DCJ 715 Brief: Women as victims and perpetrators

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Abstract

This paper reviews the available evidence to answer why women are overrepresented as victims of gender-based crimes but underrepresented as perpetrators. A large amount of evidence supports the assertion that most victims are, in fact, women. Females are almost always introduced into organized crime via intimate relationships with males. Usual culprits of high unemployment, poverty, low-level education, family violence, and low self-esteem contribute to female vulnerability and exploitation. Furthermore, some cultures do not report male victims in gender-related crimes, further contributing to skewed statistics.
Additionally, most women in prison for drug-related charges are, in actuality, trafficked women. These numbers are not counted towards sexual and gender-based crimes. Countermeasures include education and support for women before they become vulnerable to organized crime. In addition, support groups need to be created to help remove the stigma of women after imprisonment.

*Keywords*: organized crime, women, gender crimes

This brief examines why women have been under-represented as perpetrators but usually over-represented as victims in the criminal justice system. Although attempts have been made to improve the treatment of women in the criminal justice system in many developed countries, there remains work to reach equality. Women’s rights are not the criminal justice system’s concern in undeveloped countries. It will take time to change this attitude because the criminal justice system has a historical precedent of women being underserved, discriminated against, and ignored. However, with a continued focus on this subject and motivation for change, there is hope for the future.

Women are overrepresented as victims because most gender-based crimes occur against women. When looking at human trafficking, for example, the gender of victims is significantly female. Examining arrests, intelligence, and interviewing victims validates the previous statements. The research further shows that members of transnational criminal organizations are overwhelmingly male. Therefore, males will be overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Although women are overrepresented in the justice system as victims, the system does not support them well. The international guided gender in criminal justice seeks to make changes. (*International guide to gender in the criminal justice system*, 2016).

The goals are to improve the citizenry’s security via foreign solid law enforcement. It is believed that by increasing the number of women that participate in the criminal justice system, the effectiveness of the law in its treatment of women would be balanced. Furthermore, a transnational organized crime must be addressed. The networks can be disrupted by attacking the problem at its roots in removing the demand for drugs. Additionally, it is shown that policies for the prevention of drug use and the establishment of treatment programs positively reduce the need for drugs from women(*International guide to gender in the criminal justice system*, 2016).

Other goals are creating global and regional partnerships that share information and methodology. The sharing of this material is critical between criminal justice and multilateral institutions. Of course, funding for gender programming is necessary, especially for poverty countries. The grant will assist in collecting metrics for any indicators and reporting of gender crimes (*International guide to gender in the criminal justice system*, 2016).

Another interesting statement from this document is the assertion that a country’s culture cannot be used to justify gender crimes. Some countries will use the excuse of their culture or religion to justify crimes against women. The document states that these actions cannot be tolerated. If they exist, they must be argued against with logic grounded in the principles of international law (*International guide to gender in the criminal justice system*, 2016).

The United Nations addresses this issue by promoting increasing female police officers. If there are more female police officers, the criminal justice system will be well represented and balanced to combat crimes against women. Women police officers have shown more remarkable restraint and are more likely to de-escalate the situation than male police officers. Females are also more likely to engage the female police officer, thereby helping to increase the validity and reliability of crime statistics. Furthermore, the police officers help create gender awareness and decrease cultural bias against women that can emerge in the criminal justice system (*UN police gender initiatives*, 2022).

An argument can be made about the imbalance of men to women as perpetrators by examining the criminal justice perceptions of gender roles in organized crime. Within the criminal justice system, the perception of men as always being the perpetrator and women being the victim is held. Unfortunately, this can lead to skewed statistics and an incorrect conclusion of women’s essential roles in organized crime. This is a complicated problem to evaluate because of the nature of women’s path to criminal participation. For example, women will often start as a victim and then, over time, evolve into a perpetrator who assists the criminal organization as an active participant. In this case, is the woman the victim or perpetrator? The answer to the question depends on the timeline of the woman’s activities. In the beginning, she is a victim. However, as she accepts her plight and begins to commit crimes, she becomes a perpetrator (Hicks, 2021).

An interesting point in this research was the finding that many countries would not report men who were victims of human trafficking. Around the globe, men are trafficked for labor but are usually not included in crime reporting, thus further skewing the perpetrator/victim gender statistics. Although the lack of motivation for this type of reporting is usually culturally based, its application has been found throughout the globe (Hicks, 2021).

To fully understand women’s role as perpetrators, the path to organized crime participation must be examined. Research has shown that most parts for women in organized crime are supportive. Some cases have advanced to leadership roles; however, this is not the norm. A surprising area where they may have leadership roles is human trafficking for sexual crimes. Women in leadership roles are likely to play a recruiting and victim management role in human trafficking. Considering that most victims of human trafficking are for the sexual purposes of women and children, this revelation is disturbing (Hicks, 2021).

According to the UN, five out of ten trafficked victims were women, two out of ten were young girls. Almost all of them were trafficked for sexual purposes. The statistic for women being trafficked for sexual purposes was 92%. Moreover, social media is a powerful tool for traffickers to recruit females committed in apartments. This type of crime can go unnoticed and unseen (*Facts and figures: Ending violence against women*, 2022).

Furthermore, while there has been a decline in child marriage globally, there has been no discernible suppression of child marriage in Latin America or the Caribbean. These rates remain the same as they were 25 years ago. Women in these relationships are under the age of 18. The recent pandemic has disrupted the market over the last two years; however, it is expected to rebound shortly (*Facts and figures: Ending violence against women*, 2022).

Regarding the victim management role of women in organized crime, the research shows that caregiving roles are assigned to women to leverage their cultural role fulfillment. Women in these roles use their gender identity to communicate and care for the victims under their authority. They generate trust with their victims, giving them control and furthering their exploitation of the victims. The caregiver role is used extensively in human sex trafficking (Hicks, 2021).

The pathway for women to participate in organized crime is almost always due to a close intimate relationship. Relationships include significant others, family members, or close friends. They are almost always enticed or tricked into participation due to a betrayal of trust. The number of women involved in organized crime continues to increase. Additionally, any criminal power that a woman might possess is linked to the men in the family. In nearly every case, the woman became involved in organized crime through male contact, whether boyfriend, husband, or close male friend (Hicks, 2021).

Sadly, some factors lead to violence against women. Lack of education, growing up around family violence, early use of alcohol, high unemployment, and gender inequality. An additional problem exists if the culture ascribes higher value to males than females. These cultures might also have little to no legal protections for women. Many situations face many health consequences, leading to homicide or suicide tendencies. There is a high risk of HIV and other STDs. Additionally, a significant risk of miscarriages and stillbirths exists. It may lead to depression, stress, anxiety, and different disorders such as sleep and eating disorders (*Violence against women*, 2021).

Some concern should be given to the research findings because all of the evidence is garnered from perpetrators that have been arrested and prosecuted. The problem lies in the observation that women primarily are used at the lowest levels of organized crime and thus are highly vulnerable to arrest. It becomes difficult to statistically determine if women play a higher role in organized crime but are not discovered and prosecuted. Moreover, since women in law enforcement services are insignificant, little empathy is awarded to female victims, and a higher percentage of them are arrested and counted statistically. Adding complexity to the perpetrator/victim categorization dilemma shows that most women in prison for trafficking drugs should be classified as trafficked women. However, this observation does not make it into the statistics and thus skews the statistical output (Hicks, 2021).

Research also demonstrates that community and family support and connectedness for women positively prevent participating in organized crime. Programs that support this connectedness must be established and promoted as a countermeasure. Connectedness with religious organizations, schools, or especially families is very helpful in preventing recidivism. The research demonstrates that young females are more susceptible to moral evaluation, impulse control, empathy, and guilt awareness. Factors should be considered in designing prevention programs for females (Hicks, 2021).

Unfortunately, there is a strong societal stigma against women who have been incarcerated for their involvement in organized crime. The negative societal stigma makes it very difficult for a woman to reenter society after serving her time. If there is a complete lack of programs to assist these women after the release, recidivism is inevitable. There is also evidence that even when drug treatment programs are available to women, they may not be accessed due to the fear of losing custody of their children. Furthermore, authorities tend not to support women involved in trafficking, causing a feedback loop of distrust between the police and female victims/perpetrators; with such stigma and limited opportunities after the release, recidivism remains high (Hicks, 2021).

In conclusion, several environmental factors contribute to female vulnerability for criminal organizations to exploit. They determine the statistics for women being overrepresented as victims while underrepresented as perpetrators in the criminal justice system. Most women are coerced or tricked into victimhood. After some time, some of these women will become perpetrators as active participants in a criminal organization. Due to many women being of service at the lowest level of the criminal organization and thus most likely to be arrested, possible discrepancies are introduced. Additionally, certain countries denying male victimhood for certain crimes contribute to skewed statistics (Hicks, 2021; *International guide to gender in the criminal justice system*, 2016; *UN police gender initiatives*, 2022; *Violence against women*, 2021).

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