

GENDER AND CRIMINALITY IN NIGERIA: INSIGHTS ON WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN SELECTED FELONY RELATED CRIMES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The subtle role of women in felony related crimes has continued to pose problems for society especially with regard to reporting and data collection for research purposes. This notwithstanding, gender perspectives on crime remain an interesting and topical issue today. It is on this premise that this study examined the issue of gender and criminality in Nigeria with specific focus on women's involvement in selected felony related crimes such as armed robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping and murder in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The main objective was to provide empirical evidence concerning the key drivers and level of women involvement in the selected crimes. Therefore, relying on the philosophy of the Strain/Anomie theory and relevant analytical tools such as the simple percentage, chi-square statistical test (χ^2) and relevant descriptive models, the study revealed that socioeconomic conditions such as previous association with male criminal boyfriends, unemployment and poverty are significant drivers of women's involvement in the selected felony related crimes in the study area. However, it was also found that among the four felonies investigated, women have moderate involvement in armed robbery and murder, with low involvement in kidnapping. The only felony where women have high involvement is drug abuse. Given this finding, the study suggests, among others, that a well-designed sensitization programme aimed at educating women on getting involved in the selected felony crimes, should be embarked upon in addition to State policies aimed at addressing unemployment and poverty in Port Harcourt city.

Keywords: Gender, Criminality, Women, Felony, Crimes, Rivers State.

1. Introduction

Issues of gender in regard to crime have been considered to be largely ignored and pushed aside in criminological and sociological study, until recent years. A dominant reason put forward in the literature for the insufficient academic attention to gender dynamics in crime and deviance is that significant cases of criminal behaviours have been almost exclusively committed by men (Makinde, 2010). As a result, theoretical concerns have focused more on discussing the invisibility of women in crime or at worst that females have an apparently low level of offending with insignificant social threat when compared to their male counterparts. In addition, it is the position of most scholars (see, Triston, 2011) that female delinquency tends to be of a relatively minor kind, sparking the notion that including women in crime research could undermine existing theories (Heidensohn, 1995). However, with the emergence of new theories, advancements in feminist studies and increases in female crimes, more attention seems to have been given to the issue of

gender and criminality.

Nigeria is not left out of the rising wave of crime not least the involvement of women in criminal activities. However, the Nigerian society overtime, has devised means of controlling crime and dealing with those who deviate from its norms and values. For instance, in pre-colonial times women were more or less restricted to their traditional social roles. The communal system of living added to the internal and external mechanism for crime control (mainly of ridicule and public disgrace) kept the level of criminal activities by women low. However, with the introduction of a money economy and emergence of private property during the colonial period, some women began to seek employment outside the home. With increased labour force participation for them, some had the opportunity of getting involved in criminal activities (Mmadu, 2011; Onaolapo, 2012). For both males and females in Nigeria as with other parts of the world, the likelihood of criminal behaviour is increased by weak social bonds and parental controls, low perceptions

of risk, delinquent associations, chances to learn criminal motives and techniques, and other access to criminal opportunities (Onaolapo, 2012). While historically, women's crime footprints have been largely minimal due to limitations on women's opportunities in the paid workforce, in conjunction with their more extensive domestic responsibilities, recent increase in women criminality especially in capital offences such as armed robbery, murder and kidnapping has created a new challenge for society.

Women involvement in criminality presents serious problems for society given the subtlety associated with them. It is in the light of this that Makinde (2010) reported that women criminal behaviour comes with subtle and profound differences that generates more problems even for law enforcement agencies in terms of crime detection and management when compared to the criminal behaviour of men. The challenge posed by female suicide bombers in war-torn Arab societies as is the case with the recent recruitment and use of women by Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria has been well acknowledged in the literature. Rashid (2009) and Hamza (2011) in their study of suicide bombings in the Middle East came to the conclusion that the emergence of female suicide bombers complicated the efforts of peace-keepers and local law enforcement agencies in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.

While women entrants into suicide bombing under the Boko Haram insurgency is creating a new scare in the northern part of the country, their involvement in felonies such as armed robbery, drug dealings, murder, kidnapping and so on in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has grown significantly over the years. The above mentioned crimes have become a daily event in Nigeria and particularly in the Niger Delta. Perhaps this is tied to the fact that the Niger Delta is rich in petroleum oil which has been explored by multinational corporations and the Federal Government of Nigeria amid high incidence of poverty, absence of infrastructures and deprivations of the locals and oil communities. Various forms of felony related crimes have emerged as a

consequence.

While felony related crimes such as armed robbery, drug trafficking, murder, kidnapping for ransom have attracted a lot of academic concerns, a large number of scholarly articles in mostly online journals have only concentrated on general analysis of the problem without any gender dimension or the role of women in these crimes (see for instance: Otu, 2013; House, 2009; Akpan, 2010; Adegoke, 2012; Inyang and Abraham, 2013; Otu, 2013 and Chidi, 2014). All the literatures mentioned above have focused on kidnapping in the Niger Delta region. House (2009) and Obiorah and Atanda (2013) for instance examined the issue of homicide in the Niger Delta region with specific focus on extra-judicial killings by the Nigerian Police. Otu (2013) on his own part studied armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria using the Niger Delta region as his case study. He came to the conclusion that armed robbers are predominantly males. Akpan (2010) for instance highlighted the consequences of kidnapping on the productive capacity of the oil and gas multinationals in the region. Adegoke, (2012), Otu (2013) and Inyang and Abraham (2013) on the other hand focused on the security and socio-economic challenges posed by the activities of criminal gangs, while Chidi (2014) articulately concluded that sophisticated crimes such as kidnapping and murder poses significant problems to the labour market in the Niger Delta region.

Although all the literatures mentioned above have contributed in one way or the other to the understanding of felony related crimes in the Niger Delta region, there is still insufficient knowledge on the problem especially in Rivers State where armed robbery, kidnapping, murder and drug trafficking continue to increase. Even more, the gender dimension of felony related crimes has been completely neglected especially the involvement of women. In the light of the foregoing gap, this study is set to examine gender and criminality in Nigeria, with emphasis on women's involvement in felony related crimes such as armed robbery, drug trafficking, kidnapping and murder in Port

Harcourt, Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to provide empirical insight into the impact of women's involvement in felonies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

Determine the conditions that drive women into committing felony related crimes in the city of Port Harcourt

Determine the level of women involvement in armed robbery cases in Port Harcourt

Determine the level of women's involvement in drug related offences in Port Harcourt

Determine the level of women's involvement in kidnapping activities in Port Harcourt

Determine the level of women's involvement in Murder related crimes in Port Harcourt

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H₁: The more women are impoverished due to economic hardship in the city of Port Harcourt, the more they would be involved in felony related crimes in order to earn a living

2. Review of Related Literature

The study on gender and crime has been largely concentrated in understanding male crimes. This is because there is a generally accepted view which has been supported by empirical findings that men commit crime at higher rates than women and are involved in more serious and violent of ending, and are more prone to recidivism (see; Mason, 2009). While this statement has been called 'one of the few undisputed "facts" of criminology' (Lauritsen et al. 2009), it was an unconsidered one for much of the subject's history. That it is now a central and much debated matter is due largely to the advent of feminist criminology which took this 'gender gap' in recorded crime as one of its key themes. Gender is now an established and central topic in criminology and studies of criminal justice (Onaolapo, 2012).

It is important to note that one of the first tasks in second-wave feminism from the 1960s onwards was to develop a comprehensive critique of criminology. Hence, since previous studies stood on the ground that

women account for a very small proportion of all known offenders, and as a consequence relatively little attention has been given to them, the first criticism was that the majority of studies of crime and delinquency prior to the 1980s were of men's crime and delinquency (Scruton, 2009). A second theme in the critique is that, even when women were recognized, they were depicted in terms of stereotypes based on their supposed biological and psychological natures (Mason, 2009).

The debate on gender and criminality that emerged with the wake of feminist scholars has necessitated significant contribution to theory and methodology in the field of criminology. One key feature of feminist contributions to criminology is the push to recognize gender as a social construct and not simply as a statistical variable. Whilst early feminist work focused on the need to incorporate women in all areas of criminological debate, later work introduced a more critical consideration of the concept of gender (Walklate, 2004; Rashid, 2009; Dike, 2010 and Hamza, 2011). Feminist criminologists have encouraged theorizations of gender, gender differences, gender relations, gender order, and the meaning of gender as a subjective lived experience rather than merely an ascription, within a context of power relations and patriarchy.

In the light of the above, volumes of empirical studies have emerged explaining female and male criminality as an outcome of similar social, economic and political indices. Thus, the changes in figures or statistics between males and females with regard to crime depend largely on the specific context/environment within which they occur and not as a product of gender differences. In this sense, Makinde (2010) opine that as women attain positions similar to men, their pattern of criminality will also become similar. As the employment patterns of men and women become similar, so will their patterns of crimes become related. Taking a cursory look at the assumption that women commit crimes due to the lack of opportunities to make money, Simon and Landis (2009) contended that greater participation in the Labour force

does not necessarily mean either more quality between the sexes or an improved economic situation for women. The bulk of female offenders, if employed at all, are concentrated in a pink - collar ghetto and their positions are characterized by poor pay and unrewarding, in secured work. Female crime, therefore like male ones constitutes a rational response to poverty and economic insecurity.

However, around the world and in Nigeria as well, presumed changes in the pattern of crime by women are drawing the attention of the popular media as well as sociologists and criminologists. Most of the early studies of female crime concentrated on two or three main areas: witchcraft, infanticide and prostitution. In recent times, inquiry into female crime has broadened to include such other crimes as drug trafficking, armed robbery and white-collar crimes in government offices (Chukuezi, 2009), cultism (Black Bra and Daughters of Jezebel) in Nigeria's tertiary institutions, and murder, among other things. Nigerian women rarely got involved in these dimensions of crime in the past (some two or three decades ago).

According to Chukuezi (2009), the issue of increasing rate and change in pattern of female crime in Nigeria is disturbing. This is so because women by their nature are bearers and nurturers of children and the social responsibilities that go with these biological and social functions demand that they should be worthy in character. Over the years, society devises ways and means of controlling crime and dealing with those who deviate from its norms and values. In pre-colonial times, women were more or less restricted to their traditional social roles. The communal system of living added to the internal and external mechanism for crime control (mainly of ridicule and public disgrace) kept the level of criminal activities by women low. With the introduction of a money economy and emergence of private property during the colonial period, some women began to seek employment outside the home. With increased labour force participation for them, some had the opportunity of getting involved in criminal activities (Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975).

From a political economy approach, attitudes, beliefs, motivations and other forms of consciousness do not exist in a vacuum, but are tied to historical conditions. They evolve over a long period in the course of man's interaction with his human and physical environment (Ake, 1981). Nigeria has gone through several changes over time-social, economic and political. The country is currently experiencing economic downturn, poverty, high rate of unemployment, change in values, moral laxity and increased rate of crime and criminal activities. Change in pattern of female crime in southeastern Nigeria became apparent after independence and particularly during the civil War (1967-1970) when women were compelled to double their roles as mothers and breadwinners of their individual families as the men were out in the war fronts. The Civil War also gave way to the oil boom which facilitated corruption on a large scale as there was increased desire for material possession by the people. Female criminality has since then assumed different forms and styles with the harsh political and economic conditions engendered by corruption and mismanagement of public funds in Nigeria. Women have thus moved from misdemeanor to heinous crimes such as ritual killing, bribery and corruption, and armed robbery (Chukuezi, 2009:10).

Gender is a determining factor in crime and how crime is studied. Criminological studies suggest that the majority of offenders are and have been males. However, female criminality has gained the scholarship of sociologists and criminologists in recent times. This study is an attempt to examine the gender issues in criminality in Nigeria, with emphasis on Port Harcourt city, Rivers State.

3. Theoretical Framework (Strain/Anomie Theory)

The study adopts the strain theory. In criminology, the strain theory states that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crime. It falls within the general category of functionalism. Following on the work of Emile Durkheim, Strain theory has been advanced by Robert Merton (1957), Albert Cohen (1965), Richard Cloward and

Lloyd Ohlin (1960), Robert Agnew (1992), and Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld (1994). Strain may be either: structural or individual. Structural refers to the process at the societal level which filters down and affect how the individual perceives his or her needs, i.e. if particular Social structures are inherently inadequate or there is inadequate regulation, this may change the individual's perceptions as to means and opportunities. Individual refers to frictions and pains experienced by an individual as he or she looks for ways to satisfy his or her needs, i.e. if the goals of a society become significant to an individual, actually achieving them may become more important than the means adopted.

It is important to note, that among the many scholarly contributions to strain/anomie theory, Robert Merton's version of the theory has been by far the most widely accepted and read. In Merton's theory anomie is very similar to the very meaning of the word Strain, as he proposed anomie to be a situation in which societies inadvertently bring to bear pressure, or strain, on individuals that can lead to rule-breaking behavior. This pressure or strain is cause by the discrepancy between culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means available to achieve these goals. To illustrate this, Merton argues that the dominant cultural goal in the U.S is the acquisition of wealth, as a message was depicted that happiness often equated with material success which is often associated with wealth. The socially accepted institutionalized manner of achieving these material goals was believed to be hard work and education, meaning it is widely believed that people who apply themselves to study and work will succeed financially and that those who do not succeed are labeled as either lazy or defective. According to Merton, the problem with this type of society is that the legitimate means for achieving material success are not uniformly distributed. In other words, those from wealthier backgrounds have considerably more access to legitimate means than those who are economically disadvantaged. As a consequence, anomie or strain is generated and produces certain 'modes of adaptation', or (simply put) coping strategies, that the

disadvantaged use to deal with the pressures that are brought to bear on them.

Merton identifies five modes of adaptation: conformity, innovation, retreatism, ritualism, and rebellion. According to Merton, the innovator is the most likely to engage in criminal behavior, as the innovator accepts the socially recognized goals of society, but reject the legitimate means to achieve these goals. Consequently, the innovator uses proceeds from crimes such as fraud, theft, and illegal drug dealing to access culturally defined goals.

Robert Dubin (1959) provided a brilliant extension of Merton's strain/anomie theory, with particular interest in innovation and ritualism. Merton proposed that the innovative response to strain was accepting the goal, but rejecting the institutionally prescribed means of achieving the goal. The implication seemed to be that not only did the individual reject the means, he must actively innovate illegitimate means as a substitute which would not always be true. Dubin also thought that a distinction should be made between the actual behaviour of the actor and the values that drove the behaviour. Instead of Innovation, Dubin proposed 'Behavioural Innovation' and 'Value Innovation'. Similarly, in Ritualism, he proposed Behavioral Ritualism and Value Ritualism (Dubin, 1959: 147-149). Merton (1959:177-189) commented on Dubin's revisions, claiming that although Dubin did make valid contributions, they took the focus off deviancy.

In 1992, Robert Agnew asserted that strain theory could be central in explaining crime and deviance, but that it needed revision so that it was not tied to social class or cultural variable, but re-focused on norms. To this end, Agnew proposed a general strain theory that is neither structural nor interpersonal but rather individual and emotional, paying special attention to an individual's immediate social environment. He argued that an individual's actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals, actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli, and actual or anticipated presentation of negative stimuli all result in strain.

The implication of the strain theory in

this study is that Nigerians are under pressure to get wealthy but the means of amassing wealth are only open to few individuals. As a result, this puts pressure on some Nigerians mostly youths to commit crime. In the light of this, it is easy to see that women who involve in felonies are likely to be doing so as a result of the stress associated with anomie in the country especially the Niger Delta region.

4. Methodology

The design adopted in the study is descriptive survey method. The population of Port Harcourt has been growing steadily. However, the official population size of Port Harcourt as detailed by the National Population Commission's (NPC) census report is 1,805,611 (NPC, 2006). This figure constitutes the research population in this study. To determine the sample for this study, the Taro Yamane formula which is stated as; $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ was adopted. Hence, the sample size is 400.

However, in addition to the sample size of 400 for the city of Port Harcourt, 10 female inmates, 5 wardens and 15 police officers will be interviewed through a focused group method at different intervals. Broadly, the probability and non-probability sampling techniques were combined to select the respondents in this study. There are two broad methods applied in collecting data for this study. These are the primary and secondary techniques. To derive useful meaning from the data, and examine the propositions of this study, data from the survey were analyzed using the statistical package provided in Microsoft Excel 2010 as well as descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as, percentages and frequencies represented in simple tables, charts and trend graphs were used to measure demographic characteristics of respondents and to answer research questions.

Results

The analysis is based on the number of valid questionnaire returned which is 385, constituting 96% of the total questionnaire distributed. The research questions which invariably are stated as the objectives of this study are evaluated using descriptive tools such as histograms, bar charts and pie charts including trend graphs.

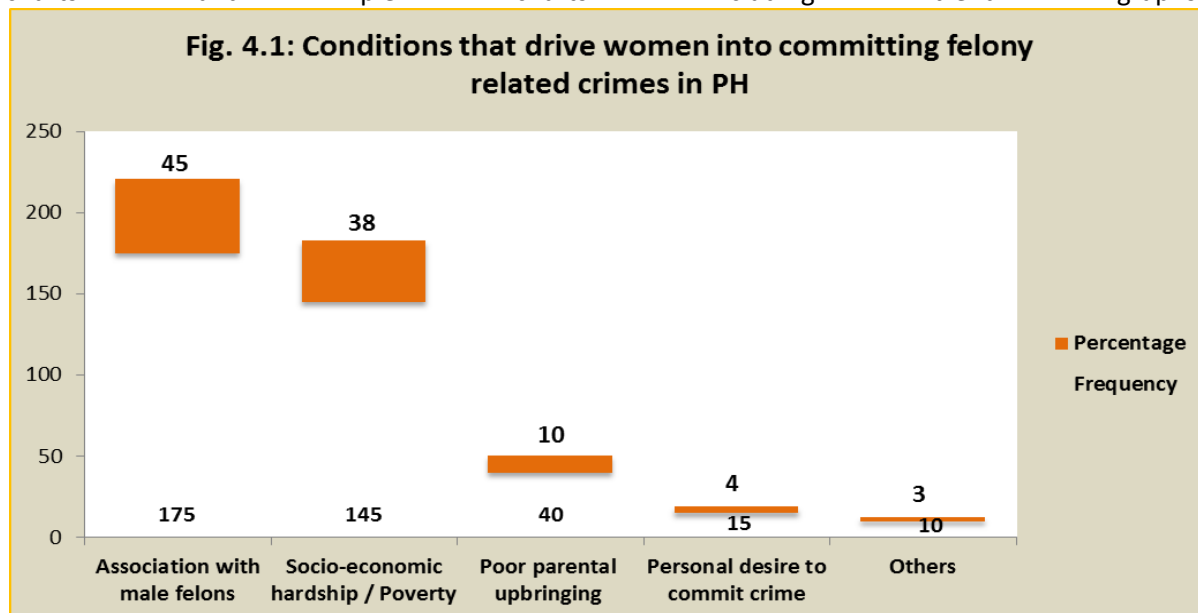


Figure 4.1 above captures the conditions that propel women into committing felony related crimes such as armed robbery, murder, drug abuse and kidnapping in Port Harcourt. From the data presented in the figure, it is easy to see that 175(45%) of the respondents said women enter such crimes as a result of their association with male felons, 145(38%) of them said it is due to socio-economic hardship or simply poverty, 40(10%) of the respondents said it is caused by poor parental

upbringing, 15(4%) of the respondents said some women enter into crime because they have the innate desire to commit such crimes, while 10(3%) of them said others.

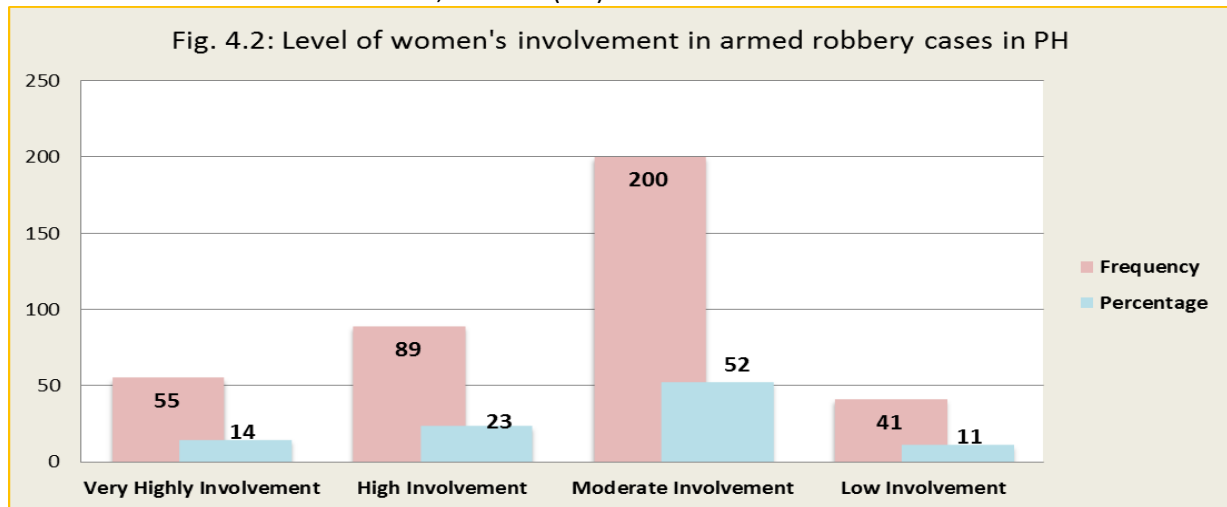


Figure 4.2 above provides information on the level of women's involvement armed robbery cases in Port Harcourt city. The data in the figure points to the fact that 55(14%) of the respondents agree that women are very highly involved in armed robbery cases in Port Harcourt, 89(23%) of them said women have a high involvement in armed robbery, 200(52%) of the respondents said moderate involvement, while 41(11%) of them said low involvement. The outcome of the data analysis simply reveals that women's involvement in armed robbery cases is not significant when compared to the involvement of men in the crime.

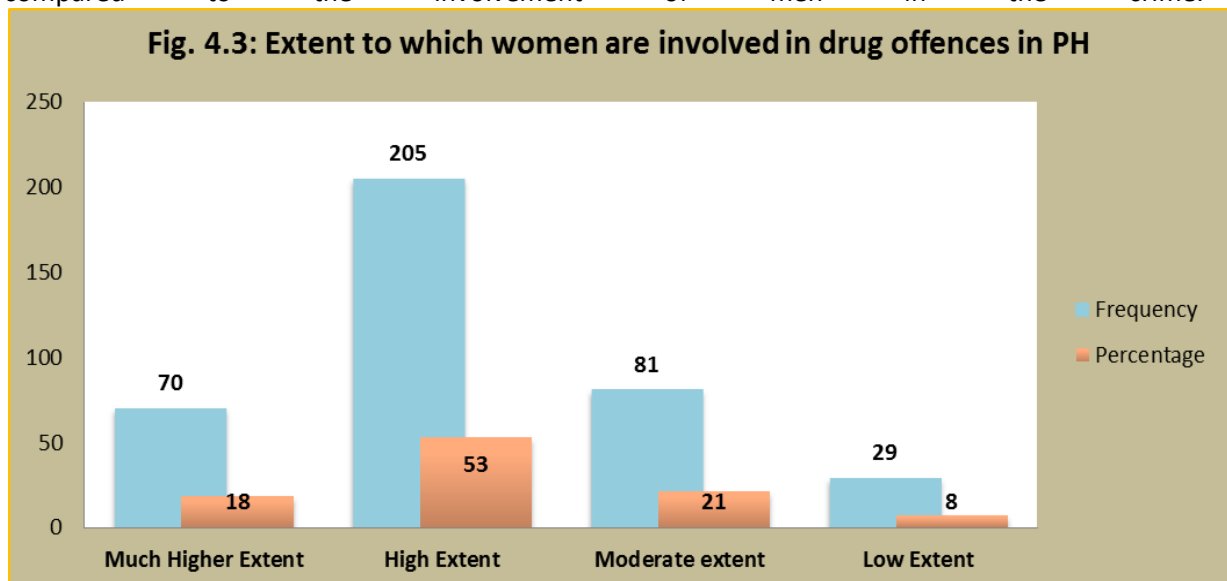


Figure 4.3 above provides information on the extent to which women are involved in drug abuse cases in Port Harcourt city. From the data presented in the chart, it can be observed that 70(18%) of the respondents, point to the fact that women are involved in drug abuse in Port Harcourt at a much higher extent, 205(53%) of the respondents said to a high extent, 81(21%) of them said moderate extent, while 29(8%) of the respondents said low extent. This does not suggest in any way that women outweigh men in drug abuse cases but rather that women are more involved in drug related felonies when compared to other type of felonies.

Fig. 4.4: Level of women's involvement in kidnapping in PH

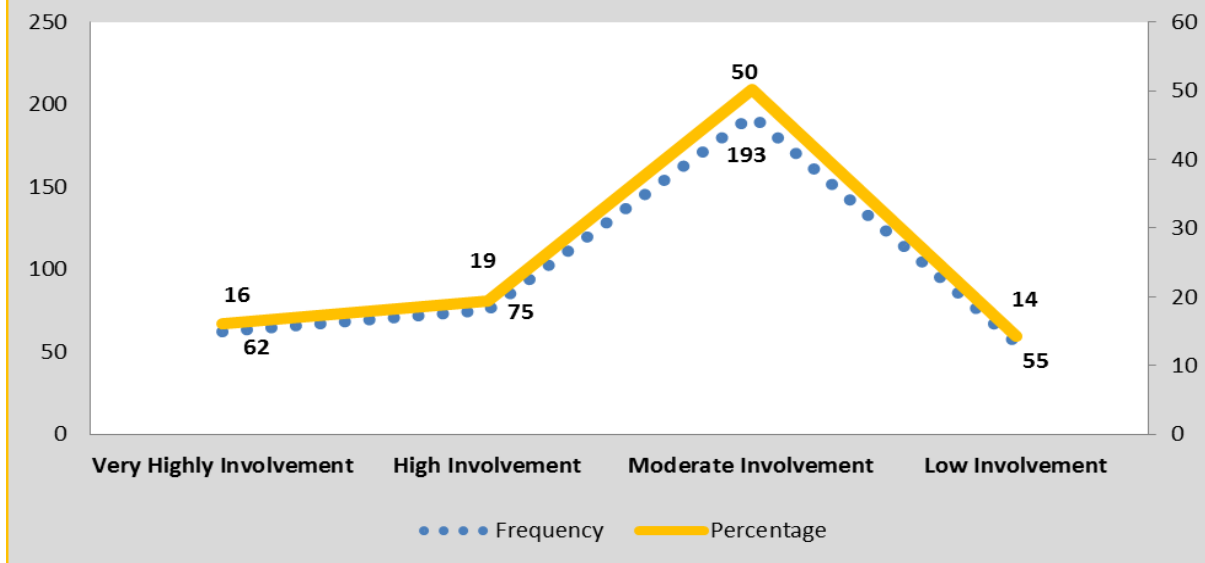


Figure 4.4 above provides information on the level of women's involvement in kidnapping cases in the city of Port Harcourt. Based on the available data presented in the chart above, it is easily decipherable that 62(16%) of the respondents point to the fact that women have very high involvement in kidnapping in Port Harcourt, 75(19%) of the respondents said women have high involvement, 193(50%) of the respondents said women have a moderate involvement in kidnapping, while 55(14%) of the respondents said low involvement. This again shows that women involvement in kidnapping cases is not very significant in the city of Port Harcourt.

Fig. 4.5: Level of women's involvement in murder related cases in PH

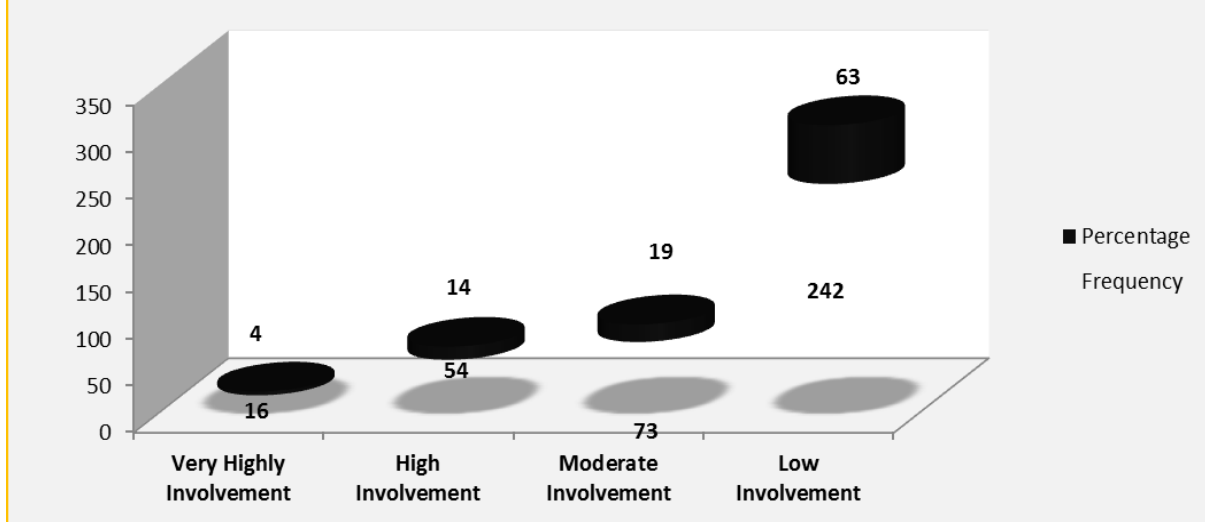


Figure 4.5 above provides information on the level of women's involvement in murder related cases in the city of Port Harcourt. Looking at the data presented in the figure above, it can be easily deduced that 16(4%) of the respondents, point to the fact that women have very high involvement in murder related felonies in Port Harcourt, 54(14%) of the respondents said women have high involvement, 73(19%) of the respondents said women have a moderate involvement in murder related cases, while 242(63%) of the respondents said low involvement. This shows that women involvement in murder related felonies is not very significant in the city of Port Harcourt.

Test of Hypothesis

H₁: The more women are impoverished due to economic hardship in the city of Port Harcourt, the more they would be involved in felony related crimes in order to earn a living

Table 1: Women go into felony related crimes due to economic hardship

Respondents	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
Trans-Amadi	51	35	5	6	97
Diobu	44	36	9	9	98
Borokiri	39	33	14	10	96
Rumuomasi	52	30	6	6	94
TOTAL	186 (48%)	134 (35%)	34 (9%)	31 (8%)	385 (100%)

Table 4.6 above shows reveals data on whether women go into felonies such as armed robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping and murder due to economic hardship. From the data presented in the table, 186(48%) of the respondents strongly agree that economic hardship or poverty is the reason why women go into felony related crimes, 134(35%) of them agree, 34(9%) of them disagree, while 31(8%) of them strongly disagree. The data from Table 2 is also used to compute the chi-square statistics for hypothesis one.

Table 2: Chi-Square Computation for Hypothesis 1

Respondents	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(o-e/e) ²
Trans-Amadi	51	46.86	4.14	17.12	0.37
	35	33.76	1.24	1.54	0.05
	5	8.57	-3.57	12.72	1.48
	6	7.81	-1.81	3.28	0.42
Diobu	44	47.35	-3.35	11.19	0.24
	36	34.11	1.89	3.58	0.10
	9	8.65	0.35	0.12	0.01
	9	7.89	1.11	1.23	0.16
Borokiri	39	46.38	-7.38	54.45	1.17
	33	33.41	-0.41	0.17	0.01
	14	8.65	5.35	28.57	3.30
	10	7.89	2.11	4.45	0.56
Rumuomasi	52	45.41	6.59	43.39	0.96
	30	32.71	-2.72	7.38	0.23
	6	8.301	-2.30	5.30	0.64
	6	31.000	-25.00	625.00	20.16
Chi-Square	$\chi^2 =$				29.85

*Degree of freedom =9; Chi-Square Table value =16.92; Chi-Square Calculated Value=29.85

Decision Rule

The generally accepted decision rule for the application of chi-square χ^2 test states that we accept null hypothesis if calculated value is less than the table value and reject hypothesis if the calculated value is greater

than table value. In this study, since calculated value for χ^2 is 29.85 and table value is 16.92, the hypothesis which states that "the more women are impoverished due to economic hardship in the city of Port Harcourt, the more they would be involved in felony related crimes

in order to earn a living” is hereby accepted. This leads to the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between economic hardship or poverty and women involvement in felonies such as armed robbery, drug abuse, murder and kidnapping in the city of Port Harcourt.

FGD/Interview Results

FGD Outcome 1: Conditions that Drive Women into Committing Felony Related Crimes

A significant number of the female inmates who took part in the study point to the fact that the conditions that drive women into committing felony related crimes are many. However, economic hardship driven by widespread poverty was indicted as the most dominant condition that drive them into committing felony related crimes. One of the inmates (*Aged 27 years, ATP for about 2 years*) pointed out that she would not have been awaiting trial if she had a man or was married. This is because she felt that the man would have provided for economic needs and she would not have involved in armed robbery.

It is important to note that while armed robbery, kidnapping and drug abuse may all be linked to economic hardship and or poverty, these variables cannot totally be linked to murder in the same way. This is because some mother cases are not entirely driven by poverty or economic hardship. Another inmate (*Aged 30 years, convicted for life*) who has been convicted for murder and doing life in prison lamented that in her own case, the murder she committed was out of mistake even though she feels bad about it, she did not plan to kill her victim.

In all, seven (7) of the inmates believe also that even though unemployment and or economic hardship is a major motivation for crime commission, association with their male boyfriends who are also criminals is a necessary incentive to get involved in crime. One of the female inmates narrating her ordeal pointed out that in her own case, it started by hiding guns and other ammunitions for the gang that her boyfriend belongs to and later, she joined in the act. She lamented that if she is given another chance, she will never get involved in such activities again.

The FGD outcome with female inmates goes a long way to support or corroborate the outcome of the data presented in Fig. 4.1 above which shows that economic hardship/poverty and association with male felons are the key drivers of women involvement in felony related crimes in Port Harcourt. Just like the female inmates who participated in the FGD session, the prison wardens strongly indicted bad associations and unemployment /poverty as key drivers of women involvement in felony related crimes such as armed robbery, murder, drug abuse and kidnapping in Port Harcourt. According to one Mba (male warden, aged 35 years) females who get involved in such crimes are often lured into it by their male friends who themselves need the females to hide weapons and carryout activities that ordinarily the Police would not have suspected a female to be involved in.

Another warden (Female, Aged 37 years) disagrees with the position that poverty and association drives women into committing felony related crimes. She simply argued that women who get into crime should be seen as criminals in their own right and that they do it because they want to and not because someone or some condition drove them into getting involved in crime. However, 80 per cent of the response from the wardens tilted toward the fact that poverty occasioned by unemployment in a city like Port Harcourt is a major cause of female involvement in criminal activities. They however lamented the fact that women’s involvement in the selected felonies has increased over the years in the city of Port Harcourt.

In the same vein, FGD outcome with members of the police force at the headquarters, Moscow Road, Port Harcourt corroborated those conducted with inmates and wardens at the Port Harcourt Prison. For instance, some of the police officers point to the adverse socio-economic condition that most women face as the key driver of their involvement in felony related crimes such as; murder, kidnapping, drug abuse and armed robbery. While there is a consensus among members of the Police Force who took part in

the FGD on the role of poverty in women criminality, they nevertheless argue that poor socio-economic condition is not a necessary and sufficient reason for anyone to get involved in felony related crimes.

FGD Outcome 2: Level of Women's Involvement in Felony Related Crimes

The women who took part in the FGD session whether those on awaiting trial or those convicted, all share the same sentiments with regard to the level of women's involvement in the selected felonies captured in this study. First, there is a general consensus among them that men are more involved in these crimes than women. One of the participants (*Awaiting Trial Person, Aged 31 years*) pointed out that all over the world, it has been strongly proven that men commit more crime than women. Although, women commit felonies, the FGD participants contend that women's involvement is much higher in drug abuse case than any of the other three (armed robbery, murder and kidnapping) felony cases. The reason according to participants is because drug trafficking and or its abuse does not require too much of masculine influence or characteristics as much as armed robbery, murder and or kidnapping. The outcome of the FGD with women inmates sufficiently supports the fact that women's involvement in the selected felonies is minimal except in the case of drug abuse.

With regard to the level of involvement in felony related crimes, the prison wardens who took part in the FGD session like the female inmates strongly believe that men are more involved in the selected felonies than women. According to one Hanachor David (male warden aged 40), "I have worked in this prison for over twelve years now and I can assure you that men commit murder, armed robbery, drug abuse and kidnapping more than women. In the same vein, the only female warden in the FGD session Mrs. Fatima Adekunle (Aged 36 years) corroborated her colleague when she argued that women are less prone to such crimes. However, she did point out that they tend to get involved in such crimes alongside male criminals. She also pointed out that women's involvement in drug

abuse tend to be much higher than their involvement in armed robbery, murder and kidnapping cases.

From the response of the FGD participants at the Police Force Headquarters, it became clear that men get involved in the selected felony related cases than women. Corroborating the response of the women inmates and prison warden FGD participants the police participants strongly support the view that men get more involved in murder, drug abuse, armed robbery and kidnapping. However, they warned that more women are now getting involved in these crimes especially in the company of male criminal gangs.

Findings and Discussion

The first objective in this study is to determine the conditions that drive women into committing felonies such as armed robbery, murder, drug abuse and kidnapping in the city of Port Harcourt. Data derived from the field was presented in Figure 4.1 above and the outcome revealed that among the conditions that propel women to get involved in felonies, social conditions were more potent than economic conditions. For instance, more of the respondents argued that criminal association especially when women have boyfriends that are involved in murder for money, armed robbery, drug abuse and kidnapping, they become more prone to getting involved in the act either as mainstream participants or as assistants especially performing the duty of hiding weapons and getting them pass security. However, the economic drivers of women involvement in felonies are also significant. This finding was further strengthened by the outcome of the Chi-square test for research hypothesis 1 above which led to the conclusion that a significant relationship exists between economic hardship / poverty and women involvement in felonies such as armed robbery, drug abuse, murder and kidnapping in the city of Port Harcourt. This also goes for the outcome of the test of hypothesis 2 which led to the conclusion that a relationship exist between previous association with male felons and the involvement of women in the selected felonies. This is because unemployment and poverty in the city in addition to criminal

association mutually reinforce the need for crime causation.

This finding strongly corroborates those of Chukuezi (2009); Hamza (2011) and Onaolapo (2012) who all in their independent studies came to the conclusion that women involvement in criminal activities begins with the hard socio-economic conditions they face and ends with a single contact with a male criminal. The scholars strongly believe that when women have strong relationship with male criminals, they one way or the other get involved in the crime of their boyfriend. Mostly, persons known to commit felonies as reported by these scholars are poor, uneducated, often unemployed and residents of low income neighbourhoods.

The second objective of the study is to determine the level of women involvement in armed robbery cases in Port Harcourt. The data collected in this regard was presented in Figure 4.2 above and the outcome of the analysis revealed that women have a moderate involvement in armed robbery cases in the city of Port Harcourt. This goes to show that women's involvement is not as significant as the involvement of men in armed robbery cases. The respondents strongly believe that women are not so much involved in armed robbery because the act is more masculine than other types of felony crimes. However, there is the strong conviction that where women are involved in armed robbery acts, they play very clandestine roles such as hiding guns, ammunitions and loots for the male criminals. This finding strongly supports that of Nwalozie (2011) who from a five year data on bank robbery cases in the city of Umahia in Abia State, Nigeria found that only 5% of the bank robbery cases involved women while 95% of such cases were male dominated. To further shed light on the issue, Nwalozie went on to prove that out of the 5% female involvement in the bank robberies, only 2% had mainstream active role in the robbery while 3% of them played assistive role of weapon hiding for the gangs. The 2014 gender figures for awaiting trial and convicted criminals in the Port Harcourt prison further gives justification to this point.

The next finding provided the necessary outcome to validate the third objective in the study which is to determine the level of women's involvement in drug related offences in Port Harcourt city. Data in this regard was presented in Figure 4.3 above. The finding showed a high level of involvement in drug abuse by women as opposed to the other felonies in this study. This is because, drug abuse and trafficking does not necessarily demand any form of masculine attributes in order for it to take place. Hence, more women tend to be found abusing or trafficking in drugs for the purpose of making ends meets in the city of Port Harcourt. However, the act of abusing drugs has been strongly associated with other felonies such as armed robbery, murder and kidnapping in most cities (Onaolapo, 2012).

The next finding in this study is in line with the forth objective which is to determine the level of women's involvement in kidnapping activities in Port Harcourt city. The data gathered in this regard was presented in Figure 4.4 above and the outcome of the analysis showed that women have a moderate involvement in kidnapping in the study area. This again revealed that women are not significantly involved in kidnapping like men. This finding corroborates those of Akpan (2010); Otu (2013) and Chidi (2014) who in their respective studies showed that kidnapping is highly dominated by male youths who see it as a way of making quick money out of their victims.

The other finding in this study relates to objective five which is to find out the level of women's involvement in murder related cases in the city of Port Harcourt. Primary data collected from the field was presented in Figure 4.5 above. A further analysis of the data showed that women have low involvement in murder related cases in the study areas. This goes a long way to show that women involvement in murder related felonies is not very significant when compared to that of the men. Again, this is because murder behaviour shows some level of masculinity (Abraham, 2013) and as such attracts males more than females. This is now made worse in the

Nigerian setting where murder for the purpose of rituals is very prevalent. This finding supports that of Makinde (2010) UNODC (2013) and Obiora and Atanda (2013). These scholars proved in their various studies that although murder related cases are increasing all over the world especially in Africa, the incidence of murder worldwide shows that more men are involved in the act than women.

5. Conclusion

There is a general understanding amongst respondents who took part in the study concerning the fact that when women face socio-economic hardship, their involvement in felonies such as armed robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping and murder become inevitable. Based on this and other related findings in the study, some very salient conclusions have been reached.

First, and the most critical conclusion, is that bad social relationship between females and male criminals in addition to economic hardship necessitated by the inability of the state to provide employment and convenient sources of livelihood to citizens creates the enabling environment for people (in this case women) to see criminal act as the only way out of the socio-economic predicaments. Thus, the economic hardship which is broadly a result of unequal allocation and or distribution of resources create the necessary and sufficient conditions females to be vulnerable, thereby forcing a situation where they are forced into hard crimes to make a living. The justification, therefore, goes beyond mere criminal association to such issues as poverty.

Also, it is the conclusion of this study that although women are involved in the selected felony related crimes in Port Harcourt city, males are more active than females in crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping and murder. However, there are more females involved in drug abuse cases when compared to the other felonies investigated in this study.

Finally, the study concludes that women involvement in felony related crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, drug abuse

and murder in cities like Port Harcourt poses a new kind of challenge to the ability of the police in terms of crime prevention and control.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions drawn from this study lead us to make the following suggestions to reduce the incidence of women involvement in selected felonies such as armed robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping and murder in the city of Port Harcourt:

A well designed and focused sensitization programme should be targeted at teaching females the dangers of involving in the selected felonies especially to them and society at large. This can be done through a collaborative framework between law enforcement agencies such as the Police Force, Government Ministries such as that of women affairs and international agencies such as the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC).

Since findings revealed that poor socioeconomic conditions predispose women into involving in the selected felonies, there is need for government at the State level to declare a massive war on poverty in the city of Port Harcourt. Hence, a participatory poverty alleviation programme is needed to ensure that ordinary households move above the poverty line as defined by the World Bank.

There is also the need to properly target women already convicted for various felony related crimes in terms of proper rehabilitation and reintegration into society. When this is properly done, these women can be used as change agents or advocates of good social standards for women in the city. Such women can be linked to state driven programmes that are aimed at changing the orientation of women with regard to criminal behaviour in society.

It is very imperative for the police force to be properly trained on the dynamics gender and criminality in order for them to properly master the behaviour of female criminals so as to help them mitigate such crimes in the city. This could take the form of public private partnership networks for crime control in the city were all stakeholders bring in their expertise to address the problem of women involvement in felony related crimes.

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