

Differences in male and female rates of crime

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Males are more likely to commit crimes than females. Research consistently demonstrates that during adolescence female involvement in crime is substantially less than male participation (Landsheer & Oud, 2008). It is no accident that boys outnumber girls by a ratio of seven to one in the juvenile justice system (Bright & Decker, 2007). This paper will use the symbolic interactionist and feminist perspectives to demonstrate that numerous variables such as race, socioeconomic status, and family structure combine to explain gender differences in crime. Deviance has various meanings, depending on race and culture. The most pronounced impact on juvenile crime is caused by the peer group but is modified only in the case of females by parenting behaviors. In addition, gendered attitudes are clearly active in the home and the court system. Variations in trends of male versus female involvement in crime invariably remain the same over recent history and the explanation is found in adolescence with two very opposed trajectories.

The results of many studies have agreed that the two variables which best explain crime are age and gender because they remain constant. Sex differences remain unchanging across the lifespan since males commit more crime than females (Landsheer & Oud, 2008). Many researchers have found that, of all demographic variables, gender is the most powerful. Landsheer and Oud used an auto-regression model which holds that current delinquency is influenced by past delinquency. They began with the hypothesis that differences in crime rates might be explained by females being more mature than males in development and females tending to associate with older males. They found that males commit crime at a rate 1.5 times higher than that for females with the difference being most

pronounced before age of 16 years. Furthermore, the model shows a direct correlation between female maturation and reduced female crime rates.

The most important study was conducted by Williams and Van Dorn (2007) who used a developmental approach and wanted to discover the root cause for the onset of youth crime. The developmental approach focuses on risk factors such as gender, race, alcohol and substance abuse, parental supervision and family impact, and peer influence, and how each contributes to the problem. In the 2002 US juvenile crime rates, marijuana and alcohol were implicated in virtually every crime. However, race makes a difference since all males and females use alcohol and marijuana similarly except for African American youth (Williams & Van Dorn). At the same time, adolescent boys use alcohol more frequently and engage in binge drinking far more than girls. Williams and Van Dorn used a longitudinal approach with 808 adolescents so that a good indication could be obtained about the trajectory of crime after adolescence. The main finding was that adolescent males are very likely to be involved in delinquent acts all through the teenage years and the most prominent contributing factor was association with delinquent peers. The strongest influence on youth involvement in crime is the peer group which determines alcohol and marijuana use along with initiation into youth crime. Each time an adolescent associates with a delinquent peer, the risk of becoming involved in delinquent acts increases four times (Williams & Van Dorn). The conclusion was that adolescent involvement in substance abuse and crime predicts negative outcomes across the lifespan. The one limitation of the study was that the respondents reported on their own behaviors and may have distorted them.

The feminist perspective fits with the developmental approach because it explains how girls do not have equal exposure to risk factors as boys. According to Bright and Decker (2007) when girls commit delinquent acts, they are treated far more severely than boys because not only is deviance involved but also violation of gender images. Girls are much more likely to be placed in detention before their court appearance and to receive probation whereas most boys are given discharge. Although boys are much more likely to be involved in crime, delinquent girls receive far harsher sanctions from the legal system. Even girls' probation offenses are viewed as grounds for incarceration (Bright & Decker). The conclusion is that two factors are operating: gendered attitudes in the legal system and collusion between the same attitudes in the family unit and the legal system. When a parent refers their daughter to the court, it can be predicted that she will be charged with a status offense, will be placed in detention and, in contrast to boys who receive discharge, will be given probation or institutionalization. Kupchik and Harvey (2007) agree with Bright and Decker (2007) on the gender differential hypothesis that courts are influenced by gender stereotypes. However, they disagree that females suffer discrimination because they are protected by two mechanisms: aggressive public defenders and the uniform procedure of case processing during sentencing. Kupchik and Harvey did a systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies of the New York and New Jersey juvenile court systems to examine the strength of the gender differential. They found gender bias in both the juvenile and criminal systems but males are more likely to be incarcerated in both systems. In criminal court, girls, whites, and blacks all have the same chance

of being incarcerated (Kupchik & Harvey). Gender bias is countered by the same means for all groups.

Davis and Banks studied the factors at work for adolescents with mental disorders who commit crime. The majority of males (69%) and nearly one-half of all females (46%) were arrested by the age of 25 years (Davis & Banks). Patterns of multiple arrests for females continued into their young adult years, and the risk of arrest for both sexes was much higher if they had been arrested previously. The databases studied only apply for Massachusetts and might not be generalized for other areas. Baron and Forde (2007) studied 400 homeless youths to learn how control balance operates in the origins of crime. This theory holds that people are controlled but also exercise control; when the two are balanced, they are less likely to be involved in deviance. The theory includes risk factors, especially peer influence. The findings were that, for both sexes, deviant peers and values, criminal peers, and perceptions of risk are predictors of crime. O'Day (2007) argues that perceptions of crime are determined by cultural ideology and social power is used to maintain control over gender, class, and family relations. This is why constructions of juvenile delinquency are subject to change. Japanese authorities are anxious about youth deviance because it is viewed as one aspect of gender, class, race, and status, and national identities in Japan (O'Day).

Molnar and Cerda (2008) began their longitudinal cohort study with the hypothesis that availability of resources determines a reduced rate of delinquency. The database sample consisted of 2, 226 ethnically diverse,

urban youth. One finding was that boys were involved in criminal acts at a rate about four times that of girls (Molnar & Cerda). The findings were that community support services and well-behaved peers are the main determinants of low rates of juvenile crime. The study's conclusions follow Baron's and Forde's (2007) use of control theory because, along with the risks for involvement in crime, there are protective factors. Those factors include being white, having assets, positive peer relationships, and conflict resolution skills. The study's findings were limited to urban youth and to Chicago and therefore may not apply for all youth. Kirk (2008) focused on social context and how race and ethnicity determine rates of arrest. In this longitudinal study, Chicago crime rates were used. The main finding was that black youths' disadvantage leads to high arrest rates. Other related factors include poverty, poor family structure, and tolerance of deviance.

Bowman and Prelow (2007) investigated the impact of deviant peers and its effect on parenting behavior with a sample of 135 urban African American adolescents. They found that whereas female involvement in crime is restricted by maternal parenting, the mother has little impact on boys' criminal activity. Peers provide boys with motivation, attitudes, and rationalizations for deviant behavior as well as opportunities for such behavior. The peer group also rewards that behavior and causes a reduction in personal and social control (Bowman & Prelow). The same pattern holds true for girls but maternal parenting is able to counteract it.

Numerous factors contribute to the differences in male and female rates of crime. In all cases, crime originates in adolescence and is combined with

initiation into alcohol and marijuana use. Initiation is the key term because the deviant peer group not only plays a role for the delinquent but serves a number of functions such as providing gratification. Girls also are susceptible to the influence of deviant peers but in a limited way. Girls' behavior is controlled by social attitudes and maternal influence and this pattern of control continues into the court system. The deviant peer group is the central determinant of crime rates and with boys there is little influence to oppose peers.