



## **SPEAKING FROM BEHIND BARS: A SURVEY ON WOMEN INMATES IN KATSINA AND KANO PRISONS, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study explored the sociodemographic markers of women inmates, the types of crime they indulged in, the predisposing factors for their criminal behaviour as well as the consequences of their offence. It was a self-report descriptive study, and a population survey was used. A total of 42 inmates were administered a questionnaire. It was found that most of the inmates were in their young age, mostly married, many with no formal education and a large number of them were self-employed. Also, most of them were involved in domestic violence and prostitution; the involvements were significantly related to their sociodemographic attributes. For most of the inmates, poverty and unemployment were the main predisposing factors for their crimes. The main consequences of women crime were broken homes and stigmatisation. Recommendations are, therefore, offered to governments and other stakeholders on the ways to reduce the problem of women involvement in crimes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Equity, Nigerian Prisons, Prison Reform, Social Justice, Women Crime, Domestic Violence, Prostitution

### **INTRODUCTION**

The role women play in ensuring socio-economic and political development in society has been recognised the world over. Notably, the recognition of women crucial role began in the 1960s and 1970s when feminism became popular (Barberett, 2014). Just like men, the involvement of women in crime can be disturbing as it threatens society's social and moral stability. Appreciating the women's important role in engendering positive development is, however, low in the less developed patriarchal social environment; in many cases, their contribution is being portrayed as inconsequential to the macro development of the society. Surprisingly, this contradicts what is obtainable with the actual role performance of the women in these societies; because even with the men being the breadwinners, so many responsibilities are left with the women to carry (Olujobi, 2001; Udeh, 2000; Odemegwu, 2000). Women look after the house, including themselves, the men and the children. This paradoxical arrangement puts the women in a difficult situation to the extent that they could no longer, in many cases, shoulder the burdens (Barberett, 2014). Hence, rampant cases of divorce and broken homes result (Olujobi, 2000; Odemegwu, 2000; Simon, 1975) and exacerbate their situation as their needs and those of the children could not be adequately met. Consequently, they end up participating in both deviant and criminal activities to improve their situation (Barberet, 2014; Sudbury, 2004).

Social structure is continually changing due to modernisation and urbanisation, which also affects individuals' statuses and roles. Women's roles are affected by this change; they now acquire formal education which gives them the opportunities to occupy positions and have



access to privileges they were not able to access. Although the participation of women in various sectors of the society helps them to be more productive for themselves and community, it also predisposes them to be deviant and criminal (see, Oluwadare & Agboola, 2011; Simon & Landis, 1991; Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975). Cases are reported, even in Nigeria (Sampson & Decker, 2010), where women from both public and private sectors were indicted in high-level white-collar crimes with men (Dodge, 2019; Haantz, 2002).

Many studies have been conducted to explore issues concerning women and criminal behaviour. For instance, studies on matters to do with theoretical assumptions and empirical research (e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics Data, 2010; Human Rights Report, 2010; Wallace, 2002; Chukwuma & Osarenren, 2001; Odimegwu, 2000) have shown women as, most of the times, victims of crimes rather than the criminals. When they are involved in criminal behaviour, the crimes are usually less demanding in terms of energy and risk (Barberett, 2014; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Carlen 1992). Some of the explanations for women crimes are that they are the “weaker sex” and they are supervised more than men (Barberett, 2014; Moon, McClusky & Lee 2012; Gelsthorpe and Worrall 2009). They also have restrictions on what opportunities they should have hence the limited access to committing crimes. Again, crime is “masculine” (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895); even where a woman commits crimes, the offender is seen as having masculine characteristics (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008) or instead the crime is a misdemeanor (Fleetwood, 2015; Burman 2004).

However, whether these explanations have broader application in all social organisations, developed and developing, traditional and modern, is an issue of continuous academic investigation, as most of the studies upon which the explanations are premised were undertaken in the West (Barberett, 2014; Arthur, 1994). Thus, with continued globalisation, there is a need for ‘universal’ theoretical explanations of women and crime issues. This fact has continued to be emphasised for decades by several authors (see, for example, Barberett, 2014; Renzetti, 2013; Nelken, 2010; Cain & Howe, 2008; Bennett, 2004; Arthur, 1994).

Most of the criminological studies undertaken in Africa on women have mostly focused on victimisation (Alemika, 2004). They have consistently reported the women engaging in only “traditional” women crime like prostitution (Akumadu, 1995) witchcraft and infanticide (Ameh, 2013; Oluwadare & Agboola, 2011; Rotimi, 1993). Interestingly, the possibility of women engaging in “non-traditional” women crime was nonetheless reported (Ameh, 2013; Jacobson, 2009; Chukuezi, 2009). Indeed, official statistics have reported women engaging in more violent crimes like murder and Arson (Nigeria Prison Service, 2009; 2007). Similarly, popular media have been reporting women engaging in crimes like drug abuse, domestic violence, murder and human trafficking regularly. However, despite this trend of women crime, empirical studies to explore issues surrounding these developments in women behaviour are inadequate. The dynamics of women crime need to be continuously explored to ensure sustainable development in a society. It is based on these arguments that this study examined some of the critical issues in women crime in Nigeria, namely, the sociodemographic profiles of women offenders, types of crimes they committed as well as predisposing factors and consequences of such behaviour. It is believed that the outcome of the study could assist in tackling the problem of women crime in Nigeria. It could as well serve as a basis and motivator for conducting further studies on the issue.



## METHOD

This study was a descriptive and cross-sectional population survey, aimed at exploring the nature of women crime in Nigeria using women inmates as subjects for the study. The study locations were Kano Central Prison and Katsina Prison. The prisons were established at different times during the colonial period, but they are currently controlled by the Nigeria Correctional Services, a federal government agency under the Ministry of Interior. The prisons are meant to serve as custody for both male and female inmates. As usually found in most prisons, the women in the two prisons have a small population; as at the time of conducting this study, there were 31 and 11 female inmates in the Kano Central Prison and Katsina prison respectively. With the permission of the prison authority and the individual consent of participants, all the inmates were involved in the study.

A questionnaire was administered by two trained female research assistants to collect data from the respondents. Questions related to sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, causes of their criminal behaviour and types of crime they committed were asked. More so, they were asked about the consequences of their criminality its resultant incarceration. The data were processed using SPSS Version 24. Distribution tables for the variables and Chi-square test were generated and conducted respectively to achieve a meaningful description of the research outcome.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents. The variables explored are age, marital status, educational qualification and occupation.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profiles of the Respondents (n=42)**

Variables	f (%)	Variables	f (%)
<b>Age</b>		<b>Educational qualification</b>	
18 – 27 years	17 (40.5)	Primary	7 (16.7)
28 – 37 years	16 (38.1)	Secondary	13 (30.9)
38 – 47 years	7 (16.7)	Tertiary	5 (11.9)
48 – 57 years	2 (4.8)	Informal education	17 (40.5)
<b>Marital status</b>		<b>Occupation</b>	
Single	10 (23.8)	Farmer	4 (9.5)
Married	18 (42.9)	Civil servant	6 (14.3)
Divorced	8 (19.0)	Self employed	13 (30.9)
Widowed	5 (11.9)	No response	19 (45.2)
No response	1 (2.4)	<b>Note.</b> Mean age = 44 years	



A significant percentage of the respondents (40.5%) were between the age of 18 and 37 years, which means that the young population among women were the most commonly found in the prisons. In a study conducted on Malaysian female prisoners, Samuel and Omar (2012) found that the prisoners were mainly between the age of 20 and 39. In another study, the mean age for women offenders was reported to be 35 years (Koroglu and Oncu, 2018). Nonetheless, Aborisade and Abayomi (2016), in a study conducted in a Nigerian prison, discovered that majority of the inmates were below 30 years.

As data in the table show, married women have the highest percentage (42.9%) among women inmates; this was followed by a single (23.8%), divorced (19.0%) and then widowed (11.9%). This result indicates that married women could have been involved more in crimes than other categories of unmarried. This is what Samuel and Omar (2012) also found in their study. However, Souza et al. (2013) found that single women were more likely to abort a pregnancy, which was a crime in the study area than married women.

Moreover, women with informal education indulged in crime more frequently (40.5%). However, those with primary education were 16.7%; women with secondary and tertiary education constituted 30.9% and 11.9% respectively. This indicates that more than half of the women must have attained a certain level of formal education. In other words, both women with formal and non-formal education are notably involved in crime. Conversely, women inmates were found to be mainly having primary and secondary education (Samuel & Omar, 2012). Thus, the majority of women offenders had at least elementary/ primary education. This is what Souza et al. (2013) also found in their studies. However, women with no formal education indulged in crime more frequently; and that significant percentage of the respondents was self-employed.

Although more than one-third of the respondents did not indicate their occupation before incarceration, 30.9% were self-employed, 14.3% were civil servants; only 9.5% were farmers. In the subsequent section, a Chi-square test was conducted to determine if there was any relationship between these sociodemographic variables and types of crime the respondents have committed.

### Types of Crime Committed by the Respondents

Table 2 shows the data on the types of crime the respondents have committed. The crimes recorded include prostitution, robbery, domestic violence, theft, fighting, murder and others, which the respondents decided not to disclose.

**Table 2: Types of Crime Committed by the Respondents (n=42)**

Crime committed	Yes	No
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Prostitution	5 (11.9)	37 (88.1)
Robbery	3 (7.1)	39 (82.9)
Domestic violence	18 (42.9)	24 (57.1)
Theft	4 (9.5)	40 (90.5)
Fighting	1 (2.4)	41 (97.6)
Murder	1 (2.4)	41 (97.6)
Others	7 (16.7)	35 (83.3)



The most common crime committed by the respondents was domestic violence (42.9%). There were 11.9% who indulged in prostitution, while 7.1% were armed robbers. See Table 2. In other words, most of the female inmates were incarcerated because of domestic violence and then prostitution. Crosstabulation and chi-square tests were generated to determine if the involvements in these two (domestic violence and prostitution) most common crimes have significant relationships with the sociodemographic attributes of the respondents. See Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3: Crosstabulation of Domestic Violence and Sociodemographic Variables**

Variables		Domestic violence		Chi square test		
		No	Yes	$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
Occupation	Undisclosed	13 (68.4)	6 (31.6)	11.730	3	0.008
	Farming	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)			
	Civil service	6 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	Self employed	3 (23.1)	10 (76.9)			
Marital Status	Undisclosed	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	15.867	4	0.003
	Single	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)			
	Married	6 (33.3)	12 (66.7)			
	Divorced	8 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	Widowed	5 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
Education	Primary	3 (42.9)	4 (57.1)	23.190	3	0.000
	Secondary	2 (15.4)	11 (84.6)			
	Tertiary	2 (40.0)	3 (60.0)			
	Informal	17 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
Age	18-27 years	5 (29.4)	12 (70.6)	12.276	3	0.006
	28-37 years	10 (62.5)	6 (37.5)			
	38-47 years	7 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	Above 47 years	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			

**Note.** Significance level at 0.05

The results indicate that involvement in domestic violence has a significant relationship with the various sociodemographic attributes of the respondents. The same results were obtained in the case of prostitution, except with education, where the effect is not significant. What the results mean is that the respondents' characteristic considered in this study had likely played a role in the inmates' involvement in domestic violence and prostitution, except education level which did not indicate a significant relationship with the participation in prostitution.

Despite the connection between crime and sociodemographic profiles, it is essential to note that domestic violence is common among women. Perhaps, because of the rivalry that usually exists among co-wives living in one household; the inmates might have been living in a polygyny type of family setting, which is a cultural practice in the areas where the locations of



this study are. In separate studies, Agbo and Choji (2014), as well as Project Alert (2001), found domestic violence to be an everyday phenomenon among people in various states of Nigeria, including Lagos, Oyo and Abuja. Contrarily, in a study conducted by Shuib et al. (2013), a tiny percentage of women claimed that they experienced domestic violence by intimate partners. Similarly, Solomon and Nwakoala (2015) argued that women are often imprisoned for non-violent, property and drug-related offences.

**Table 3: Crosstabulation of prostitution and sociodemographic variables**

Variables		Prostitution		Chi-square test		
		No	Yes	$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
Occupation	Undisclosed	19 (100)	0 (0.0)	10.461	3	0.015
	Farming	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)			
	Civil service	6 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	Self employed	10 (76.9)	3 (23.1)			
Marital Status	Undisclosed	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	10.11	4	0.039
	Single	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)			
	Married	17 (94.4)	1 (5.6)			
	Divorced	8 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	Widowed	5 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
Education	Primary	6 (85.7)	1 (14.3)	6.248	3	0.100
	Secondary	11 (84.6)	2 (15.4)			
	Tertiary	3 (60.0)	2 (40.0)			
	Informal	17 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
Age	18-27 years	12 (70.6)	5 (29.4)	8.327	3	0.039
	28-37 years	16 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	38-47 years	7 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			
	Above 47 years	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)			

**Note.** Significance level at 0.05

As for prostitution, the data further support the previous findings [for instance, Dewey, Germain, & Germain (2016), Tyoanande & Samson (2014), Black Point (2003), and Akumadu (1995)] that the offence is a traditional women crime. However, some studies also reported about the multidimensional involvement of men in prostitution. For example, men are involved in child prostitution (Jeffreys, 2000) and other forms of prostitutional engagement (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; Durchslag & Goswami, 2008).

### Predisposing Factors to Respondents' Involvement in Crime

Table 4 shows the predisposing factors for the respondents' involvement in a crime. More than half of the respondents (52.4%) said they committed the offence as a result of poverty.



Unemployment, which is related to poverty, was seen as the reason for indulging in crime by 16.7% of the respondents. Peer influence was seen as a predisposing factor by 11.9% of the inmate respondents. Consequently, poverty, unemployment, and peer influence were the main causes of crime among the inmates, in that order.

**Table 4: Reasons for Respondents' Involvement in Crime (n =42)**

Reasons	Yes	No
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Poverty	22 (52.4)	20 (47.6)
Unemployment	7 (16.7)	35 (83.3)
Peer influence	5 (11.9)	37 (88.1)
Greed	3 (7.1)	39 (92.9)

Similarly, Omotor (2010) discovered that economic factors, which include poverty and unemployment, were more likely to determine all forms of crimes than social factors in Nigeria. Conversely, Souza et al (2013) reported that low income and lack of unpaid job did not influence women to commit induced abortion, just as Mundia et al (2016) found that women prisoners who were employed before incarceration outnumbered their unemployed counterparts. Moreover, it has been reported that many women who committed crime were under influence of alcohol or have abuse substance or drugs (Koroglu and Oncu, 2018). According to Campaniello (2014), technological progress and social norms having freed women from the home (Oluwadare and Agboola, 2011; Simon and Landis, 1991), convergence in the social roles of women and men as well as leniency of the judicial system toward female offenders increase women participation in the crime market.

### Consequences of Women Involvement in Crime

The broken home was believed to be the major consequence of women involvement in crime, with 40.5% of the respondents (see Table 5). The outcome resulted, perhaps, once a woman is convicted of a crime and imprisoned, she loses contact with her family, including the husband. Accordingly, as a result of stigmatisation (indicated by 23.8%) by members of the society, the husband may decide to divorce the wife who is now a prisoner. Indeed, this could lead the husband to indulge in extramarital sexual affairs and the children losing maternal parental care, which can make the later not enjoying proper socialisation.

**Table 5: Consequences of Respondents' Criminal Behavior (n=42)**

Consequences	Yes	No
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Psychological problem	4 (9.5)	38 (90.5)
Stigmatization	10 (23.8)	32 (76.2)
Broken home	17 (40.5)	25 (59.5)
Others	4 (9.5)	38 (90.5)



The overall implication could be uncultured children who could potentially be a nuisance to the society (Prison Reform Trust Briefing, 2017). In other words, a difficult transition into the community could be another implication of women criminality (Covington and Bloom, 2003). Loss of a sexual relationship, which could lead to masturbation and lesbianism among inmates was found to be a consequence of women imprisonment (Player, 1990). Further, mental illness (WHO, 2009), rape by male warders that also leads to insomnia and depression as well as the loss of liberty and self-esteem could negatively affect women when they are imprisoned (Ramsbotham, 2004; Durosaro, 2002). Again, most women find it challenging to make a new home or job on their release from prison (Prison Reform Trust Briefing, 2017).

### Solutions to the Respondents' Involvement in Crime

Measures needed to be adopted to address the problem of women involvement in crime were suggested by the respondents; see Table 6. Religious preaching was more frequently mentioned as a solution to women criminality, having the highest inmate respondents (33.4%). Free education (19.0%) was also prominent among the solutions to women criminality as suggested by the respondents, followed by the provision of a loan (11.9%) or capital to the women.

**Table 6: Solutions to Respondents' Involvement in Crime (n=42)**

Solutions	Yes	No
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Free education to women	8 (19.0)	34 (81.0)
Provision of loan/capital to women	5 (11.9)	37 (88.1)
Religious preaching	14 (33.4)	28 (66.6)
Skills acquisition programmes	1 (2.4)	41 (97.6)
All of the solutions	8 (19)	34 (81.0)

However, a small percentage, i.e. 2.4%, believed that skill acquisition by women could solve women crimes. Interestingly, 19.0% thought that all of the solutions mentioned above should be used together if women participation in crime is to be addressed.

Related to the above findings, Aborisade and Fayemi (2016) have found that religious preaching helped female inmates to adjust to prison life. Akindutire, Francis and Ikuomola (2016) have suggested that creating more job opportunities and provision of small loans to women, which make them self-reliant were measures that could help to curtail the involvement of women in crime. For Campaniello (2014), policies that could help reduce wage disparity across different categories of female workers, such as incentivising female education, might deter disadvantaged women from engaging in criminal activities. According to the Prison Reform Trust Briefing (2017), however, the solutions to women's offending lie in improved access to community-based support services, including women's centres.





## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, certain conclusions are made thus; most of the women inmates were in their young age, mostly married, many with no formal education and a large number of them were self-employed. Again, most of the inmates indulged in domestic violence and then prostitution, with poverty and unemployment as the major causes. Notably, there was a statistically significant relationship between involvement in domestic violence and the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents. Also, the relationship between prostitution and the sociodemographic variables was significant, except in the case of education. Broken homes and stigmatisation were the major consequences of women incarceration in prisons. It is therefore recommended that free formal education and enlightenment by religious teachers should be provided to women; that could help them to understand the implication of committing a crime. Pre-marriage counselling could also assist the women in understanding the rights and obligations in the matrimonial; doing this may help reduce violence and the chances of involving extramarital affairs like prostitution. Governments at different levels together with NGO's should device means of training the women in small and medium enterprises and provide them with appropriate capital in the form of loan to establish ventures.

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