

FACTORS AND CAUSES THAT FAVOR FEMALE CRIMINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Criminality is a particularly complex social phenomenon, shaped by a variety of economic, cultural, psychological, and legal factors. Over time, criminological research has predominantly focused on male criminal behavior, as men have traditionally represented the majority of offenders and incarcerated individuals. However, interest in the study of female criminality has increased over the past decades, reflecting the need to understand this specific aspect of deviant behavior, often overlooked in classical analyses of criminal phenomena.

Female criminality should not be viewed merely as a percentage within overall crime statistics, but rather as a phenomenon with distinct characteristics, influenced by particular social, psychological, and contextual factors. The motivations behind women's criminal behavior often differ from those of men, being closely linked to experiences such as domestic violence, personal trauma, substance dependence, economic hardship, or abusive relationships. Furthermore, the types of crimes committed by women, their frequency, and modus operandi may exhibit significant particularities that require a distinct criminological approach.

Female criminality represents a complex and sensitive subject whose analysis requires a deep understanding of the multiple dimensions involved: social, cultural, psychological, and legal. Unlike male criminality—which has been extensively studied and theorized—delinquency among women continues to be treated as a peripheral or deviant phenomenon in relation to the "norm" of criminal behavior.

KEYWORDS: *female criminality, social context, globalization, vulnerable positions, differentiated socialization*

J.E.L CLASSIFICATION: K42, J16, I31

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF FEMALE CRIMINALITY

Addressing the causes of female criminality requires moving beyond rigid explanatory models built primarily around male experiences. Historically, most criminological theories have interpreted criminal behavior from a gender-neutral perspective, overlooking the contextual and social specificities that shape women's experiences.

When these theories are applied without adaptation, they risk providing an incomplete or even distorted view of the motivations and trajectories behind female offending. For instance, focusing exclusively on the lack of material resources as a motive may obscure emotional, relational, or systemic pressures that deeply influence women's decisions in critical situations.

Beyond material deprivation, the lives of many female offenders are often marked by traumatic experiences, emotional neglect, and marginalization within society. Dysfunctional relationships, repeated abuse, dependence on controlling partners, or the absence of real life alternatives contribute to a buildup of psychological tension that, under certain circumstances, may lead to deviant behavior.

Crimes committed by women are often less driven by a desire for profit or dominance, and more by attempts to survive in a hostile environment, escape abusive relationships, or protect what they hold most dear—children, dignity, or the hope for a better life.

Therefore, the analysis of female criminality cannot be separated from a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and emotional context in which these women live. It is not simply about identifying "causes," but about carefully interpreting a complex reality in which crime sometimes emerges as a response—not ideal, but understandable—to a lack of options or the inability to break free from a vicious cycle.

This perspective offers not only a more humane understanding of the phenomenon but also the opportunity to build more effective solutions, focused on prevention, support, and real reintegration—rather than solely on punishment.

2. FACTORS THAT FAVOR FEMALE CRIMINALITY

To understand why certain women come to commit crimes, it is essential to explore the elements that favor such behavior. Unlike male criminality—where motivations may often be linked to competition or dominance—women's involvement in illegal acts is frequently influenced by difficult social conditions and complicated interpersonal relationships.

A decisive factor is the precarious socio-economic situation. Women facing severe material deprivation, unemployment, or limited access to education and social services may see crime as a temporary solution to meet urgent needs. These offenses are not driven by the desire for enrichment, but rather by necessity and survival.

The influence of family and relational environments plays a particularly important role. In situations where women live in abusive settings or are emotionally or financially dependent on their partners, they may be manipulated or coerced into participating in illegal activities. As a result, the line between victim and perpetrator often becomes blurred, and criminal behavior develops within a context of pressure and control.

Traumatic experiences in childhood or adolescence are another major element that contributes to women's vulnerability to crime. Abuse, neglect, or the loss of family support can lead to deep emotional disorders which, if left unaddressed, may encourage risky decisions and involvement in criminal acts.

In addition, societal expectations related to gender roles and cultural norms can create pressures which, if inadequately managed, can fuel the marginalization of women who do not conform. These women, often rejected by traditional social environments, may seek acceptance in deviant groups where criminal acts are seen as a form of validation or empowerment.

In conclusion, women's involvement in criminal activities is the result of a complex interplay of socio-economic, familial, psychological, and cultural conditions. Understanding this complexity is crucial for developing effective prevention and support strategies that address the real needs of women at risk.

3. INDIVIDUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

In understanding the causes of female criminality, it is crucial to focus on the individual characteristics and psychological elements that influence criminal behavior. These often stem from complex personal experiences that shape how women respond to life circumstances.

A frequently encountered factor is the impact of psychological trauma. Experiences of abuse—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—during childhood or within adult relationships can leave deep scars, affecting how women manage emotions and interpersonal connections. In some cases, criminal acts may emerge as an expression of inner pain or as an attempt to regain control that has been lost in other areas of life.

Mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, or various forms of emotional imbalance are also often present in the lives of women involved in illegal activities. These conditions can impair their ability to make well-reasoned decisions and increase susceptibility to negative influences or impulsive actions.

Feelings of isolation and marginalization also play a significant role. Women who lack social and emotional support may be drawn to deviant groups where illegal behaviors are accepted or even encouraged. This dynamic highlights the close link between social environment and the predisposition to criminal behavior.

Finally, impulsivity and difficulties with self-control can be exacerbated by trauma or psychological imbalances, contributing to rash decisions made without proper assessment of risks or consequences.

In summary, understanding female criminality requires careful attention to the psychological and individual factors that not only trigger but also perpetuate criminal behavior. This underscores the need for personalized therapeutic interventions and comprehensive support systems aimed at reintegration and the prevention of recidivism.

4. SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Social influences and the surrounding environment play a crucial role in shaping women's criminal behavior. These factors create a context in which certain situations and experiences can favor the adoption of deviant conduct. The family is one of the most important environments for socialization.

Women who come from unstable family backgrounds marked by conflict, violence, or neglect often face difficulties in developing a solid sense of emotional security and identity. Such contexts can lead to the emergence of vulnerabilities that increase the risk of engaging in illegal acts.

Precarious socio-economic conditions represent another major factor. Poverty, lack of access to education, and limited opportunities in the labor market can push women toward survival crimes such as theft or trafficking of goods. In such circumstances, criminality becomes a coping strategy in response to urgent needs and lack of resources.

Moreover, the influence of social groups is essential to understanding this phenomenon. Women embedded in deviant social circles may be continuously exposed to norms that justify or even encourage criminal behavior, making participation in such activities seem normal or even necessary for acceptance and support.

Additionally, cultural factors and societal norms regarding the role of women can create added pressures. Stereotypes and traditional expectations often stigmatize women who deviate from these models, amplifying feelings of social exclusion and complicating their reintegration after committing a crime.

Social and environmental factors offer a complex perspective on female criminality, highlighting the need for prevention and intervention measures that consider women's life contexts and the social networks in which they are embedded.

5. ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL FACTORS

Precarious economic conditions and limited access to education play a key role in shaping women's criminal behavior. The lack of financial stability and the difficulty in meeting basic needs can lead to situations in which some women feel compelled to resort to crime in order to survive or cope with material pressures.

Women in vulnerable positions—such as those without a stable income or those burdened with family responsibilities without support—are particularly at risk of becoming involved in illegal acts in an effort to secure the resources needed for daily living. This economic pressure often leads to property-related offenses such as theft or fraud.

Additionally, a low level of education exacerbates this vulnerability, as inadequate training limits access to well-paid and stable employment. Without solid professional skills and knowledge, women's chances of achieving financial independence are significantly reduced, increasing their exposure to risk.

Moreover, education plays a vital role in raising awareness about the consequences of illegal actions and in developing the ability to cope with stress or personal conflict without resorting to deviant behavior. Women with higher levels of education generally have more resources to avoid criminal pathways.

Therefore, it is clear that economic and educational factors do not operate in isolation but rather interact and reinforce each other, significantly influencing women's decisions to engage in criminal acts. This underscores the need for integrated interventions that support both economic development and equal access to education for women, in order to prevent female criminality.

6. CULTURAL AND GENDER FACTORS

Social norms and gender role expectations play a crucial role in how women become involved in criminal behaviors and how they are judged by society. Historically, women have been perceived through stereotypes that associate them with gentleness, caregiving, and rule-following. Any deviation from these traditional roles often generates not only condemnation for the act itself but also harsh social criticism, deepening the stigma.

These cultural pressures can indirectly influence the reasons women commit crimes—for example, as a reaction to abuse, to protect their families, or to cope with difficult living conditions. Moreover, gender stereotypes affect both how women are treated within the justice system and the type of penalties applied—sometimes with excessive leniency, other times with disproportionate severity.

Furthermore, gendered socialization often leads women to engage in a distinct type of criminality, typically characterized by less violent acts and often tied to familial or relational contexts. Thus, cultural factors and gender norms not only shape criminal behavior but also influence the social and legal responses to female criminality.

To truly understand female crime, it is essential to include an analysis of cultural norms and gender constraints, so that we can design policies and measures that are more accurately tailored to the realities of this phenomenon.

7. SITUATIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Female delinquency does not arise in a vacuum; it is often the result of specific, sometimes fleeting but deeply influential circumstances. Situational factors refer to immediate and unforeseen conditions—such as a sudden emotional breakup, a recent trauma, a personal economic crisis, or an episode of domestic violence—that can destabilize a woman's psychosocial balance and push her toward deviant behavior when no other options are perceived as available.

Likewise, the broader context in which a criminal act occurs—such as a tense family environment, lack of community support, proximity to normalized delinquent behavior, or social disorganization—acts as a matrix that amplifies individual vulnerabilities. In such environments, crime is not necessarily a conscious choice but rather an adaptive response to an oppressive climate.

In many cases, women become involved in criminal acts not through personal initiative but as a result of imbalanced personal relationships, where dynamics of power, emotional dependence, or manipulation play a determining role. Thus, a significant portion of female criminality is deeply connected to relational and social circumstances rather than internal predispositions or stable traits.

The situational and contextual perspective on female criminality emphasizes the idea that not only personal characteristics, but also concrete circumstances and living environments, can shape criminal behaviors in ways that are often subtle yet decisive.

8. CUMULATIVE AND INTERDEPENDENT FACTORS

Women's criminal behavior cannot be understood through the lens of a single causal factor. Rather, it results from a gradual process in which multiple elements—personal, social, economic, and cultural—intertwine and reinforce each other. Once combined, these factors do not simply overlap; they form a complex equation in which each element modifies its significance and impact depending on the others.

For instance, early traumas such as emotional abuse or parental neglect can lay the foundation for psychological instability, which, in the absence of social or educational support, may deepen over time. If material deprivation, negative influences from the social environment, or co-dependent relationships are added to this fragile structure, a fertile ground is created for deviation from legal norms. In this context, crime does not appear as an isolated act of will, but rather as an extreme response to compounded pressures, leaving little room for viable alternatives.

Each factor—whether psychological, social, or economic—varies in its weight depending on the timing of its occurrence and the interaction with other active elements. Moreover, their interplay often triggers a domino effect, in which a seemingly minor issue can lead to a cascade of major imbalances.

This cumulative and interdependent perspective is essential to genuinely understand female criminal behavior. It is not a matter of a simple choice between legal and illegal, but rather a network of constraints, influences, and personal vulnerabilities that, together, can progressively direct a woman toward criminality. Therefore, analyzing these synergies sheds light not only on the real causes of female crime but also on effective and personalized points of intervention in social policy.

9. CONCLUSIONS ON THE ETIOLOGY OF FEMALE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Exploring the complexity of female criminal behavior leads us to the conclusion that it cannot be reduced to simplistic or uniform explanations. The etiology of deviance among women results from a dynamic interaction of individual, social, cultural, economic, and contextual factors, each carrying different weight depending on the life trajectory of each individual.

Women who end up committing crimes are often the product of a social system that has marginalized them, limited their opportunities, and exposed them to various forms of vulnerability.

Unlike traditional models that assume rational choice or autonomous criminal intent, reality shows that many criminal behaviors among women are rooted in circumstances of coercion, survival, or emotional pressure.

For example, involvement in abusive relationships, lack of family support, childhood trauma, or limited access to education can become links in a causal chain that fosters deviance.

Classical criminological theories—such as social control theory, differential association, or subcultural theory—offer a useful framework but are not always sufficient. Therefore, incorporating contemporary theories such as feminist, victimological, and trauma-informed approaches becomes essential in interpreting female criminal behavior in a contextualized and balanced manner.

These perspectives not only add depth to the analysis but also challenge outdated stereotypes that portray female offenders either as "absolute deviants" or passive victims of circumstance.

Another crucial aspect revealed by theoretical synthesis is the cumulative and interdependent nature of the factors that lead to criminal acts. Rarely does a single element—such as material deprivation or psychological trauma—suffice to produce illegal behavior. More commonly, we observe a pattern of overlap between personal struggles and external pressures that, in the absence of adequate intervention, may drive individuals toward deviance.

Ultimately, we can assert that the etiology of female criminality reflects systemic inequalities, personal vulnerabilities, and imbalanced power relations. A profound understanding of these causes should not remain merely an academic exercise but should underpin the reform of penal and social policies—promoting responses that combine firmness with empathy, and prevention with real support. In this way, an integrated, gender-sensitive approach, tailored to social realities, becomes the key to authentic and inclusive justice.

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