Gender and Crimes in Urban Nigeria: A Systematic Review of Offending and Victimization Patterns in Port Harcourt

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Abstract

Gender and crime research has become increasingly prominent in criminological discourse, particularly in rapidly urbanizing cities like Port Harcourt, Nigeria. This study addresses the urgent need to understand and respond to gendered dynamics of crime in the context of rapid urbanization, rising insecurity, and persistent gender-based criminalities in Nigeria. By examining trends in both victimization and offending, this paper aimed at investigating the gendered patterns of criminality in Port Harcourt. Theoretical orientation of the study anchored in Feminist Criminology and Social Strain Theory, both of which provided critical insights into the gendered dimensions of crime and victimization in Port Harcourt. By drawing attention to these disparate trends, the review advocates for community-based interventions catered to the unique needs of men and women, gender-sensitive crime prevention tactics, and changes in policing and judicial responses. Developing inclusive and successful crime control programs in Port Harcourt and other Nigerian cities of a similar nature requires an understanding of these gendered dynamics. It identifies notable differences in the type, incidence, and setting of crimes committed by and against men and women in the city, drawing on empirical research, police records, and academic literature. In contrast to men, who are more likely to commit violent crimes like armed robbery, cultism, and gang-related violence, women are more frequently linked to non-violent crimes like petty theft, fraud, and commercial sex work, which are frequently motivated by financial insecurity. The review also shows that despite the fact that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the aforementioned gender-based crimes, these offenses are not well reported because of institutional inefficiencies, cultural stigma, and fear of reprisals.

Keywords: *Criminality, Gender-based violence, Offending trends, Port Harcourt, Victimization*

Introduction

Globally, women's sense of vulnerability is profiled not just by environmental factors, but also by social dynamics such as male presence and harassment patterns (te Braak (2025).

Gendered patterns of criminality refer to the ways in which Individuals experience and perpetrate crime differently based on their gender identities. These variations show up in the kinds of crimes perpetrated, the socioeconomic factors that lead to them, and the victimization rates. However, its patterns of safety and victimization cannot be fully explained by crime statistics alone, but must also take cognizance of environmental conditions, perceptions and cultural norms that everyday mobility Cleland, Coney & O'Kane, 2025). According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2005), women are increasingly involved in non-violent crimes, especially those related to survival strategies like petty theft and commercial sex work, while men are more involved in violent and organized crimes like armed robbery, cultism, and political thuggery.

It would be apt to reiterate from the onset that crime is a complex social phenomenon that is impacted by different elements, such as institutional dynamics, cultural values, and socioeconomic condition. Among these factors, gender continues to be a crucial prism through which victimization and criminal behaviour patterns might be properly understood. In many countries, including Nigeria, gender plays a key influence in shaping experiences within the criminal justice system in addition to dictating responsibilities and expectations (Okeshola & Mudiare, 2013). In Nigeria, the persistent neglect of gendered dimensions in crime research and policy responses has created a knowledge gap that hampers effective crime prevention and control. Most security strategies continue to adopt a gender-neutral approach, overlooking the structural and social factors that shape men's and women's involvement in, and experiences of, crime (Igbinovia, 2014; Opara, 2019). This gap not only undermines the effectiveness of law enforcement and judicial processes but also perpetuates cycles of inequality, insecurity, and mistrust in formal institutions. Given the escalating insecurity in Nigerian cities, the rising cases of gender-based violence, and the urgent demand for gender-sensitive crime prevention strategies, there is a pressing need to review the gendered patterns of criminality in Port Harcourt, especially in view of its cosmopolitan status.

Port Harcourt, often described as Nigeria's oil hub, presents a complex urban setting characterized by industrial expansion, population growth, economic disparities, and social tensions (Agbiboa, 2015; Otu, 2020). While these developments have spurred economic

opportunities, they have also intensified crime rates and reshaped the patterns of offending and victimization in the city (Okeshola & Adewusi, 2013). A growing concern is that crime in Port Harcourt does not affect men and women uniformly. Research indicates that men are more frequently involved in violent crimes such as armed robbery, cultism, and gang-related activities (Chukwuma, 2018; Dambazau, 2021). Women, on the other hand, are increasingly associated with non-violent crimes such as petty theft, fraud, and commercial sex work, which are often linked to poverty, financial insecurity, and limited employment opportunities (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2022; Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2016). At the same time, women and girls disproportionately suffer from gender-based victimization, including sexual assault, domestic violence, and trafficking (Eze-Anaba, 2016; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). Despite this reality, many of these offenses remain grossly underreported due to cultural stigma, institutional inefficiencies, and fear of reprisals, leaving victims without justice or adequate support (Amnesty International, 2018; Akinlabi, 2020).

This paper interrogates how gendered roles and institutional responses, structure patterns of offending and victimization in Port Harcourt, a dimension overlooked in existing Nigerian criminological research. The results would help create gender-sensitive policy frameworks for criminal justice administration and crime prevention in urban Nigeria.

Literature Review: Conceptual Clarifications

Gender

Gender refers to the state of being male or female as distinguished by socially and culturally assigned roles, attributes, and expectations, rather than biological differences alone (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). While sex is biologically determined, gender emphasizes the socially constructed roles that societies attribute to men and women. It is conceptualized as a social category that shapes how individuals participate in, experience, and respond to crime. It influences both offending and victimization patterns by determining access to resources, power, and opportunities (Butler, 2011; Lorber, 1994). For instance, patriarchal norms often associate masculinity with aggression and dominance, which partly explains men's higher involvement in violent crimes such as

armed robbery, cultism, and gang-related violence (Messerschmidt, 2018). Conversely, femininity is often linked to economic dependency and vulnerability, making women more likely to engage in non-violent crimes such as petty theft, fraud, and commercial sex work, while also exposing them to disproportionate victimization, especially in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence (Smart, 2013; Eze-Anaba, 2016). Thus, gender in this study is not merely a demographic variable but a lens for understanding the structural and cultural forces that shape criminal behavior and victimization in Port Harcourt.

Crime

Crime is defined as an unlawful act punishable by law (Black's Law Dictionary, 2019). It represents behavior that violates the criminal code of a state and is subject to formal sanctions such as fines, imprisonment, or other penalties. It is both a legal and social phenomenon. It is not only the breach of law but also an outcome of socio-economic and cultural realities that define what is considered criminal in specific contexts (Clinard & Meier, 2015). Gender-based crimes such as sexual violence and domestic abuse highlight the intersection of crime with patriarchal power structures, which often silence victims due to stigma, institutional inefficiencies, and fear of reprisals (Amnesty International, 2018; Akinlabi, 2020). Hence, crime is understood not only as a legal violation but also as a socially situated practice shaped by gender inequalities and broader structural conditions.

Gender and Crime in Nigeria

The landscape of crime in Nigeria clearly demonstrates gendered elements, with unique patterns in offending behaviour, societal responses, and motivations. The statistics on criminal activity, especially violent and organized crime, have always been dominated by men. These include gang disputes, political thuggery, cult-related violence, and armed robberies (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005). Nonetheless, because of changing gender norms and socioeconomic circumstances, women have become more visible in criminal activity over the past 20 years. The rising percentage of poverty and economic marginalization among women in Nigeria is one of the major causes contributing to the growth in female criminality. Many women are now financially dependent and at risk of exploitation due to structural hurdles, including restricted access to formal employment, education, and land

ownership (Ajah et al., 2020). Their involvement in "invisible" or non-violent crimes including sex work, drug couriering, black market dealing, petty theft, and computer fraud facilitation is frequently a sign of this vulnerability. The need to provide care and socioeconomic limitations make engaging in criminal activity a sad but frequently logical survival strategy.

Again, the rise in broken homes, domestic violence, and the feminization of single parenthood has increased women's entry into crime. In order to support their children, women in urban areas like Port Harcourt who have been abandoned by their partners or who have been widowed by violence frequently turn to illegal means. In these situations, necessity, rather than deviance, is commonly the driving force behind criminal activity (Nwankwo, 2019).Furthermore, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women joining organized crime networks. The use of women as traffickers, drug mules, and even recruiters in human trafficking organizations is on the rise. A cycle that highlights the hazy distinction between vulnerability and agency in gendered criminal contexts is that some people become offenders after first becoming victims of human trafficking (UNODC, 2021). Given that law enforcement still makes gender-biased assumptions about who is likely to commit crimes, these women are frequently chosen for their alleged abilities to evade detection. On the other hand, social expectations of masculinity, peer pressure, unemployment, and political manipulation remain to be the main drivers of male criminality in Nigeria. Young males are particularly susceptible to being recruited into criminal gangs and cults, frequently with the promise of financial gain, safety, or political favours. The increasing use of thugs for political purposes during Rivers State elections, many of whom are young men without jobs, is indicative of the gendered institutionalization and weaponization of crime (Ebeku, 2020).

In sum, the Nigerian context shows that while men still account for the majority of violent crimes, the gender gap in criminality is narrowing due to socio-economic pressures and evolving social norms. However, due to different gender roles, expectations, and lived realities, men and women have very different reasons for committing crimes, the kinds of crimes they commit, and the outcomes of their involvement. Developing fair and successful

crime prevention and intervention techniques requires an understanding of these distinctions.

Victimization Patterns and Gender

Gender is a key driver of victimization patterns, influencing not just the types of crimes suffered but also the chance of reporting and receiving justice. Women and girls are more vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV), such as rape, domestic abuse, sexual assault, forced marriage, and human trafficking, in Nigeria and many other patriarchal nations (UNODC, 2021; IOM, 2020). Systemic disregard for women's rights, cultural norms that support male dominance, and unequal power relations are the core causes of these violent crimes. These national trends are exacerbated in Port Harcourt by the city's intricate social structure and economic inequality. Several studies attest to the fact that women and girls, particularly those from low-income families, are regularly subjected to sexual violence in both public and private settings. Sexual harassment and abuse have been found to be prevalent in public transportation systems, marketplaces, and informal settlements (Ajah & Ajah, 2021). Research indicates that victims frequently know the perpetrators, often intimate partners, landlords, neighbors, or employers, which makes it more difficult for survivors to report (Ameh, 2019).

In addition, domestic violence remains a pressing issue in Port Harcourt, where a lot of women live in economically dependent or abusive relationships. The Domestic Violence Registry in Rivers State has been criticized for its limited coverage and inconsistent record-keeping, making it difficult to gauge the full scope of the issue (Chukwuma, 2022). Because of institutional indifference, societal stigma, economic reliance, and fear of retaliation, victims frequently endure suffering in silence (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Amnesty International, 2018). The culture of silence is exacerbated by traditional beliefs that prioritize family honor over individual well-being and deter women from seeking legal redress. Another widespread hazard to women and girls in Port Harcourt is forced labor and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Nigeria's trafficking network somewhat relies on Port Harcourt as a transit and origin location, with victims being trafficked across borders or from rural to metropolitan regions (NAPTIP, 2021). Many women are forced into

prostitution or servitude after being tricked by promises of work or education. The desire of victims to disclose is further complicated by the fact that trafficking is sometimes assisted by family members or friends (UNODC, 2021).

Even though GBV disproportionately affects women, male victimization is a significant, yet under-discussed, aspect of gender and crime. Homicide, cult violence, armed robbery, and extrajudicial assassinations are more common among men in Port Harcourt, frequently at the hands of both law enforcement and criminal organizations (Ogundipe, 2018; Eze, 2020). The hypermasculinity culture, which emphasizes toughness and violence, deters male victims from coming forward with reports of abuse, especially when it comes to sexual assault, which is usually disregarded because of patriarchal or homophobic sentiments (Ezeibe & Nwachukwu, 2021). Additionally, young males from underprivileged communities are disproportionately affected by police violence, arbitrary arrest, and torture since they are often labeled as criminals based on their location or appearance (Chijioke, 2020). Young males have complained of regular harassment and extortion by security personnel in the Mile One, Diobu, and Oyigbo neighborhoods of Port Harcourt. Such widespread abuse erodes effective attempts to prevent crime and fosters a culture of fear and mistrust toward law enforcement.

In summary, urban stresses, cultural silence, and institutional failures exacerbate gender-based victimization in Port Harcourt, which is a reflection of larger national and international issues. It is necessary to look at both the obvious and hidden harms as well as the gendered silences surrounding victimhood in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of these trends.

Urbanization, Gender, and Crime in Port Harcourt

Port Harcourt's urban development over the past thirty years has been characterized by uncontrolled expansion, rural-urban migration, and economic inequality, which have collectively contributed to a high-crime environment. As the commercial and oil-producing hub of Nigeria's Niger Delta, the city attracts large numbers of migrants seeking better opportunities. However, the failure of infrastructure, housing, and public services to keep pace with population growth has created dense informal settlements, unemployment

hotspots, and socioeconomically stratified neighborhoods (Omuta, 2011; Amadi & Eyinla, 2016).Both new types of crime and the transformation of old ones have been influenced by urbanization. From a gender standpoint, urban dynamics increase the vulnerabilities of both men and women, though in different ways.

Rapid urbanization has exposed young men to more criminal subcultures. Cult gangs, who operate as quasi-political and economic organizations engaged in contract killings, armed robberies, extortion, and drug trafficking, attract a large number of young men in Port Harcourt (Ebeku, 2020). In places like Rumuokoro, Diobu, and Elelenwo, where gang networks may operate freely due to unemployment and a lack of community police, cultism flourishes. Especially during election seasons when politicians use teenage violence as a political tool, these organizations frequently entice young men with promises of safety, prestige, and financial gain (Okpaleke, 2021). In the meantime, many women are pushed into informal and illegal economic activity, especially commercial sex work, black-market trading, and petty criminality, by urban poverty and gendered economic exclusion. One common survival tactic used by economically marginalized women is transactional sex, particularly in Port Harcourt's red-light districts (such as Abonnema Wharf, Garrison, and D-Line) (Amadi, 2022). In addition to being legally considered criminals, these women are frequently the victims of social exclusion, client assault, and police abuse.

Furthermore, some exploitative gender relations have become more commonplace in urban areas. For instance, many employers and landlords utilize sex-for-shelter or sex-for-work coercion to take advantage of the housing and employment needs of female migrants, which further solidifies cycles of abuse and reliance (Umaru & Okoye, 2020).

Since many police stations in metropolitan Port Harcourt are male-dominated, understaffed, and lack specialist gender departments, women also face limited access to judicial procedures. Additionally, victims are deterred from seeking justice or compensation due to the legal system's slowness and frequent corruption (Ogundipe, 2018). The gendered experience of urban crime also includes the spatial dimensions of fear and restriction. Research shows that women often alter their movement patterns, dress codes, and social behaviours to avoid harassment or assault in public spaces (Chukwuma,

2022). This spatial exclusion reinforces gender inequality by limiting women's access to urban opportunities and autonomy. Men, on the other hand, control public areas but are more likely to face violent conflict, whether it be from police raids, cult conflicts, or gang rivalry. This fact illustrates how urbanization reinforces feminine susceptibility while also increasing masculinized risk.

In conclusion, a highly gendered criminal landscape has been cultivated by Port Harcourt's urban development. Women are forced into fragile survival methods and typically suffer in silence, while men are trained into dangerous, usually violent positions. These discrepancies will keep growing if intentional, gender-sensitive urban planning and crime prevention are not implemented.

Empirical Review

Prevalence and Patterns of Gendered Offending and Victimization

Empirical studies conducted in Port Harcourt reveal clear gendered dynamics in both offending and victimization. Research shows that women and girls disproportionately suffer from gender-based violence (GBV), with physical, sexual, and emotional harms being common, particularly in domestic and intimate contexts (Udam, 2023; ISRG Publishers, 2023). The psychosocial impacts of such violence include depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, underscoring the significant burden on female victims. In addition, commercial sex work has become a visible feature of the Port Harcourt urban economy, driven largely by poverty, unemployment, and limited access to legitimate livelihoods (Global Scientific Journal, 2021; Robinson, 2019). These studies affirm that women are both highly vulnerable to victimization and more involved in survival-driven, non-violent offenses compared to men.

Offending: Violent Male-Dominated Crimes and Female-Linked Non-Violent Offenses

Studies in Rivers State and Port Harcourt consistently associate men with violent, organized crimes, particularly cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and political thuggery (Oruwari, 2006; DataprojectNG, n.d.; PIND Foundation, 2019). These forms of crime are linked to cult group recruitment among youths, economic marginalization, and the

spillover of campus cults into urban communities (Alikor, 2023). Conversely, female offending often revolves around less violent but equally consequential crimes such as petty theft, low-level fraud, and commercial sex work (Global Scientific Journal, 2021; Nigerian Journal of Social Policy, 2022). The empirical evidence highlights that while men dominate violent criminal activity, women's offenses are often rooted in socioeconomic desperation.

Victimization, Under-Reporting, and Impacts

A striking feature of gendered crime in Port Harcourt is the under-reporting of GBV and related offenses. Cultural stigma, fear of reprisals, and lack of trust in policing institutions contribute to significant gaps between actual victimization rates and official crime statistics (Fund for Peace, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2023). Women often avoid reporting crimes due to the perceived inefficiency of institutions and potential for secondary victimization. Furthermore, spatial studies suggest that domestic violence is more prevalent in unplanned neighborhoods of Port Harcourt, intensifying the vulnerability of women in marginalized urban areas (Johnbull, 2024). This under-reporting not only skews the official understanding of crime trends but also limits effective intervention.

Structural and Proximal Drivers

Empirical studies highlight that economic hardship and unemployment serve as push factors for women into commercial sex work and other petty crimes, while young men are more vulnerable to recruitment into cult groups and violent networks (Global Scientific Journal, 2021; Robinson, 2019; Alikor, 2023). Rapid urbanization and slum expansion exacerbate these problems, creating environments with weakened social controls and increased exposure to criminal opportunities (Oruwari, 2006). This evidence demonstrates how structural inequalities intersect with gender to produce differentiated patterns of crime and victimization.

Institutional Responses and Limitations

Field assessments of institutional capacity reveal major deficiencies in policing and judicial responses to gendered crimes. Weak investigative follow-up, lack of victim-centered services, and insufficient gender sensitivity in law enforcement remain widespread

(Invictus Africa, 2024; Fund for Peace, 2018). Reports also show that domestic violence and cult-related conflicts are recurrent in Rivers State, yet interventions often lack coordination between law enforcement, social welfare, and community-based organizations (PIND Foundation, 2019). Female offenders, when apprehended, also face systemic biases, with limited access to rehabilitation or reintegration programs (Nigerian Journal of Social Policy, 2022).

Synthesis and Research Gaps

Taken together, the empirical literature reveals four consistent themes. First, gendered differences in offending and victimization are entrenched in Port Harcourt, with men dominating violent crime while women are more affected by GBV and economic survival crimes. Second, under-reporting masks the true extent of gendered victimization. Third, structural drivers -poverty, unemployment, and urban marginality - fuel these patterns. Finally, institutional responses remain inadequate and poorly tailored to gender-specific realities.

However, empirical gaps remain. Few studies provide longitudinal, gender-disaggregated crime data for Port Harcourt. Comparative analyses that situate Port Harcourt within broader Nigerian urban crime trends are scarce. Moreover, evaluations of gender-sensitive interventions (such as police reforms, community-based prevention programs, or victim support services) are largely absent. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing evidence-based, inclusive strategies for crime prevention and justice delivery in the city.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist criminology and social strain theory, two complementing criminological frameworks that offer important insights into the gendered aspects of crime and victimization in Port Harcourt, serve as the study's foundations.

Feminist Criminology emerged as a response to the limitations of mainstream criminological theories that historically ignored or misrepresented women's experiences in the criminal justice system. It challenges the androcentric biases of classical criminology, which pathologized or made invisible female criminality and frequently saw crime through

a male lens (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013). According to feminist criminologists, systemic injustices such as poverty, gender discrimination, domestic violence, and limited access to jobs and education are the main reasons why women commit crimes. This theoretical framework, when applied to Port Harcourt, explains why women are overrepresented in survival-based and informal crimes like trafficking, petty stealing, and commercial sex exploitation. According to Smart (1995), feminist criminology also highlights the intersectionality of oppression, which holds that women's susceptibility to criminal activity and victimization is exacerbated by elements including class, ethnicity, and urban marginality.

Furthermore, feminist theory takes into account the systematic disregard for female victims in addition to examining female offenders. In Nigeria, victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault frequently experience blame, stigma, and institutional obstacles to justice. To guarantee that women's opinions and experiences are sufficiently heard, feminist criminology advocates for gender-responsive changes in the legal system, law enforcement, and support networks.

Robert K. Merton's Social Strain Theory (1938) offers yet another crucial explanatory framework for comprehending criminal activity in Port Harcourt. According to the theory, crime occurs when there is a disjunction between culturally endorsed goals (such as financial success) and the structurally available means to achieve them. In urban centers like Port Harcourt, where high unemployment, underemployment, and widening economic disparities prevail, many individuals, irrespective of gender, experience strain or pressure to succeed through alternative, often illegitimate, means.

When legal work is unavailable, young males may be pushed toward violent and dangerous illegal activities including cultism, armed robbery, and kidnapping by society's expectation that they be protectors and providers. Women may engage in drug sales, transactional sex, or trafficking networks as a result of social pressures and a lack of economic opportunities. Because survival tactics sometimes take precedence over legality in Port Harcourt, Social Strain Theory provides a socio-structural explanation for criminality that is consistent with the lived experiences of many Port Harcourt citizens.

Integrating Feminist Criminology with Social Strain Theory allows for a more nuanced analysis that considers both structural constraints and gendered expectations in shaping pathways to crime. It acknowledges that although strain may be experienced by both men and women, their reactions to it may differ because of gendered socialization, economic roles, and resource availability.

Methodology

The study adopted thequalitative systematic review methodology to synthesize information from secondary sources such as government reports, media investigations, scholarly journal articles, and NGO publications. Key databases and search engines such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, and African Journals Online (AJOL) were used to identify relevant literature. Inclusion criteria were studies published between 2010 and 2024, focused on Nigeria or comparable African urban contexts, and with clear gender-disaggregated data or analysis. Gray literature from reputable organizations such as CLEEN Foundation, UN Women, and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) were also included. The review was thematic, with focus on categories such as types of crime by gender, drivers of criminal behaviour, and types of victimization, law enforcement responses, and policy implications.

Findings and Discussion

1. Gendered Offending Patterns

The review reveals that offending patterns in Port Harcourt are strongly gendered, reflecting differences in socialization, opportunity structures, and socio-economic pressures. Men are disproportionately involved in violent and organized crime, including cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and political thuggery (Alemika, 2019; Igbinovia, 2020). These offenses are often driven by a combination of youth unemployment, peer group influence, and political patronage, where cult networks provide both identity and economic opportunities (Alikor, 2023). In contrast, female offending is primarily non-violent and survival-oriented, including petty theft, low-level fraud, and commercial sex work (Okeshola & Adenuga, 2019; Robinson, 2019). Motivations for female offending are largely economic, arising from poverty, single parenthood, and limited access to formal

employment. Although these crimes are less visible in official statistics, they are critical to understanding urban survival strategies and highlight gendered pathways into crime.

These patterns demonstrate how structural inequalities intersect with gender roles, resulting in different expressions of strain. While men externalize strain through aggression and organized violence, women internalize economic pressures through opportunistic or survivalist offending, consistent with strain theory (Agnew, 1992). Furthermore, the findings align with feminist criminology, which posits that patriarchal structures constrain women's choices and contribute to their unique crime patterns (Smart, 2011).

2. Gendered Victimization Experiences

The study also identifies distinct gendered patterns of victimization. Women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and exploitation, particularly within private and intimate settings (Amnesty International, 2022; Udam, 2023). Barriers to reporting include cultural stigma, fear of reprisal, and institutional inefficiencies (Fund for Peace, 2018). Men, however, are more frequently victims of street violence, cult clashes, and gang-related attacks (Otu & Nnam, 2021). These violent encounters are often public and fatal, yet they receive comparatively less attention in policy responses.

These patterns suggest differential vulnerability: women's exposure in domestic/private spaces leads to underreporting, whereas men's exposure in public spheres is more visible to authorities. The gendered distribution of victimization reflects both cultural norms and structural factors, illustrating the necessity of **context-sensitive interventions** (Agbiboa, 2020).

3. Institutional Response and Justice System Bias

Empirical evidence highlights institutional shortcomings and biases in dealing with gendered crime. Women offenders, especially in commercial sex work, face harsher social condemnation, whereas male violent offenders sometimes benefit from informal protection, particularly if linked to political networks (Okeke, 2020). Victims, particularly

women, experience poor investigative follow-up, procedural delays, and pressure to settle cases privately, undermining access to justice (Invictus Africa, 2024).

Institutional bias reinforces gender disparities in both offending and victimization. Women are simultaneously criminalized and denied protection, perpetuating cycles of marginalization. Addressing these structural inequalities requires gender-sensitive policing and judicial reforms (ISRG Publishers, 2023).

4. Structural and Socio-Economic Drivers

Multiple studies identify poverty, unemployment, rapid urbanization, and youth marginalization as structural drivers of both male and female criminality in Port Harcourt (Global Scientific Journal, 2021; Oruwari, 2006; PIND Foundation, 2019).

- For men, youth exclusion and cult networks create pathways into violent group-based crime.

- For women, economic deprivation and social marginalization drive survivalist offenses.

These findings demonstrate that gendered criminality is not random; it emerges from the interaction between structural inequalities and gendered social expectations. Strain theory explains the causal mechanisms, showing that blocked opportunities manifest differently by gender, while feminist criminology emphasizes the social and institutional constraints shaping women's criminal behavior (Smart, 2011; Agnew, 1992).

5. Comparative Analysis of Gendered Criminality

A comparative perspective highlights critical differences in offending and victimization:

Aspect	Men	Women
Dominant offense type	Violent, organized crimes	Non-violent, survival-oriented crimes

Aspect	Men	Women
Common victimization	Street and gang-related violence	Domestic, sexual, and intimate violence
Motivating factors	Peer pressure, unemployment, cult affiliation	Poverty, economic exclusion, social marginalization
Institutional bias	Occasional informal protection	Harsher social condemnation, under-representation in justice system
Reporting patterns	More likely for violent crimes	Severely under-reported due to stigma

The comparison underscores the dual nature of gendered criminality: **men dominate visible,** violent crimes, while women experience invisible harm and survival-driven offending. Policies must therefore be tailored to gender-specific realities, addressing both prevention and victim support (Agbiboa, 2020; Amnesty International, 2022).

In summaryl,findings reveal clear gender differentiation in offending and victimization, socioeconomic and structural inequalities as root causes, institutional bias that exacerbates disparities, and under-reporting, especially among female victims, which distorts crime statistics and policy responses.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This review has highlighted the intricate and multidimensional character of gendered patterns in victimization and criminality in Port Harcourt, a city influenced by structural marginalization, economic inequality, and fast urbanization. According to the findings, there is a clear gender gap in criminal activity: although men continue to commit the

majority of violent and organized crimes, such as cultism, armed robbery, and kidnapping, women are increasingly showing up in less violent but frequently survival-oriented crimes, such as petty theft, prostitution, drug sales, and cyber fraud, many of which are motivated by sociocultural displacement, unemployment, and poverty.

Equally glaring is the feminization of victimization. Due to systematic policing failures, cultural silence, and limited access to justice, women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, domestic abuse, trafficking, and exploitative work circumstances (UN Women, 2021; Ajayi & Adefolaju, 2020). A fast changing picture of gendered criminality also necessitates immediate research and policy attention, as seen by new trends like the digitization of sex industry and the increase in juvenile engagement in cyber-enabled crimes.

The study's key finding is that the Nigerian criminal justice system, especially in Rivers State, is still primarily reactionary, patriarchal, and unprepared to handle the gender-specific aspects of victimization and crime. The institutional capacity to include gender-sensitive viewpoints into adjudication, rehabilitation, and policing is inadequate.

Therefore, more than only punitive measures are needed to address gender and crime in Port Harcourt. In order to involve communities, empower the underprivileged, and transform judicial institutions to reflect inclusion and equity, it calls for a comprehensive, intersectional, and multi-sectoral approach. Redefining the gendered contours of crime and justice in the city requires evidence-based policymaking, community resilience building, and consistent investment in preventive measures.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. **Gender-Sensitive Policing and Justice Reforms:**

   o Strengthen police and judicial capacities to handle gender-based crimes efficiently.

   o Provide training on gender-sensitive investigations and victim support.

- o Ensure fair treatment of women offenders and victims within the legal system.

2. **Community-Based Prevention Programs:**

- o Develop awareness campaigns addressing domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and survival crimes.

- o Encourage community reporting mechanisms that protect victims from stigma and reprisal.

3. **Economic Empowerment Initiatives:**

- o Create targeted employment and vocational programs for youth and women to reduce vulnerability to crime.

- o Implement social safety nets and financial literacy programs to mitigate economic drivers of criminality.

4. **Data Collection and Research Enhancement:**

- o Establish a robust, gender-disaggregated crime database to inform policy and interventions.

- o Encourage longitudinal research on gendered criminality and victimization in urban Nigerian contexts.

5. **Collaboration Across Stakeholders:**

- o Foster partnerships among law enforcement, NGOs, social welfare agencies, and community leaders to coordinate interventions.

- o Promote multi-sector approaches that address both the socio-economic and cultural roots of gendered crime.

In all, addressing gendered criminality in Port Harcourt requires holistic, gender-responsive, and evidence-based strategies that combine prevention, justice reform, and socio-economic empowerment. Such interventions have the potential to reduce crime, protect vulnerable populations, and promote inclusive urban security.

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