

How gender is vital factor when explaining criminal behaviours



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In this essay the topic of how gender is a vital factor when explaining criminal behaviours will be, examined and analysed, to see the actual extent of genders impact on such behaviours. Gender refers to the opportunities and social attributes associated with being female or male. Different societies have different attributes and responsibilities assigned to males and females; they are socially constructed and are learnt through the socialization process. Gender also determines what is expected of a man or woman Soothill (et al, 2002) explained that criminal behaviours are types of acts that a society perceives as wrong doing, it is formally proceeded against by the law, and leads into convictions. Soothill (et al, 2002) said " To understand criminology one needs to recognize that in the related social issues, the possible interpretations of apparent evidence represent viewpoints and philosophies which need to be examined along with the evidence gathered,". Many lives can be controlled by the personal fear of crime. The impact of crime on victims can be immense, and crime can be the harmful exercise of power by one person over another (Soothill et al, 2002). Soothill (et al, 2002) believes, " Criminology shows us the diverse and sometimes divided nature of society, rather than always reinforcing the image of a homogenous, uniform society," There are various types of information and knowledge that influences people's perception of crime. (Soothill et al, 2002). There are direct experiences of crime, mediated experiences, official information and research knowledge; these are the different types of knowledge that inform our understanding of crime.

In 1997 the home office figures showed that only 17% of offenders in the British Criminal Justice System were female, Heidensohn (2000 cited in

Soothill et al, 2002). In general women are likely to be convicted for offences such as theft or assault and handling stolen goods. Their careers in crime are shorter compared to men (Soothill et al, 2002). The number of women offenders are far less than male offenders, except in offences such as prostitution (Soothill et al, 2002). In terms of women's representation, serious crimes tend to be performed by men, rather than women. (Soothill et al, 2002). This shows that gender and criminal behaviour is stratified into specific types of offences, and the psychology of men can cause them to commit more serious crimes compared to women.

The traditional 'sexual scripts' that are within societies are heterosexual and gendered, so perceiving a woman as sexually aggressive, or worse, as a sexual offender, is contrary to the traditional 'sexual scripts'(Jackson, 1978; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Byers, 1996 cited in Myriam S. Denov, 2004 p. 3). According to Denov (2004) the criminal behaviour of female offending sexually challenges 'appropriate' female behaviour, when compared to the traditional 'sexual scripts'. Byres agreed that the image of women being described as sexually aggressive is excluded from the traditional sexual scripts, Byres & O'Sullivan (1998 cited in Denov, 2004 p. 4). This view of women not being suitable to commit sexual offences can cause females to become reluctant when contemplating whether to commit these types of crimes. " These scripts also exclude the image of men as sexually reluctant or as victims of sexual coercion or assault" (Lew, 1990, hunter 1990, Mendel, 1995 cited in Denov, 2004 p4). It is portrayed as an abnormality, if a male is sexually assaulted this is due to the perception of masculinity. Denov (2004) reports that up until the 1980's, female sex offenders and their victims were

practically ignored, compared to males and their victims which were the main focus in reflecting traditional sexual scripts. Specific sex roles are assigned to each gender (Denov, 2004). The sexually aggressive role is assigned to men (Denov, 2004). Miller (Studying Young Women in Street Crimes). According to this collective story, the gang is an arena in which they receive status and esteem from being strong and being willing to stand up for themselves, exhibiting traits that cultural stories commonly associated with males rather than women, (cited in Bernasco, 2010). Comack & Brickey (2007 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 64) suggests that masculinity is the founder of the stereotypical 'bad girl' she is tough spoken, of low socioeconomic status, aggressive and male looking. From the literature on female criminal behaviour, we can construct a profile of the average female offender. " She is likely to be plagued with poverty and to lack an education and job skills. She is generally young, unmarried, involved in unhealthy sexual relationships, and the lone caregiver of small children," (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Franklin & Lutze, 2007 cited in van Wormer p. 66).

Wright and Jacobs (2004 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 74) reported that in their study of young urban male offenders, they found that the conflict between men were influenced by the needs of maintaining gendered reputations. Miller (2008 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 78) also found that compared to women, men were more apt to view robbery as one means of expressing their masculinity. Men stole items that expressed their manliness, to impress their peers. Girls and women, however, were drawn to take luxury items they felt they need but couldn't justify spending household income on, items such as cosmetics and jewellery (van Wormer, 2010). The blocked

opportunities within societies that persist on material success tended to lead individuals into antisocial forms of behaviour, like theft, fraud or drug dealing. This is the 'opportunity theory'. Van Wormer (2010) claims that females are prone to this due to the marginalization they face economically. Those without education or skills felt that they will never " make it", pressuring them into committing crimes in order to " make it," Van Wormer explained that " sociological theories of gang delinquency argue that peer group affiliation and living in crime-ridden neighbourhoods promote crime," (van Wormer, 2010).

Relationship and trauma are the main attributes of women who are involved in the criminal justice system; it has the greatest effect, (van Wormer, 2010). Van Wormer (2010) claims, " We can sum up this truth in this way: Trauma breeds trauma and hardship more of the same," When crime is related to criminal thought patterns a history of victimization and trauma amongst offending females is greatly evident, (van Wormer, 2010). A vast majority of female offenders endured a tough upbringing which was physically and sexually abusive; this type of victimization is usually continued in their adulthood in the form of rape and battering, this provoked emotional problems and severe stress reactions, linking to the development of their criminal behaviour, (Belknap, 2007; Failing, 2006; Franklin & Lutze, 2007 cited in van Wormer p. 66). Roberts (2007 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p81) reported " Examined data drawn from a sample of 105 women in prison convicted of killing their husbands/partners and 105 battered women in a sample from the community in New Jersey. The imprisoned women had a history of being battered. These women were far more likely to have

received death threats from their partners than the battered women who did not kill their partners; these threats were specific as to time, place and method. In addition to a history of partner violence, the majority of the women prisoners had a history of sexual abuse, a substance use problem, had attempted suicide, and had access to the batterer's guns,".

Interviews with 130 San Francisco prostitutes revealed that over half reported sexual abuse in childhood and about half reported having been physically assaulted, (Farley & Barkman, 1998 cited in van Wormer, 2010). Van Wormer (2010) reported " Among men and women on probation, the BJS (2000) found that 6 in 10 women in state institutions experienced physical or prior abuse". McKee (2006 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 82) focused on the characteristics of females who have murdered their children or infants, he evaluated this by using 30 females in his research, and they varied between girls and women. His research depicted that amongst the 30 females it included those who were: abusive/neglectful, psychotic/suicidal, psychopathic, detached or retaliatory. McKee (2006 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 82) analysed " Susan Smith, who drowned her children in a car, kill their children, then plan to kill themselves. Smith had many of the risk factors for suicidal murder: There was a high rate of suicide in her family, including her father, who died when she was a child. Susan was sexually abused by her step father and diagnosed as having bipolar personality disorder, her marriage was shaky and her children were very young,"

Psychiatric women who murdered their children often showed a high tendency of psychosis, social isolation, depression, lower socioeconomic status, suicidality, substance use, and difficulties in their own childhood, <https://assignbuster.com/how-gender-is-vital-factor-when-explaining-criminal-behaviours/>

(Friedman et al, 2005 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 81). La Tanya Skiffer (2009 cited in Van Wormer, 2010 p. 76) - Crime causation. " Chris, a 22-year-old woman, was arrested for permitting her husband to sexually abuse her five - and nine-year-old nieces. Chris's father was an alcoholic and was abusive to his wife and children.... When she was 21, she married a 35-year-old trucker. In accounting for her failure to stop her husband's abuse of the children, Chris suggested that she acted to please her husband, so he would love her."

Van Wormer (2010) had interviews with female psychopathic offenders which revealed how they reacted violently to personal insults. " One 43-year-old female, for example, reacted to her neighbour's racial slur in this way: She pulled out her knife and slashed the offending woman's face several times, which required the woman to have other a100 stitches," Women frequently victimized other women whom they viewed as easy targets, (Miller, 2008 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 79). Van Wormer (2010) said that " Several of the women, moreover, reported feelings of power and excitement in " beating the defenceless," such as dogs and children," According to Strand & Belfrage (2005 cited in van Wormer, 2010 p. 71) " The women were found to display antisocial characteristics through relational aggression, lying, deceitfulness, and lack of impulse control," Testosterone levels are a vital link to criminal behaviour in both males and females, (van Wormer, 2010). An important hormone called cortisol is also vital when analysing criminal behaviour especially with females. It is classed as the stress hormone because it is secreted in response to stress. Women who are more likely to commit antisocial behaviour, like violence they are often low in

this hormone, (Anderson, 2007 cited in van Wormer, 2010 pg72). Depression is a mental disorder that regularly occurred in female offenders and especially adolescent girls, (Bloom, Owen, and Covington, 2003 cited in van Wormer 2010 p. 72). Obeidallah and Earls (1999 cited in van Wormer 2010 p. 72) examined the link between depression and delinquency was established through a project that was carried out by the Institute of Justice. Males and females had similar low rates of depression but the depression rates of females clearly increased, especially during adolescence. Van Wormer (2010) reported that " Interviewers gathered a self-report data on 754 girls in urban Chicago. Comparing the antisocial behaviour of girls who were depressed with those who were not, Obeidallah and Earls found that 40% of non depressed engaged in property crimes compared to 68% of girls with depression fifty-seven percent of depressed girls engaged in seriously aggressive behaviour compared to only 13% of those who were not depressed. Overall, these findings suggest that depression in girls may put them at high risk for antisocial behaviour," In 2008, 700 males and 1, 640 females were killed by their intimate partners, according to the BJS (Califano et al., 2009) report. Research shows, individuals who are prone to depression and are treacherously violent are more at risk of murdering their partners and killing themselves to, when the breaking up of a relationship occurs, (van Wormer & Bartollas, 2010).

In conclusion the gender factor is fairly crucial when examining criminal behaviour because it assess involvement and reason. There is a higher involvement of males in the criminal system compared to females. Women mainly indulge in less serious crimes like theft, while men usually indulge in

more serious crimes. Van Wormer (2010) explained that neutral offences like assault or theft have different meanings to males and females. Miller (cited in Bernasco, 2010) brought to notice how the relations with social genders have changed and is now situational. Situations like relationship and trauma are major elements when focusing on criminal behaviour through gender, relationship and trauma regularly occurred and seemed to have the most efficient effect on the cause of criminal behaviour. Pollock & Davis (cited in van Wormer 2010) claim that " Policy and decision makers apparently have come to believe the myth that women are more dangerous than was previously believed." It is evident because, the arrest for women increasingly arose for aggravated assaults and simple assaults. This is clear through the dramatic contemporary changes of criminal behaviour compared to the 'traditional sexual scripts'. Van Wormer (2010) believed that " the basic biological factors that impinge on gender differences in criminality are informed by research on psychology and neurology," A biological approach accepts that there are fundamental differences between males and females and that these differences interact with cultural norms to influence differences in male/female criminality.

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