girl-child while focusing on the boy-child for correction and monitoring. This is often based on the general notion that boys are more prone to theft and other related deviant behaviors.

The issue of gender also borders on the theories that have made attempts at advancing the knowledge of deviance in terms of the direction of their explanations (Lee and Collins 2010). For example, the strain theory of Robert Merton (1968) defines cultural goals in terms of financial success. Traditionally, at least, this goal has had more to do with the lives of men, because women have been socialized to define success in terms of relationships, particularly marriage and motherhood (Walklate 1998). This is especially so in Nigerian society where the success of women is mainly defined by their ability to marry and hold on to their marriage with children. A more woman-focused theory might recognize the “strain” that results from the cultural ideal of equality, clashing with the reality of gender-based inequality.

Merton (1968), in his strain theory, postulated that an integrated society maintains a balance between social structure (approved social means) and culture (approved goals). According to him, anomie is what results from poor societal integration when there is dissociation between valued cultural ends and legitimate societal means to those ends. Due to the gender inequality that pervades in Nigeria, women are disadvantaged with respect to life chances and economic empowerment. For example, as a result of early marriage practices in some parts of Nigeria, low educational level and economic status, a young woman goes directly from depending on her parents to depending on her husband (Oppong and Wery 1994). The implication of this is that when such a marriage collapses through divorce or death of the husband, with no inheritance rights, the economic difficulty that the woman appears to be confronted with could increase the vulnerability of the woman to be recruited into criminality.

In respect of education, referred to by the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as the heart of the improvement of women’s

social and economic status, out of the 10.5 million children who are out of school in Nigeria (the world's highest number), 60% of them were reported to be girls (UNICEF 2015). Earlier, in the gender profile on Nigeria, the Canadian International Development Agency (2002) stated that girls are highly discriminated against in access to education in many parts of the country, particularly for social and economic reasons. It was reported further that when economic hardship restricts the ability of many families to send all their children to school, the girls' rights to education are readily sacrificed. The female children are then directed into commercial activities such as trading and street vending, exposing them to criminality, both as victims and offenders. Since the general belief among traditional societies is that a girl will eventually get married to a man who will be responsible for her needs, less importance is attached to the education of a girl (Braide 2002). Furthermore, Onyeonoru (2003), while examining the socio-cultural factors that propel girls to crime and deviant behavior, identified the social system of polygyny, patriarchal family structure, the system of primogeniture and traditional belief system, as responsible. He concluded that these factors all have gender implications, putting the feminine gender in a disadvantaged social position, and constituting the push factors into criminality.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

### *Study Site and Population*

Kirikiri Female Prison, Apapa, Lagos was the only all-female prison in Nigeria until recently, when the second all-female prison was established in Numan, Adamawa State, in 2017. At the commencement of this study, a total of 316 inmates were under incarceration in the 211-capacity prison facility. On the other hand, a total number of 56 inmates were in prison for armed robbery at the time of the visits of the researchers. Meanwhile, between April 2017 and November 2017, 32 female convicts of armed robbery in the prison were recruited for the study from the available 56 inmates. However, 22 of the 56 inmates refused to take part in the research despite the reassurance of the researchers that the information would be kept confidential, and two were mentally unstable to provide coherent responses. Therefore, the remaining 32 female inmates that were already convicted for armed robbery and willing to participate were engaged in the study. It is noteworthy to state that convicts of other violent and non-violent crimes were exempted to avoid the influence of other crimes and motivations on the results.

### *Procedures and Data Collection*

After obtaining express permission of the Comptroller of Lagos State Prisons to conduct the study in the Female Maximum and Medium Security Prisons, Kirikiri, Apapa, a list of 318 inmates was obtained from the prison authorities. Through the assistance of prison officials, the eligibility of prisoners for the research based on data from their criminal records was determined. At the same time, requirements and the contents of the consent form were drawn. The shortlisting of 56 inmates was purposively done based on the nature of the crime committed,

their prison status (convicted), years of criminal career and willingness to partake in the study. Interviews were semi-structured. The respondents were allowed to talk extensively on their childhood, social background, parental and peer pressure into deviance, marital life, offense history, entry into robbery, exploits and pathways into the penitentiary. The conduct of interviews was in a private room in the penitentiary. The respondents were all interviewed by the researchers. However, recording of proceedings (through writing) was done by two students of sociology under the supervision of the second author. The average timing for the interviews was 40 minutes.

The Ethics Committee of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, approved the study, while other ethical rules and standards of research that involve human subjects were adhered to (Kruger, Ndebele, and Horn 2014). The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as participants of the study. Both written and verbal informed consent of the respondents was obtained before they were engaged in the research. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured; pseudonyms are used throughout this article to refer to participants.

### ***Data Analysis***

This was a qualitative study where an in-depth-interview protocol was used to elicit information from respondents through face-to-face interactions. A total of 32 female inmates participated in the study. Content analysis of the interviews with the use of a qualitative software program (NVivo, version 12) was deployed. Content analysis concerns the probing of content and themes of text to uncover both definitions contained in the text and those that emerge through the analysis (Krippendorff 2012). Thematic categories were then derived from both theoretical constructs and the data from which they emerge. Coding for theoretical themes was made in the first pass, which has to do with the global themes that we expected to find within the disclosure of gender and robbery. In the second pass, we coded for themes that emerged from the content of the data.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### ***Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents***

Data on age, education, marital status, length of stay and status in the prison were obtained from official reports while the rest were obtained from offenders' self-report. The age range of the interviewed women was 18–48 years, with the majority of them (26, 81.25%) within the ages of 18 and 28 years, while the median age was 25 years. Aside from three (9.36%) respondents who had no formal education, the rest had either primary or secondary education. However, four (12.5%) of them stated that they received their primary education and wrote their primary school leaving certificate after being incarcerated. In respect of their marital status prior to their incarceration, only two (6.25%) reported being legally married, while five (15.62%) cohabited with male partners with whom they had children; the remaining 25 (78.13%) were never-married singles. However, a good number of the respondents (14, 43.75%) had children of their own, including seven (21.87%) of the never-married singles.

### **Social Background and Childhood Experiences of the Offenders**

This study seeks to examine the social background factors and childhood experiences that contributed to the vulnerability of the respondents to being recruited into committing violent crimes generally, and armed robbery specifically.

#### **Familial Variables of Respondents in their Childhood**

Of the respondents, 22 (68.75%) reported that they did not share residence with both parents beyond their first 10 years of age. While only three of the 22 lost either of the parents to death, the parents of the 19 others were separated through divorce and other separation. The majority of the respondents were from large families of more than eight members (including parents). Of the women, 11 (34.36%) stated that they were from polygynous homes, while 12 (37.3%) respondents indicated that though they were from monogamous homes, they grew up sharing their residence with relatives. As regards parental education, while 16 (50%) of the women stated that both parents had primary education, only eight (25%) of the respondents stated that both parents had above secondary education. Of the respondents, 10 (31.25%) reported that both parents had no formal education, while either the father or mother of six respondents had primary education and above. None of the respondents indicated that either of their parents had post-secondary education.

In respect of domestic violence, 26 (81.25%) of the respondents indicated that they witnessed parental violence (including violence between foster parents), while all of them stated and described being physically abused as children. Their level of abuse ranged from being beaten with strokes of a cane or wood, slapped with palm, punched with a fist, to being hit with metal objects, and being cut with razor blades, among others. They all described the rate of abuse they suffered from being “high” and “very high.” One of them described a gory tale of abuse:

... there was no regular method of being beaten in those days. Most times, my parents use whatever they can lay their hands on to beat us. Be it iron rod, wooden or plastic material, even handy furniture like table and chairs. However, if they were unable to lay their hands on anything, they hit our heads against the wall, and if two of us offended at the same time, they hit our heads against each other until it hurt. The first time I stole as an eleven-year-old, my mother cut open my skin with a razor blade and applied grounded pepper to the open wounds. I thought I was going to die that day from the pain I felt . . . (Angelina/26 years/in-depth interview/Kirikiri, Lagos).

In respect of parental supervision, 30 (93.75%) respondents pointed out that they did not receive what can be described as “proper parental supervision” in their childhood for reasons they provided to be “parents’ separation,” “absentee parents,” “large family size” and “nonchalance.”

Only seven of the participants indicated their knowledge of their parents’ involvement in criminal behavior in their childhood. One of them stated that her father was into armed robbery. The rest reported their parents were into smuggling (2), pickpocketing, pimping (for sex workers), selling of hard drugs, and touting (political thugs that engage in violent activities like fighting, maiming, arson, etc.).



Of the respondents, 23 expressed that though they were oblivious of their parents' involvement in any form of crime, they experienced their parents' deviant behavioral acts as children. These deviant behaviors included public smoking, alcoholism, engaging in fistcuffs with neighbors, wife battering, incest, using foul or vulgar language, among others. Susan, one of the respondents, described how her father was of the habit of sending her to buy condoms whenever "one of his numerous girlfriends was around." According to her, he started by writing the name of the brand of the condom for her on a piece of paper to deliver to the seller, because she was only eight years old and may not recollect the brand name. By the time she was 10 years old, he would simply ask her to go get "Gold Circle" (the name of the condom brand that he often bought).

The majority of the respondents (27, 84.37%) considered the economic status of their parents and guardians in their childhood as "poor" and "below average." The few that perceived their parents to be above average reported that their large family size prevented them from getting adequate financial and material provisions.

### ***Neighborhood Characteristics and Vulnerability to Delinquency***

Of the respondents, 28 (87.5%) described the neighborhood where they spent their childhood to be dense, poor, mixed-use neighborhoods. The characteristics of the neighborhoods mentioned by the respondents share a lot of similarities in terms of the arrangement of houses on the streets, type of houses, socio-economics of inhabitants, and residency types. In respect of the buildings on the streets of the selected areas, the houses were mostly dilapidated, poorly ventilated, densely populated and mixed-use. The areas were mostly inhabited by people living below the poverty line; hence, homes were crowded. Respondents that spent their childhood in such neighborhoods stated that the probability of a child becoming deviant in these areas is higher than growing up to be conformist. One of the respondents expressed:

... parents usually find it difficult to control their children as it is virtually impossible for such parents to influence the kinds of friends or neighbors their children relate with. For example, in some 24-bedroom buildings that is (sic) meant to accommodate two people per room to make 48 occupants, you will count more than 150 people staying in such buildings. In some instances, families of six will be living in a single room apartment (Faustina/32 years/in-depth interview/Kirikiri, Lagos).

The respondents also added that the general absence of formal mechanisms of social control and the seeming apathy of the police and other security agencies to matters that affect such environments are factors that make deviance and crime pervasive. Of the 26 respondents that grew up in such areas, 22 stated that they became conscious of crime and took to deviant behavior from their experience of living in those areas.

### ***Specific Gender Issues***

The study probed gender-related factors related to their childhood socialization which made them vulnerable to engage in violent crimes. In their childhood, the majority of the female respondents expressed facing gender discrimination which adversely affected their development. Of those that dropped out at secondary



educational level, 12 volunteered that they were forced to stop their education to allow male siblings to proceed with theirs as their parents got financially incapacitated and could no longer fund the education of all the children. Furthermore, seven respondents added that they dropped out of secondary school when they became pregnant, although two of them eventually continued with their education at some point after delivering their babies. Other gender-related challenges that they were confronted with as children include sexual abuse, incest, neglect, and child labor.

### ***Initiation into Crime and Criminal Career Development***

The onset of criminal behavior of the respondents showed that peer influence accounted for the introduction of twenty-six of them into juvenile delinquency. After that, their criminal behaviors were developed and sustained by their closeness to deviant groups. The most common first criminal act committed by the respondents was stealing. The stealing came in different forms like pickpocketing, pilfering, snatching, and breaking into shops and other commercial areas within their neighborhood. Aside from stealing, other crimes they reported committing in the early part of their criminal careers were physical assault, arson, Internet scamming, over-billing of customers in hotels and drinking bars, and attempted murder through food poisoning. Motunrayo, an ex-student of a Lagos-based university until her arrest, stated that her first stint as a criminal was when she was a university student:

... in school during my second year, it was through some group of girls that I met when I moved out of the school hostel. They were all yahoo girls (Internet scammers) and “slay queens” (sophisticated ladies). Moving with them I got into yahoo and scamming people and all sort of things... (Motunrayo/27 years/in-depth interview/Kirikiri, Lagos).

Motunrayo, who was also into campus prostitution, eventually was initiated into armed robbery through an aunt of one of her school friends when she came visiting them on campus. “Aunty Lora,” as she called her, enquired from her if she was satisfied with what she got from campus prostitution or if she would like to “upgrade.” Motunrayo agreed to “upgrade” into armed robbery because she needed money to pay her school fees and since her parents were not forthcoming in giving her the needed amount. She was introduced to an all-female gang of robbers that targeted men who solicit sexual services from campus prostitutes. According to her, once a man contracts one of the gang members for sexual service, usually in the man’s house, the contracted member will persuade the man to invite his friends while she invites hers. This is done to increase the number of victims for their robbery. Such men are usually robbed at gunpoint of their valuables by the female gang members, especially when they are drunk.

On what informed their participation in criminal activities, the majority of them stated it was their financial and material needs that pushed them into crime. However, there were a few that said they became involved in crime as a way of seeking revenge, satisfy curiosity, and gain recognition among peers.

***Entry into Armed Robbery and Life as a Female Armed Robber***

Prior to becoming armed robbers, the majority of the respondents were engaged in commercial activities that are both legal and illegal, aside from the six that were students of higher institutions. Only two of the respondents stated that they were unemployed and virtually living on handouts from their boyfriends. Meanwhile, 13 participants reported that they were into commercial sex work, four sold locally brewed alcoholic beverages at motor parks and other joints, and three were into illegal drug sale. Others were into nursing in local clinics, bartending in pubs, tailoring and hairdressing. Although most of them had been into one form of crime or the other prior to their involvement in armed robbery, 16 of the respondents were introduced into armed robbery by their boyfriends and male associates, while 10 of them were introduced by their female friends or friends' boyfriends. Ifeoma, aged 29 years, however, told a story of how she was "accidentally" introduced into armed robbery even though she had not participated in crime prior to that time. She came to Lagos and was offered accommodation by a friend who wanted her to join the prostitution business. Her refusal made her friend send her packing from her home. This left her with no choice than to ask her workplace boss to allow her to be passing nights in their shop until she was able to get a befitting accommodation. Unfortunately for her, in one of the nights, the shop was attacked by armed robbers. She further relayed her story:

... I was the only one inside (the shop), I shouted and called my madam on phone. When they (the robbers) entered they beat me until one of them came inside to tell them to hurry up and saw me on the floor and told them to stop. When I looked up it was my friend's boyfriend (the same friend that sent her packing). When they finished, they took me with them ... when they got to one street, they stopped and was talking among themselves. After some time, my friend's boyfriend came and told me that now that I have seen all their faces that they cannot let me go, it's either I join them or they kill me. That's how I become (sic) an armed robber.

In respect of how they cope with the physicality of armed robbery as a violent crime, the majority of the respondents stated that they did not start carrying guns immediately when they joined their robbery gangs. They mainly first served as informants and sourcing agents for suitable targets to be attacked. In doing this, most of them took up jobs as "house help," "house cleaner," "cook" and other domestic hands of would-be targets and use their position to obtain necessary information for their gangs. In the process, they were trained to carry guns and how to shoot. They were equally introduced into hard drugs that helped them adjust to the physicality of armed robbery.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this paper is to examine and describe the sociological profiles of women involved in a violent crime such as armed robbery. This is as against the social perception that violent crimes are the exclusive preserve of males, as females are considered incapable of committing violent crimes based on the gender socialization of women in Nigerian society to be soft, caring and compassionate (Obi et al. 2014;

Olonisakin et al. 2017). In this manner, this paper contributes specifically to the developing literature on gender and violent crimes in Nigeria and to the broader literature on gender and crime. We examined the social background factors that increase the vulnerability of females to engage in violent crimes. In alignment with social disorganization and social learning theories (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Akers 1998), evidence from the study showed that the women were made susceptible to deviance by a number of social factors. First, the participants of the study were mainly from dysfunctional families that were large and disorganized, characterized by low parental education, prone to domestic conflict, lacking in parental supervision, and negative parenting. Furthermore, the respondents grew up in abusive environments lacking in family affection and communication.

The developmental stages of the women as children were characterized by neglect, abuse and discrimination based on their gender. This may have impacted negatively on the socialization process that is meant to produce “soft, caring and compassionate” females as socially expected in the country. These results speak to two larger theoretical issues in the literature on gender and crime: the explanation that gender socialization is a cause of female criminality, and that which describes gender socialization as a factor that drives the subtle behavioral nature of women. The realities of the unconventional socialization that the women were exposed to in their childhood lend credence to the literature that women are subtle due to the training they receive to be loving and caring. There is, however, little evidence to support the position of liberal feminists that gender socialization is a cause of female criminality (Jaggar and Rothenberg 1984).

In consonance with the postulations of social disorganization theorists (Shaw and McKay 1942), this study found the characteristics of the neighborhoods of the women to be an important factor in determining their vulnerability to deviance and crime. The transmission of deviant behavior in the areas where the women spent their childhoods was made possible by the inadequacy of formal and informal social control mechanisms in such areas. The areas where the women spent their childhoods are usually characterized by strained or even broken-apart families and other conventional institutions (e.g. churches, schools, voluntary associations), a mixture of different ethnic and racial groups (heterogeneity), people moving in and out (transiency) and poverty. Therefore, positive child development is very difficult to achieve in such areas where social disorganization prevails.

The initiation of the women into crime and ultimately into armed robbery is also laden with social factors. The study found families, peers, and significant others to be those that facilitated the onset and development of the criminal careers of the respondents. Akers (1985) and Akers and Sellers (2004) identified families and friends as primary groups that individuals spend time with which expose them to definitions of behavior. They also positively or negatively reinforce a variety of behaviors, and are an avenue within which certain behaviors are learned from others or imitated. The vulnerability of the women into getting recruited into armed robbery was also found to be a factor of the lack of social support from families and friends to meet the socio-economic needs of women. Even the few who were in higher education and seemed to have progressive lives got initiated into armed robbery when they could no longer meet up with financing their education.

This analysis provides strong evidence for the importance of socialization, familial variables, peer influence, and gender discrimination, in the pathways leading to both deviance and crime. Extant literature and evidence from this study indicate that these sociological factors are equally important in ensuring effective rehabilitation of the offenders (Strapko et al. 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between gender and violent crimes has produced a great deal of research in recent decades. Western countries are increasingly able to offer various explanations for the growing trend of female participation in violent crimes. However, research attention paid to gendered criminality in Nigeria has been low, in spite of the apparent increase in female involvement in violent crimes in the country. In this article, we have focused on the dysfunctionality of the socialization process in the developmental stages of female children which can be significant in explaining their vulnerability to committing violent crimes.

Our findings suggest that the effect of proper socialization has continued to dwindle in the face of contemporary socio-economic realities. This current study supports the positions of extant literature that the family as an institution is experiencing stress in modern Nigeria, with its attendant negative effects on the country's social values and system. To counteract this, a revival of this institution is inevitable with a resounding need for government policies and programmes to focus on the improvement of the socio-economic wellbeing of the citizenry. In reviving the family institution, there is a need for a conscious consideration of gender-neutral parenting, which means stepping away from the gender binary and allowing children to grow with an appreciable sense of social equality. Gender rights organizations and other stakeholders need to increase the intensity of women and gender rights campaigns across the country, educating the people about the dangers of gender discrimination, neglect and violence. Women should not suffer any discrimination in accessing opportunities for education and work careers. This will go a long way further to reduce the level of vulnerability of women to being recruited into committing crime, especially violent crimes.

Future research should focus on the psychological effects of the social experiences of females and how their negative emotions explain pathways to female criminality. The results of this study support the utility of feminism and general strain as theories explaining the vulnerability of females turning to criminality in contemporary Nigerian society. Future research should continue to build on these connections to develop a fuller understanding of gender and crime.

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## TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS

### Abstracto

El aumento de la participación femenina en delitos violentos es una preocupación en Nigeria, sin embargo, no está claro qué informa este repentino aumento en una sociedad que supuestamente socializa el género femenino para que las mujeres sean suaves, cariñosas y compasivas. Este artículo explora los perfiles sociológicos de las mujeres involucradas en el robo a mano armada, dibujando ejemplos de 32 casos en una penitenciaría femenina nigeriana. Se encontró que las mujeres se volvieron susceptibles a la desviación por algunos factores sociales como variables familiares, características del vecindario, discriminación de género, negligencia y violencia. Se descubrió que los grupos sociales primarios y secundarios eran los principales facilitadores en la iniciación al delito, el desarrollo de la carrera criminal, el ingreso al robo a mano armada y el mantenimiento de la vida como ladrón. Este artículo concluye que la desigualdad basada en el género en todas las facetas sociales y las condiciones socioeconómicas desfavorables en Nigeria, aumentan la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres para ser reclutadas como delincuentes. Se sugiere un resurgimiento de la institución familiar, impulsar criar niños y niñas en un ambiente neutral con respecto al género, y la intervención del gobierno para mejorar el bienestar socioeconómico y la educación de género.

**Palabras clave** robo a mano armada; crimen; género; cárceles; perfil sociológico; socialización

### Abstrait

L'augmentation de l'implication des femmes dans les crimes violents est une préoccupation au Nigéria, mais on ne sait pas encore ce qui informe cette poussée soudaine dans une société qui soi-disant socialise le genre féminin pour être doux, attentionné et compatissant. Cet article explore les profils sociologiques des femmes impliquées dans des vols à main armée, en tirant des exemples de 32 cas dans un pénitencier pour femmes nigérianes. On constate que les femmes ont été rendues vulnérables à la déviance par certains facteurs sociaux tels que les variables familiales, les caractéristiques du quartier, la discrimination sexuelle, la négligence et la violence. Les groupes sociaux primaires et secondaires se sont avérés être des facilitateurs majeurs dans l'initiation au crime, le développement d'une carrière criminelle, l'entrée dans le vol à main armée et le maintien de la vie en tant que voleur. Cet article conclut que les inégalités fondées sur le sexe dans toutes les facettes sociales et les conditions socio-économiques défavorables au Nigéria augmentent la vulnérabilité des femmes à être recrutées dans la criminalité. Une relance de l'institution familiale, une parentalité non sexiste, l'intervention du gouvernement pour l'amélioration du bien-être socioéconomique et l'éducation en matière de genre sont suggérées.

**Mots clés** vol à main armée; crime; genre; prisons; profil sociologique; socialisation



**抽象**

在尼日利亚，越来越多的女性卷入暴力犯罪仍是一个令人担忧的问题，但是，目前尚不清楚是什么原因导致了这个社会的突然激增，该社会据称使女性性别变得柔和，关怀和富有同情心。本文探讨了参与武装抢劫的妇女的社会学特征，并从尼日利亚一名女性监狱中的 32 名罪犯中提取了一些案例。人们发现，由于一些社会因素，例如家庭变量，邻里特征，性别歧视，忽视和暴力，使妇女容易产生偏差。人们发现，初级和次级社会团体都是犯罪的主要推动者，犯罪职业的发展，武装抢劫的进入以及劫匪的维持生活。本文的结论是，尼日利亚所有社会方面的性别不平等和尼日利亚不利的社会经济状况，增加了妇女被招募入罪的脆弱性。建议复兴家庭机构，不分性别的育儿，政府为改善社会经济福祉而进行的干预以及性别教育。

**关键词：**持械抢劫；犯罪；性别；监狱；社会学概况；社会化

**نبذة مختصرة**

إن زيادة مشاركة الإناث في الجرائم العنيفة أمر مثير للقلق في نيجيريا ، ومع ذلك ، من غير الواضح ما الذي يفيد هذه الظاهرة المفاجئة في مجتمع يفترض أنه يتعامل مع الجنس الأنثوي ليكون ليئلاً ، عطوفاً ، عطوفاً. تستكشف هذه مستمدة أمثلة من المقالة الملامح الاجتماعية للنساء المتورطات في السطو المسلح ، 32 مدانة في سجن نيجيري. وجدنا المرأة أصبحت عرضة للانحراف عن طريق بعض العوامل الاجتماعية مثل المتغيرات العائلية ، وخصائص الأحياء ، والتمييز بين الجنسين ، والإهمال ، والعنف. تم العثور على كل من الفئات الاجتماعية الأولية والثانوية لتكون مسيرين رئيسيين في الشروع في الجريمة ، وتطوير الحياة المهنية الإجرامية ، والدخول في السطو المسلح ، والحفاظ على الحياة كسارق. تلخص هذه المقالة إلى أن عدم المساواة القائم على نوع الجنس في جميع الجوانب الاجتماعية والظروف الاجتماعية والاقتصادية غير المواتية في نيجيريا ، يزيد من ضعف النساء لبتن تجنيدهن في الجريمة. يقترح إحياء مؤسسة الأسرة ، والأبوة المحايدة جنسانياً ، وتدخل الحكومة لتحسين الرفاه الاجتماعي والاقتصادي ، والتعليم الجنساني.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** السطو المسلح الجريمة الجنس السجون التمييز الاجتماعي التنشئة

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