

Gender-Based Variations in Crime: Case Studies and Data Analy

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Abstract

This study examines gender differences in crime, a long-standing area of interest within sociology, criminology, psychology, and law. Consistent global patterns reveal that men commit more crimes, particularly violent offenses, than women, though gender also shapes victimization experiences and justice system responses. By analysing statistical trends, types of crimes associated with each gender, and the underlying social, cultural, and biological factors, this research highlights the complex interplay influencing criminal behaviour. In addition to addressing problems of traditional criminological theories, this research critically reviews important theoretical frameworks that explain gender variations in criminal behaviour. It investigates how gender norms or gender stereotypes, cultural expectations, and institutional practices shape outcomes within the justice system. Learning more about these elements is crucial for crafting effective crime prevention strategies, implementing gender-sensitive policies, and ensuring fair treatment across the criminal justice process. Ultimately, the study adds to broader conversations about social justice, gender equity, and the creation of more inclusive and just societies. The findings underscore the persistent gender gap in criminal behavior, shaped by complex social, cultural, and structural factors, and highlight the need for gender-responsive policies to promote fairness and equity within the justice system.

Introduction

Crime has long been a subject of sociological inquiry, offering insights into societal structures, power dynamics, and cultural norms. One of the most consistent patterns in criminology is the disparity in crime rates between men and women. Historically, men have committed more crimes, particularly violent ones, across various societies and time periods. Understanding gender differences in crime involves analysing not only statistical trends but also the underlying social, cultural, and biological factors.

This paper indulges exploring gender imbalances in criminal activity by examining global statistical trends, the types of crimes committed by each gender, theoretical explanations, critiques of existing theories, and the implications for criminal justice policies¹.

Gender has long been recognized as a significant factor in understanding crime dynamics, with research consistently demonstrating differences in criminal behaviour, victimization experiences, and justice system responses based on gender. The study of gender and crime intersects multiple disciplines,

including sociology, criminology, psychology, and law, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay of biological, social, and cultural factors shaping individuals' involvement in criminal activities and their interactions with the criminal justice system. This research seeks to explore the nuanced relationship between gender and crime, aiming to shed light on the underlying mechanisms driving gender disparities in criminal behaviour and justice outcomes. By examining various theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gender influences patterns of offending, victimization, and legal processing. Understanding gendered patterns of crime is essential for developing effective crime prevention strategies, designing gender-responsive policies, and promoting equitable treatment within the criminal justice system².

Gender disparities in criminal behavior have been extensively examined over the years in disciplines such as sociology, criminology, psychology, and law. Studies globally indicate that men are more prone to engage in criminal activities, particularly violent crimes, while women tend to commit fewer offenses and often partake in non-violent or financial crimes. In addition to these variations in crime perpetrators, gender influences how individuals experience victimization and the treatment they receive from the justice system. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for developing equitable policies that address the needs of all individuals and guarantee fairness for every gender.

In India, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) offers official statistics on crime, displaying patterns and categories of offenses throughout the nation. Recent reports indicate a rise in offenses against women, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. Although numerous incidents may remain unnoticed because of social stigma and various obstacles, these figures indicate that women continue to be at risk of gender-based violence. Data also indicates that men are primarily engaged in violent crimes such as murder, robbery, and assault. Social, cultural, and economic factors influence these trends, shaping gender roles and behaviors within Indian society³.

This research seeks to examine the disparities between males and females in criminal behavior in India by analyzing crime data and the societal and cultural factors contributing to these differences. It merges official statistics with an examination of gender roles, stereotypes, and biases within the system to enhance the understanding of how gender influences crime and justice. The aim is to assist in creating improved crime prevention strategies and reforms that promote equality and justice within India's criminal justice system.

The scope of gender and crime is vast and multifaceted, encompassing a range of topics that explore the relationship between gender dynamics and various aspects of criminal behaviour, victimization, and the criminal justice system. Here's a more detailed breakdown of its scope:

1. **Gendered Patterns of Offending:** This involves examining the differences in the types of crimes committed by men and women, as well as the factors that contribute to these gender disparities in offending rates. Researchers analyse how societal expectations, gender socialization, and power structures influence individual involvement in criminal behaviour.
2. **Gender-Based Violence:** Gender and crime research extensively explores forms of violence that disproportionately affect individuals based on their gender, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, honour killings, and human trafficking. Understanding the root causes, prevalence, and consequences of gender-based violence is a significant aspect of this area of study.
3. **Victimization and Gender:** Researchers investigate how gender influences individuals' experiences as victims of crime. This involves analyzing the types of crimes that men and women are more likely to experience or commit, as well as how society responds to victims differently based on gender—for example, through victim blaming or skepticism toward their accounts.

4. **Gender Bias in the Criminal Justice System:**

Gender intersects with various stages of the criminal justice process, including arrest, prosecution, sentencing, and incarceration.

5. **Intersectionality:** Intersectional approaches are crucial in understanding how gender intersects with other social identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and disability, to shape individuals' experiences of crime and the criminal justice system. Researchers examine how the intersection of these identities shapes distinct experiences of victimization, offending, and interactions with the criminal justice system⁴.

Statistical Trends in Gender and Crime

Globally, men commit a disproportionate share of crimes. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS, 2020), males account for approximately 73% of all arrests in the United States. In violent crimes such as homicide, men represent over 90% of offenders (FBI Uniform Crime Reporting, 2019). Internationally, similar patterns are observed. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2019) reports that men account for about 80-90% of homicide perpetrators worldwide, with slight regional variations. In property crimes and non-violent offenses, women's involvement is relatively higher, though still lower than men's.

Women's participation in crimes like fraud, embezzlement, and drug offenses has shown a slight increase over the past few decades. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Ministry of Justice (2020) reported that women represented approximately 25% of all prosecutions, with notable involvement in theft and fraud cases. These trends indicate a slow but observable shift in gender patterns, although the gender gap remains significant⁵.

Types of Crime by Gender

Types of crimes committed often reflect gendered socialization and opportunities:

- **Violent Crime:** Men dominate in offenses requiring physical aggression, such as homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Sociological theories suggest that these behaviours are linked to traditional notions of masculinity emphasizing dominance, strength, and risk-taking (Messerschmidt, 1993).

- **Property and Economic Crimes:** Women are more involved in crimes like shoplifting, welfare fraud, and embezzlement. These offenses often align with economic survival strategies, especially among marginalized women (Daly, 1994).
- **White-Collar and Organized Crime:** Men still predominate in white-collar crimes, though women's participation has grown with their increased presence in professional sectors. In organized crime, women's roles have traditionally been supportive, but there are cases of women leading drug trafficking operations and gangs.
- **Cybercrime:** Emerging trends show that both genders are participating in cybercrime, though men still dominate hacking and large-scale cyberattacks, women are more involved in online fraud and scams.
- **Terrorism:** Although men constitute the majority of terrorists, women involved in extremist activities has increased, particularly in supporting roles and propaganda dissemination⁶.

Methodology

Aim

The aim of this research is to identify the gender-based differences in criminal behaviour and victimization, and to explore how these differences are influenced by social, cultural, and institutional factors. The study also intends to analyze statistical crime trends across genders, critically evaluate theoretical frameworks explaining gendered offending, and explore the impact of gender norms and stereotypes on justice system outcomes. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to the development of more equitable and gender-responsive criminal justice policies.

Procedure

This research followed a structured multi-phase procedure to ensure thorough and credible analysis:

Data Collection

Quantitative data on crime rates, types of offenses, and victim demographics were gathered from international databases such as UNODC, WHO, and national statistics bureaus (e.g., FBI, ONS).

Academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and official reports, were collected to support theoretical and contextual analysis.

Literature Review

A systematic review of literature was conducted to identify and synthesize major theoretical perspectives, including classical, positivist, feminist, and contemporary criminological theories.

Key critiques of traditional models and their limitations in explaining female criminality were examined.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify trends and compare male and female offending and victimization patterns across time and geography.

Thematic content analysis was employed to examine qualitative data, such as case studies, court judgments, and media reports. NVivo software was used for coding to identify recurring themes related to gender bias, cultural perceptions, and institutional reactions.

Synthesis and Interpretation

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of how gender influences criminal behavior and justice outcomes.

The results were discussed in relation to existing theories and policy implications.

Ethical Considerations

Only publicly accessible and ethically sourced secondary data were used. Full citation and academic integrity were maintained throughout.

Data Analysis

Crime Statistics

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report for 2022, a sum of 4,45,256 cases of crimes against women continued to be reported across India. This represents a 4% increase from the previous year, reflecting a continuing rise in gender-based violence. The classification of these crimes is as follows:

- Cruelty by husband or his relatives: 31.4%. Registered under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, remains the most frequently reported crime against women. It encompasses both physical and emotional abuse within the household, often linked to dowry demands and patriarchal control.
- Kidnapping and abduction of women: 19.2%. Many cases in this category involve forced marriages, elopement, or trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation or domestic labor. The figures highlight the vulnerability of women, particularly those from rural or economically weaker sections.
- Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty: 18.7%. Crime under this includes sexual harassment, groping, stalking, and other forms of public or private assault. It reflects prevailing societal attitudes that condone or normalize the violation of women's bodily autonomy.
- Rape: 7.1%. While this percentage may seem relatively low, it is important to recognize that rape is significantly under-reported due to fear of stigma, retaliation, and inadequate support systems. These incidents highlight the severe threat posed to women's safety across social settings.
- Other crimes: The remaining percentage consist of dowry deaths, cyberstalking, acid attacks, voyeurism, and human trafficking. Though reported less frequently, these crimes often involve long-term psychological and physical harm.

These statistics reveal highlight that a substantial portion of violence against women occurs within the domestic sphere or are rooted in gender-based discrimination. The data calls attention to the ongoing need for legal reform, gender sensitization, and stronger protective mechanisms⁷.

Gender and Crime Rates

Research and law enforcement data reveal a class gender gap in both offending and victimization patterns.

Men are disproportionately responsible for violent crimes such as murder, armed robbery, aggravated assault, gang violence, and sexual offenses. This trend is often linked to cultural constructions of masculinity that associate male identity with power, aggression, and dominance. Contributing factors may include unemployment, lack of education, peer influence, and substance abuse.

On other hand, women are more frequently to be victims of crimes that reflect systemic gender inequalities, such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, dowry-related violence, and trafficking. These crimes are frequently unreported due to fear, social stigma, a lack of financial independence, or distrust in the criminal justice system. Women from marginalized communities, such as Dalits, Adivasis, or LGBTQ+ individuals, are more vulnerable.

When women commit crimes, they are more likely to be involve in non-violent or economically driven offenses such as petty theft, fraud, or drug couriering. In many cases, such involvement arises from poverty, exploitation, or coercion by male partners. Women are also less likely to hold leadership roles in criminal enterprises, reflecting broader structural inequalities.

The different patterns of criminal behavior and victimization along gender lines also influence public perception and judicial outcomes. Few examples, female offenders are often judged more harshly when their actions contradict expected gender roles, especially in cases involving child neglect or violent crimes. Meanwhile, leniency in sentencing for women in some contexts may be based more

on stereotypical views of women as passive or dependent rather than a genuine understanding of their circumstances.

Overall, the analysis reveals that gender significantly influences how shaping the experiences of individuals within the criminal justice system— as victims, offenders, and as subjects of legal and social judgment. These findings underline the need for gender-responsive policies and reforms that acknowledge the complex social realities behind crime and justice in India⁸.

Gender Bias in the Criminal Justice System

Gender -based biases within the criminal justice system significantly impact on outcomes for male and female offenders. Women often receive more lenient sentences for non-violent crimes, particularly if they conform to traditional gender roles. Conversely, women who commit violent crimes or deviate from gender expectations may face harsher judgments. These biases reflect broader societal attitudes toward gender and morality.

Recent Trends and Implications

Recent data show a slight narrowing of the gender gap in crime, particularly in non-violent offenses. Several factors contributing to this trend include:

- **Evolving Gender Roles:**As more women enter the workforce and participate in public life, their exposure to both legal and illegal opportunities have increased
- **Economic Pressures:**Economic downturns and widening income inequality may push more women into economically motivated crimes.
- **Policy Changes:**Stricter crime policies and shifts in law enforcement practices have led to more arrests for minor offences.

Despite these trends, violent crime remains predominantly male. Cultural norms around masculinity, systemic inequalities, and structural barriers continue to perpetuate this disparity⁹.

Case Study: Karen Matthews and the Kidnapping of Shannon Matthews (2008)

The case of Karen Matthews stands out in contemporary British criminal history, not only for

the crime itself but for the media and public reaction it provoked—deeply rooted in gender stereotypes and class biases. In February 2008, Karen Matthews, a 32-year-old mother from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, reported her 9-year-old daughter Shannon Matthews missing after school. The case immediately gained national attention, especially given its proximity in time to the well-known disappearance of Madeleine McCann.

A massive and costly police operation followed, involving over 300 officers and an expenditure exceeding £3 million. Public sympathy grew as media coverage painted Karen Matthews as a distraught and helpless mother. However, the narrative shifted dramatically after Shannon was found alive 24 days later, hidden in a divan bed at the home of Michael Donovan—Karen’s boyfriend’s uncle. Investigations revealed that Matthews had conspired with Donovan to stage the kidnapping, intending to later “discover” Shannon and claim the £50,000 reward money offered by a local newspaper.

From a criminological standpoint, the Matthews case is significant not only for the crime itself, but also for what it reveals about how female offenders, particularly mothers, are treated in the criminal justice system and media discourse. Karen Matthews was vilified as both a criminal and a failed mother. The crime was framed as a betrayal of her maternal duties, which violated the deeply held societal ideal of motherhood as inherently nurturing, protective, and selfless.

Unlike many male offenders whose crimes may be assessed primarily in terms of motive and criminal behavior, Matthews was judged through a moral lens that emphasized her perceived shortcomings as a woman and a mother. Tabloid headlines branded her “Britain’s Worst Mum,” highlighting her working-class background, poor parenting record, multiple children by different fathers, and perceived lack of intelligence. This personalized and sensationalist coverage amplified the social outrage and may have contributed to the severity of her sentence. In December 2008, she was convicted of kidnapping, false imprisonment, and perverting the course of justice and sentenced to eight years in prison. She

served approximately half of this sentence before being released on license.

The Matthews case reveals how **gendered and class-based narratives** intersect in the public and legal responses to female offenders. Her actions, while criminal, were uniquely pathologized because they conflicted with the dominant ideals of femininity and motherhood. In contrast, male criminals committing comparable or worse offenses often face public scrutiny for their actions alone, not their personal failings in relation to gendered roles.

Furthermore, the case illustrates how **media representations** can shape societal perceptions and potentially influence judicial processes. The portrayal of Matthews as manipulative, unintelligent, and morally deviant contributed to a widespread belief that she deserved a harsh punishment—not just for the crime, but for being an unfit mother and a ‘bad woman’.

It highlights the need for a justice system that recognizes the structural, psychological, and socio-economic dimensions of crime—especially when addressing female offenders whose actions do not conform to traditional gender norms. Matthews’ case underscores how criminality in women is often interpreted as an aberration from expected womanhood¹⁰.

Conclusion

Understanding gender differences in crime requires a multifaceted approach that considers biological, social, cultural, and structural factors. Men consistently outnumber women in criminal activities, especially violent crimes, although women’s involvement in non-violent and economic crimes has increased. Future research should focus on the evolving nature of gender roles and how technological, economic, and political changes influence criminal behaviour.

In criminological terms, this case serves as a clear example of how gendered expectations influence both the perception and treatment of offenders. Policy implications include the need for gender-responsive interventions that address the specific

needs and circumstances of female offenders, reforming sentencing practices to eliminate gender biases, and developing prevention programs that challenge harmful gender norms. A comprehensive understanding of gender and crime not only enhances criminological theory but also promotes a more equitable and effective criminal justice system.

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