

**AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CRIME
AND JUSTICE ADMINISTRATION IN ABUJA, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine gender differences in crime involvement and justice administration within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 445 respondents across the Abuja Municipal, Gwagwalada, Bwari, and Kuje Area Councils, with 434 valid responses (97.5% response rate) obtained through a multi-stage sampling procedure. Quantitative analysis employed descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, Cramer's V, mean score comparisons, and Pearson correlation analyses to assess relationships among gender, socio-economic status, and justice outcomes. Results show a significant association between gender and type of crime ($\chi^2 = 74.86, p < .001$), with males predominating in violent and property offences and females in non-violent, survival-driven crimes. Socio-economic status strongly correlated with crime involvement ($r = 0.69, p < .01$), indicating that economic deprivation predicts higher criminal participation. Institutional bias further influenced justice outcomes, with women facing moralized judgments and men harsher sentencing for violent crimes. The study concludes that gender, poverty, and institutional practices jointly shape justice disparities in the FCT. It recommends the establishment of gender-sensitive prosecutorial guidelines as a concrete policy intervention to reduce inequities in Nigeria's criminal justice system.

Keywords: Gender and Crime, Justice Administration, Socio-Economic Inequality, Institutional Bias

INTRODUCTION

Crime and justice are inherently gendered phenomena shaped by social norms, structural inequalities, and institutional practices that produce distinct experiences for men and women (Heidensohn & Silvestri, 2012). Traditional criminology, dominated by male-centric perspectives, has historically neglected how patriarchy, economic dependency, and gendered power relations shape women's offending patterns and justice encounters (Smart, 2013). Feminist and intersectional criminology have since expanded this understanding, emphasizing how gender, class, and cultural expectations mediate both deviance and judicial outcomes.

In Nigeria, gender disparities in crime and justice remain deeply entrenched. Men dominate violent and property crimes, while women often engage in non-violent, survival-driven offences such as

petty theft and fraud (Okafor & Akinyemi, 2019). These trends are reinforced by systemic inequalities, including gender bias in policing, prosecutorial discretion, and the underrepresentation of women in justice institutions (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2011). Despite policy efforts toward gender mainstreaming, empirical analyses of institutional bias within Nigeria's justice system are limited.

Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), provides a compelling context for examining these dynamics. As the nation's political and administrative hub, Abuja epitomizes the intersection of modernization, urban inequality, and cultural diversity that heighten gendered vulnerabilities and opportunities for crime. Rapid urbanization and economic pressures have reconfigured the city's social fabric, yet scholarship rarely explores how these processes shape gendered justice outcomes.

This study, therefore, investigates gender differentials in crime involvement and justice administration in Abuja, focusing on how socio-economic conditions and institutional biases intersect to sustain inequality. The study's timing is particularly relevant amid ongoing judicial reforms and gender policy implementation, providing an opportunity to evaluate whether these initiatives are fostering substantive gender equity within Nigeria's justice system.

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing recognition of gender disparities in social institutions, empirical research examining the influence of gender on crime and justice processes in Nigeria remains limited, particularly in urban settings such as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. National crime statistics frequently fail to disaggregate data by gender, obscuring critical differences in patterns of offending, victimization, and judicial outcomes (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Evidence from prior studies suggests that female offenders are often framed as moral deviants or victims, whereas male offenders are perceived as inherently violent, shaping both investigative practices and sentencing decisions (Heidensohn, 2018; Okereke, 2020).

Law enforcement and judicial institutions are similarly influenced by entrenched cultural and institutional norms, which perpetuate gendered inequalities within the justice system. Given Abuja's socio-economic diversity, escalating crime rates, and emerging gender-sensitive policy agendas, there is a pressing need for a context-specific, evidence-based understanding of how gender mediates criminal behavior and justice administration. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical insights into gender differences in offending, judicial outcomes, and the socio-economic and institutional factors that underpin these disparities.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to analyze gender differences in crime involvement and justice administration within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The specific objectives include:

- I. To examine the patterns and prevalence of crimes committed by males and females in the FCT, Abuja.
- II. To investigate gender-based disparities in arrest, prosecution, and sentencing outcomes within the justice system in Abuja.
- III. To assess the role of socio-economic factors (education, employment, and income) in influencing gender differences in criminal behavior.
- IV. To evaluate the perception of law enforcement officers and judicial actors on gender bias in justice administration.
- V. To identify policy and institutional challenges affecting gender equality in crime control and justice delivery in the FCT, Abuja.

Research Questions

The following core research questions guided this study:

- I. What are the dominant patterns and types of crimes committed by males and females in the FCT, Abuja?
- II. How do gender differences influence arrest, prosecution, and sentencing outcomes within Abuja's justice system?
- III. In what ways do socio-economic factors contribute to gender variations in criminal involvement?
- IV. How do law enforcement and judicial personnel perceive gender bias in the administration of justice?
- V. What institutional and policy measures exist or are lacking to address gender disparities in crime and justice in the FCT, Abuja?

Research Hypotheses

The study formulated the following null hypotheses to examine gender differences in crime involvement and justice administration in the FCT.

- I. There is no significant difference between male and female involvement in crime within the FCT, Abuja.
- II. There is no significant relationship between gender and arrest, prosecution, or sentencing outcomes in the FCT, Abuja.
- III. Socio-economic factors such as education, employment, and income have no significant influence on gender-based differences in criminal behavior.
- IV. There is no significant perception of gender bias among justice sector actors in the administration of justice in Abuja.

Scope of the Study

The study is delimited to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja Nigeria's administrative and political center, selected for its rapid urbanization, socio-economic diversity, and evolving crime dynamics. Four Area Councils Abuja Municipal (AMAC), Bwari, Gwagwalada, and Kuje were purposively chosen to represent both urban and peri-urban settings for comparative analysis of gender differences in criminal involvement and justice administration. Thematically, the study examines the intersection of gender and crime involvement, as well as the relationship between gender and justice administration, with a focus on disparities in arrest, prosecution, conviction, and sentencing processes.

It also assesses institutional perceptions of gender bias among law enforcement, judicial, and correctional personnel. The temporal scope of the study is the year 2025. Empirical data are drawn from surveys, interviews and scholarly sources to measure gendered differentials in crime and justice outcomes across the FCT. The study does not aim for a national comparison but provides localized evidence to inform gender-sensitive crime prevention and justice reforms in Abuja.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section critically examines existing scholarly and empirical studies on gender differences in crime involvement and justice administration, highlighting key theoretical perspectives, global and Nigerian evidence, and the research gaps this study seeks to address.

Conceptual Clarification

- i. **Gender and Crime:** Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations associated with being male or female (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In criminology, gender shapes both motivations for and the types of crimes committed. Men are more frequently involved in violent and property crimes due to socialization patterns emphasizing dominance and risk-taking, while women's criminality is often linked to economic marginalization or victimization (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013).
- ii. **Crime Involvement:** Crime involvement refers to the extent, frequency, and types of criminal behavior individuals engage in (Alemika, 2011). Structural factors such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality have been shown to correlate strongly with patterns of criminal activity (Merton, 1938). Gender influences both access to criminal opportunities and the forms of social control applied to offenders.
- iii. **Justice Administration:** Justice Administration encompasses the institutional processes of law enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, and correction (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). Gender disparities manifest in the justice process. Women

may experience leniency in sentencing but may also face moral judgments or social stigma, while men are often treated more harshly due to masculine stereotypes (Smart, 2013).

- iv. **Socio-Economic and Institutional Mediators** refer to the social and structural factors that influence how gender differences manifest in crime and justice outcomes. Socio-economic variables include income level, education, and employment status etc., while institutional mediators in the context of this study include the policies, practices, and norms within law enforcement, judicial, and correctional systems.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Feminist Criminology, Strain Theory, and Institutional Bias Theory to examine how gender, socio-economic status, and institutional practices shape crime and justice outcomes in Abuja, Nigeria. This multidimensional framework captures the interplay of patriarchal norms, structural deprivation, and systemic bias in producing gender-differentiated offending patterns and judicial experiences.

Feminist Criminology situates crime within patriarchal structures, emphasizing how women's offending often stems from economic dependency, social subordination, and limited agency, while men's criminality reflects societal expectations of dominance and control (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Connell, 2009). In Abuja, men predominantly commit violent or property crimes, whereas women engage more in survival-oriented offences. Gender also shapes institutional responses, as law enforcement and judicial actors reproduce stereotypes that influence arrest, prosecution, and sentencing. Accordingly, gender is treated as a key independent variable, hypothesized to affect both offence type and justice outcomes.

Strain Theory links socio-economic deprivation to deviant adaptation, suggesting that blocked opportunities generate strain and shape coping mechanisms (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 1992). In Abuja, men often externalize strain through aggression or theft, whereas women internalize it, engaging in non-violent survival crimes. Thus, socio-economic status functions as a predictor variable, moderated by gendered coping strategies. Institutional Bias Theory posits that systemic inequalities persist via discretionary policing, prosecutorial selectivity, and judicial stereotyping (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014).

Within Abuja's justice system, such biases mediate the relationship between gender and judicial outcomes, producing leniency for women in minor cases but moralized judgment for offences defying gender norms, while men are presumed aggressive. Collectively, this framework explains how gender, socio-economic factors, and institutional bias interact to produce differential crime and justice outcomes in the FCT.

Integrated Theoretical Model

The integration of these theories yields a coherent explanatory model in which patriarchy (Feminist Criminology) defines gendered opportunity structures, economic strain (Strain Theory) drives adaptive deviance, and institutional discrimination (Institutional Bias Theory) reinforces unequal justice outcomes. Accordingly, the model predicts that socio-economic deprivation heightens crime involvement, gender shapes the type and context of deviance, and institutional bias amplifies justice disparities. This intersectional synthesis underscores that crime and justice in the FCT are not merely individual phenomena but outcomes of structural inequality, socio-economic strain, and institutionalized gender bias.

Empirical Review

Recent criminological research highlights persistent gendered disparities in crime involvement and justice outcomes across African and global contexts. Collectively, these studies reveal how structural, cultural, and institutional factors mediate gendered experiences of policing, prosecution, and sentencing. Akinyemi and Edeh (2023) show that policing in Nigerian urban centres remains embedded in masculine occupational cultures; their findings indicate that police disproportionately target young men through surveillance and stop-and-search practices while moralizing female suspects, reinforcing stereotypes of male aggression and female vulnerability. Alemika (2017) complements this by documenting how everyday policing practices in Nigeria reproduce social hierarchies and selective enforcement, producing differential contact with the criminal justice system along gendered as well as class and ethnic lines.

Scholarship on sentencing and judicial treatment likewise demonstrates gendered patterns that are complex and context-dependent. Akinyemi and Faseke (2023) report systematic gender disparities in sentencing within Nigerian lower courts, where men are more likely to receive custodial sentences while women often benefit from leniency linked to caregiving or victimhood stereotypes. Worrall and Bernburg (2022) similarly find a persistent “sentencing gap” in Western contexts, mediated by judicial discretion and offence type. Daly’s work both the classic framing in Daly (1994) and later revisions (Daly, 2020) critiques simplistic readings of the “chivalry thesis,” arguing that apparent leniency toward women is often conditional and reproduced through broader patriarchal structures that limit women’s access to equitable institutional power.

Joseph (2024) reports that despite the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) reforms, in Nigeria, gender-accountability mechanisms remain weak, fostering unequal prosecution and sentencing outcomes. Ayenigba, Ajao, and Augustine (2025) further demonstrate a stark gender imbalance in incarceration men constitute 97% of inmates reflecting both socio-economic strain and institutional bias. Studies on trafficking and victimization (Okumagba & Ogisi, 2023) highlight

that women are often criminalized for survival offences while simultaneously being denied adequate protection as victims.

A robust international literature situates female offending within structural constraints and gendered pathways. Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2013) emphasise gendered pathways into delinquency and the specific ways juvenile justice systems respond to girls highlighting trauma, victimisation, and social control as mediating forces. Heidensohn and Silvestri (2012) focus on how gendered social controls and institutional responses shape both the visibility of female crime and the forms of punishment women receive.

At the continental level, Mokgoro et al. (2022) and the UNECA (2023) Africa Gender Index emphasize that intersecting inequalities class, gender, and institutional exclusion continue to impede women's access to justice. However, these macro-level studies seldom integrate local data to explain *how* gender differences manifest in specific urban contexts like Abuja's area councils. Empirical studies such as Holtfreter et al. (2008) and Renzetti (2013) further document gender differences in offending patterns, risk factors, and justice outcomes, showing that women's offending is often linked to survival strategies, intimate relationships, and economic marginalisation rather than the offence-type distributions seen among men.

Regionally, empirical research from Africa reinforces and complicates these global findings. Dlamini (2022) identifies urban poverty and gendered economic exclusion as key drivers of women's participation in survival crimes. Ncube (2024) extends this analysis by showing how globalization and shifting urban economies in Southern Africa are expanding women's roles in both organized and economic crimes thereby challenging traditional stereotypes of female deviance.

Mbatha (2021) finds that when women engage in violent or organized crimes that contradict prevailing gender norms, courts may impose harsher sentences intended to "restore moral order," indicating that gendered justice frequently operates through moral rather than strictly legal logics. Omoyibo (2022) links Nigerian youth violence to hegemonic masculinity, peer influence, and socio-economic frustration, illustrating how crime functions as a means of social validation within marginalized male subcultures.

Together, these works build an empirical picture: gender shapes not only rates and types of offending but also the responses of police, prosecutors, and courts responses that are mediated by cultural norms, institutional practices, and intersecting inequalities (race, class, age). The combined scholarship of Chesney-Lind & Pasko (2013); Daly (1994, 2020); Heidensohn & Silvestri (2012); Holtfreter et al. (2008); Renzetti (2013); Alemika (2017); and the regionally focused studies cited above points to the need for more integrative, longitudinal, and intra-urban work that traces gendered bias across the entire justice continuum.

Across these studies, three themes emerge; gender remains a significant determinant of offending and justice outcomes. Socio-economic and institutional contexts shape how gendered expectations are expressed and Ncube (2024) asserts, patriarchal cultures persist in structuring the discretionary spaces of justice systems.

The Research Gaps

Few Nigerian studies, especially in urban centres like Abuja, examine how gender interacts with socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors to influence offending, victimisation, and justice outcomes. Existing research often relies on aggregated data, masking gender differences. This study provides empirical, context-specific insights into these gendered dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods descriptive–correlational design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine gender differences in crime involvement and justice administration in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The FCT's socio-economic diversity and institutional complexity make it an ideal context for assessing gendered dynamics in justice processes. The study population comprised law enforcement officers, judicial and correctional personnel, and community residents with informed knowledge of crime and justice. Based on National Population Commission (2023) projections, the combined population of the Abuja Municipal, Gwagwalada, Bwari, and Kuje Area Councils was approximately 2.48 million which informed our population of study. Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{2,480,000}{1 + 2,480,000(0.05)^2} \approx 445$$

A sample size of 445 was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure: purposive selection of key institutions (police divisions, courts, and correctional centres), stratified sampling by gender and occupation, and systematic random sampling of participants. Of the 445 questionnaires distributed, 434 were validly completed and returned (97.5% response rate).

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The questionnaire contained socio-demographic and perceptual items on gender bias and justice administration, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. KIIs explored institutional perceptions of gender and justice disparities. Instrument validity was confirmed through expert review, and reliability established via Cronbach's alpha: Gender Bias Scale ($\alpha = .82$), Justice Administration Scale ($\alpha = .79$), and Institutional Fairness Scale ($\alpha = .85$).

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using SPSS Version 25, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential tests (Chi-square, Cramer's V and Pearson correlation). Qualitative data were analysed thematically, and findings were triangulated to

strengthen interpretive depth and validity. All participants provided informed consent, and strict confidentiality and ethical research standards were maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines the key findings of the study, contextualizing them within the stated hypotheses, theoretical frameworks, and existing empirical literature. Of the 445 questionnaires distributed, 434 were validly completed and returned, providing the dataset for the ensuing analysis and discussion.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 434)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	247	56.9
	Female	187	43.1
Age Group (Years)	18–25	64	14.7
	26–35	133	30.6
	36–45	122	28.1
	46–55	75	17.3
	56 and above	40	9.2
Marital Status	Single	152	35.0
	Married	226	52.1
	Divorced/Widowed	56	12.9
Educational Qualification	Secondary	68	15.7
	Diploma	101	23.3
Occupation	Bachelor's	186	42.9
	Master's and above	79	18.2
	Law Enforcement (Police/NSCDC)	118	27.2
	Judiciary/Correctional Staff	92	21.2
	Community Leaders/Civil Servants	136	31.3
	Others	88	20.3
	AMAC	165	38.0
Area Council	Bwari	95	21.9
	Gwagwalada	102	23.5
	Kuje	72	16.6

Note. Source: Field Survey (2025).

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that a majority of respondents (56.9%) were male, reflecting the gender distribution characteristic of law enforcement and justice sector institutions in the Federal Capital Territory. The predominant age group was 26–35 years (30.6%), representing a

youthful and economically active workforce. In terms of educational attainment, 42.9% of respondents possessed a bachelor's degree, suggesting a relatively high level of literacy and professional qualification among participants. Furthermore, Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) accounted for the highest proportion of respondents (38%), aligning with its status as the administrative and institutional hub of the FCT, where most justice-related agencies are concentrated.

Hypothesis Testing and Quantitative Analysis

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between gender and type of crime involvement in the FCT.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test and Measure of Association Showing the Relationship between Gender and Type of Crime Involvement in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

Variable	Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O - E)^2 / E$
Male	Violent Crimes	163	119.4	15.85
Male	Non-violent Crimes	84	127.6	14.85
Female	Violent Crimes	47	90.6	21.05
Female	Non-violent Crimes	140	96.4	23.11
Total χ^2				74.86
Cramer's V				0.41

Note. $df = 1$, $p < .001$. Source: Field Survey (2025).

The Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 74.86$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; Cramer's $V = 0.41$) shows a strong and statistically significant association between gender and crime type in the FCT. Males are markedly more involved in violent crimes, whereas females are overrepresented in non-violent and economic offences. These findings mirror Akinyemi and Edeh (2023) and Omoyibo (2022), who identified masculinity norms and peer pressure as drivers of male aggression, while female offending reflected economic marginalisation and caregiving burdens.

However, Ncube (2024) found emerging female participation in violent crimes in Johannesburg, suggesting that urbanisation and shifting gender roles may erode traditional patterns. Qualitative evidence corroborates the statistics. A senior police officer (Officer 3, AMAC) explained: "Most violent crimes like robbery or cultism are dominated by men, but when it comes to fraud or drug-related offences, women are increasingly involved." This supports Dlamini (2022), who emphasise that urban poverty and survival strategies increasingly shape female non-violent crime. Hence, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected: gender significantly predicts the type of crime involvement in Abuja.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between male and female offenders in the administration of justice in the FCT.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test and Measure of Association Showing Gender Differences in the Administration of Justice in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

Variable	Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O - E)^2 / E$
Male	Harsh Sentence	156	130.3	5.09
Male	Moderate Sentence	66	66.6	0.01
Male	Lenient Sentence	25	50.1	12.59
Female	Harsh Sentence	73	98.7	6.65
Female	Moderate Sentence	51	50.4	0.01
Female	Lenient Sentence	63	37.9	16.77
Total χ^2				58.12
Cramer's V				0.36

Note. $df = 2$, $p < .001$. Source: Field Survey (2025).

The Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 58.12$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$; Cramer's $V = 0.36$) reveals a moderate yet significant relationship between gender and sentencing outcomes. Men are more likely to receive harsh custodial sentences, while women more frequently obtain lenient or non-custodial judgments. This pattern supports Akinyemi and Faseke (2023) and Daly (2020), who argue that judicial discretion in African and Western contexts remains influenced by gendered perceptions of culpability and reformability. Conversely, Mbatha (2021) observed a narrowing leniency gap as women engage in organised or violent crimes, indicating context-dependent shifts. Field interviews reinforce these insights. A magistrate (Judge 2, Gwagwalada) noted:

“Judges sometimes show leniency towards female offenders, especially those with dependents. For men, there's often less sympathy. “Similarly, a correctional officer (Officer 5, Bwari) stated: “Many female offenders receive community service or fines, but for men, imprisonment is almost automatic for similar crimes.”

Such accounts illustrate “contextualized chivalry” (Daly, 2020), where cultural ideals of femininity and caregiving guide judicial empathy rather than formal equality. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected: gender significantly affects justice administration in the FCT.

Hypothesis 3: Socio-economic status has no significant effect on gender differences in crime involvement.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Analysis for Socio-Economic Status and Gender Differences in Crime Involvement

Hypothesis (H ₀₃)	Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Socio-economic status has no significant effect on gender differences in crime involvement.	Socio-economic status × Gender-based crime involvement	0.69	< .01	Reject H ₀₃	There is a strong positive and statistically significant correlation, indicating that socio-economic status significantly influences gendered patterns of crime involvement. Lower income levels are associated with higher rates of crime for both genders, though with distinct behavioural patterns.

Note. Source: Field Survey (2025).

The Pearson correlation ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$) reveals a strong positive relationship between socio-economic status and crime involvement, indicating that worsening economic conditions increase the likelihood of offending. Low-income groups record the highest crime rates (61.1% males; 58.3% females). Men are more involved in violent crimes (e.g., assault, theft), reflecting frustration and aggression, while women engage in non-violent survival crimes (e.g., petty fraud, drug trading) driven by poverty and caregiving burdens.

These findings support Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992), showing that economic deprivation generates strain that fosters deviant coping mechanisms. In the FCT, poverty acts as both a structural and gendered force, shaping distinct criminal pathways. As a Bwari leader noted, "In poor settlements across Bwari and Kuje, crime rates are rising. Poverty doesn't discriminate, but women often resort to economic crimes like drug peddling" (Interviewee 07, Community Leader). Overall, the evidence shows that poverty produces gendered patterns of adaptation, men externalise strain through violence, while women internalise it through economic survival. Tackling these disparities requires gender-sensitive poverty reduction and employment policies to mitigate structural drivers of crime in the FCT.

Hypothesis 4: Institutional gender bias has no significant influence on justice administration outcomes.

Table 5: Chi-Square (χ^2) Test and Measure of Association between Institutional Gender Bias and Justice Administration Outcomes

Hypothesis (H ₀₄)	Variables	χ^2 value	Df	p value	Cramer's V	Decision	Interpretation
Institutional gender bias has no significant influence on justice administration outcomes.	Institutional gender bias × Justice outcomes	46.27	2	< .001	0.38	Reject H ₀₄	A statistically significant and moderately strong relationship exists between institutional gender bias and justice administration outcomes, indicating that gendered bias meaningfully affects case handling, sentencing patterns, and access to justice.

Note. Source: Field Survey (2025).

The Chi-Square result ($\chi^2 = 46.27$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) and Cramer's V (0.38) indicate a moderately strong and statistically significant relationship between institutional gender bias and justice administration outcomes within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). This demonstrates that justice processes ranging from bail decisions to sentencing and credibility assessments are systematically influenced by institutionalized gender norms rather than random variation.

This finding is consistent with prior research documenting gendered disparities in criminal justice systems (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Daly, 1994). Similar to findings by Heidensohn and Silvestri (2012), the present result supports the claim that women's offences are often interpreted through moral or emotional frameworks, while men's deviance is rationalized as circumstantial. Conversely, the result contrasts with some reform-era studies (e.g., Holtfreter et al., 2008), which found gender neutrality emerging in modern judicial systems due to gender-sensitivity policies suggesting that in Nigeria's context, such reforms remain largely procedural and not transformative

The qualitative interviews provide contextual depth to the quantitative findings, illustrating how gendered institutional attitudes shape outcomes in subtle but pervasive ways. A female defence

lawyer (Participant D-04, FCT High Court) stated: “Many women facing trial for drug peddling or fraud are treated as if their crime reflects a moral failing rather than an economic one. The system often pities men as victims of circumstance but condemns women as bad examples.”

This perspective highlights symbolic moralization of female offending, aligning with Smart’s (1995) feminist critique that legal institutions often conflate female criminality with moral deviance. Similarly, an NGO representative (Participant N-07, Garki) explained: “Institutional bias isn’t always deliberate it’s cultural. Even police officers interpret women’s behaviour through moral lenses. A woman caught in crime faces stigma before the trial begins.”

This corroborates findings from Renzetti (2013) and Alemika (2017), who argue that institutional culture not merely individual prejudice sustains gender disparities through the normalization of patriarchal logic in justice administration. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings converge to demonstrate that institutional gender bias is structurally embedded within Nigeria’s criminal justice system. This supports feminist criminological perspectives (Smart, 1995; Chesney-Lind, 2006) which argue that justice systems reproduce social inequalities under the guise of procedural neutrality. The moderate Cramer’s V value (0.38) empirically accentuates that gender is a salient determinant of justice outcomes, warranting institutional reforms.

Research Question 5: What institutional and policy measures exist or are lacking to address gender disparities in crime and justice in the FCT, Abuja?

Table 6: Institutional and Policy Measures Addressing Gender Disparities in Crime and Justice in the FCT, Abuja

Institutional / Policy Measure	Adequate (%)	Partially Adequate (%)	Inadequate (%)	Non-existent (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Gender-sensitive police training programmes	18.9	31.2	35.7	14.2	2.55	0.96
Women’s representation in justice sector leadership	12.7	24.9	38.7	23.7	2.27	0.99
Gender mainstreaming policies in law enforcement	15.4	33.4	37.8	13.4	2.51	0.89
Legal aid and rehabilitation services for female offenders	22.6	35.5	31.8	10.1	2.71	0.93

Policy enforcement against gender-based discrimination	19.8	28.3	37.5	14.4	2.53	0.94
Inclusion of gender studies in justice personnel training curricula	11.3	26.5	41.7	20.5	2.29	0.97
Government–NGO collaboration on women’s justice advocacy	25.8	34.7	29.1	10.4	2.76	0.88
Gender-responsive data collection and policy evaluation	10.8	29.2	39.9	20.1	2.31	0.95
Aggregate Mean	–	–	–	–	2.49	–

Note. Source: Field Survey (2025).

The aggregate mean score of 2.49 reflects that institutional and policy responses to gender disparities in Abuja’s justice sector are largely weak and inconsistent. While legal aid ($M = 2.71$) and NGO collaboration ($M = 2.76$) show moderate adequacy, critical areas such as women’s leadership representation ($M = 2.27$) and data-driven evaluation ($M = 2.31$) remain severely lacking. This reveals a policy–practice gap, where gender equality frameworks exist symbolically but lack structural enforcement.

Qualitative insights corroborate these findings. A Ministry of Justice official noted that gender initiatives “fade once donor funding ends,” exemplifying what Mackay et al. (2010) term *policy decoupling*. Similarly, an NGO director observed that “female offenders hardly get legal support,” highlighting systemic neglect of women’s justice needs. The limited presence of women in decision-making roles mirrors Connell’s (2009) *Gender Order Theory*, which links institutional patriarchy to hierarchical exclusion.

Overall, both data and interviews point to symbolic compliance rather than substantive equality. Effective reform requires gender-responsive budgeting, mandatory equality training, and greater inclusion of women in justice sector leadership to achieve genuine institutional transformation.

Summary of Findings

The study yielded the following key findings based on the analysis of data collected from 434 valid respondents:

- I. There is a clear gendered pattern in crime typologies. Males were predominantly involved in violent crimes such as robbery and assault, whereas females were more active in non-violent and economic offences like fraud and drug trafficking.
- II. Gender significantly influenced sentencing decisions. Male offenders were more likely to receive harsh custodial sentences, while female offenders frequently benefited from lenient or non-custodial outcomes, indicating persistent gender bias in judicial practice.
- III. A strong positive correlation was observed between low socio-economic status and crime involvement across genders. Individuals from poorer backgrounds were more likely to engage in criminal behaviour, with men committing expressive violent acts and women engaging in survival-driven offences.
- IV. Findings revealed that institutional gender bias significantly affects justice administration. Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes within the police, prosecution, and judiciary contribute to unequal treatment and outcomes for male and female offenders.
- V. The analysis showed that existing institutional and policy measures addressing gender disparities are weak, fragmented, and poorly implemented. Low female representation in leadership, inadequate gender-sensitive training, and poor monitoring mechanisms undermine equitable justice delivery.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study's findings highlighting significant gender differences in crime types, sentencing outcomes, and institutional bias, reveal deeply entrenched structural and cultural dynamics within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Informed by Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992), Merton's Social Structure and Anomie Theory (1938), and Feminist Criminology, the results demonstrate how socio-economic pressures, unequal opportunity structures, and patriarchal norms intersect to shape the gendered nature of both criminal behaviour and justice administration in the FCT.

Consistent with Agnew's General Strain Theory, the strong correlation between low socio-economic status and crime involvement ($r = 0.69, p < 0.01$) suggests that poverty-induced strain drives deviant coping behaviours. Men tend toward violent and expressive offences (robbery, assault), while women engage more in survival-oriented crimes (fraud, drug peddling). This aligns with prior Nigerian and global studies (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Okafor & Akinyemi, 2019), confirming that strain operates through gendered pathways.

Merton's (1938) Anomie Theory further explains these outcomes as adaptations to blocked legitimate opportunities in Abuja's stratified urban economy. High crime involvement among low-income males and females reflects "innovation" responses to structural disjunctions between societal goals and accessible means, a pattern similarly reported in prior African criminological research (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2011).

Findings on sentencing disparities and institutional bias substantiate Feminist Criminology perspectives. The significant difference in sentencing outcomes ($\chi^2 = 58.12, p < 0.001$) and weak gender-policy implementation ($M = 2.49$) reveal both paternalistic leniency and structural exclusion. Women are symbolically protected but materially underserved, illustrating what Connell (2009) terms the “gender order” of institutions. These results corroborate studies highlighting patriarchal judicial norms and the tokenistic integration of gender equality in justice reform (Heidensohn, 2012; Mackay et al., 2010).

Largely, the findings demonstrate that gendered crime patterns and justice disparities in the FCT are products of socio-economic strain, institutional inequality, and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity. Bridging this gap requires structural interventions, poverty alleviation, gender-responsive training, and greater female representation to move policy from symbolic compliance to substantive equality in Nigeria’s justice system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that gender significantly shapes patterns of offending, victimisation, and judicial outcomes in Abuja, Nigeria. Female offenders are often treated leniently due to caregiving or victimhood stereotypes, while male offenders face harsher scrutiny, reflecting entrenched cultural and institutional biases. Male youth violence is linked to socio-economic marginalisation and peer influence, highlighting the intersection of structural and gendered factors in criminal behaviour. The study is limited by its urban-focused sample, potential self-reporting bias, and the cross-sectional design, which prevents causal inference. Based on the study’s findings, the following policy measures are recommended:

- I. FCT should implement gender-sensitive training for law enforcement and judiciary to address biased investigation and sentencing practices that disadvantage male or female offenders due to entrenched stereotypes.
- II. The federal government should ensure data disaggregation by gender in national crime statistics to reveal gender differences in offending, victimisation, and judicial outcomes that are otherwise masked.
- III. FCT should introduce targeted socio-economic interventions for at-risk male youth to mitigate crime linked to peer influence and structural marginalisation identified in male offending patterns.
- IV. FCT should promote community awareness programmes on gender stereotypes in crime to challenge societal moralization of female offenders and foster more equitable perceptions of male and female criminality.

Study Contribution and Future Research

This study contributes to scholarship by providing empirical, context-specific evidence on gendered dynamics in crime and justice administration in Nigeria. Future research should expand to rural areas, longitudinal designs, and intersectional analyses of gender, class, and ethnicity.

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