

**EXPLORING THE PREVALENCE, PATTERNS AND CONSEQUENCES OF FEMALE
CRIMINALITY AMONG INMATES IN CORRECTIONAL CENTRES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH
REGION OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Crime is inevitable in human society. However, when it involves the female gender, it is often perceived as an abnormal phenomenon. Female criminality is a global issue that has persisted since time immemorial. This paper explores the prevalence, patterns, and consequences of female criminality among inmates in correctional centres in the South-South region of Nigeria. The Feminist Theory and Social Disorganization Theory formed the theoretical framework for the study. The study adopted a mixed methods research design, involving the use of questionnaires for quantitative data collection and in-depth interviews for qualitative data collection. A sample size of 208 female inmates was selected for the questionnaire administration, while 12 participants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 27). The data were presented using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and charts. The qualitative data were transcribed, coded into themes and sub-themes, and analyzed using illustrative quotes. The findings revealed that although women constitute a relatively smaller proportion of offenders compared to men, their involvement in criminal activities has become increasingly visible, diversified, and structurally embedded. It was also found that stigmatization of former inmates has long-term structural implications, including limited employment opportunities, weakened family support systems, and restricted access to community-based assistance. The study recommends the development of gender-responsive correctional policies that address the unique socio-psychological and rehabilitative needs of female inmates, including counselling, trauma support, and family reintegration services.

Keywords: Crime, Criminality, Female Criminality, Inmates and Recidivism

Introduction

Criminality among the female gender is often seen as an abnormal phenomenon. It is frowned at in most societies of the world. The female gender in many Nigerian societies is traditionally expected to conform to certain behaviours differently from the males. Such socially defined roles have guided the actions and behavioural dispositions of females in the past, which made it look as if females were less prone to criminality in comparison with the male gender. However, crime statistics have proven that over the past few decades, criminality among the female gender has become prevalent and involvement of females in more violent crimes has equally increased tremendously, ranging from cases of less serious crimes like theft, to more serious crimes including spousal murder, child trafficking, assaults, infanticide, drugs peddling, arms trading etc. (Enahoro, 2017; NBS, 2016).

This trend has however become more problematic in developing nations like Nigeria and more prevalent in some geographical zones particularly the South-South Nigeria. For instance, the NBS (2016) reported 14.9% prevalence in female criminality. In 2017, the agency reported 16.4% prevalence in female criminality (i.e. 1.5% increase from the preceding year). Similarly, data obtained from the registry of the Delta State Correctional Service (2021) indicated that female criminality increased by 5% from 2017 to 2021; and of all the crimes committed, violent crimes among the females increased by 10%. It is also important to highlight that there are dark figures (unreported cases) surrounding female criminality in Nigeria, which makes data on female criminality difficult to find. This could be associated with poor data management on the part of the relevant CJS, the public perception of females as less prone to criminality, as well as the leniency on the part of the criminal justice system toward female offenders. However, there are multiple studies which highlighted the trend in female criminality and its consequences on the society (Ameh, 2013; Oluwadare & Agboola, 2011; Suleman, Yinusa, Abdulateef, Ganiyu & Abdulbaqi, 2016).

Several studies have been conducted both internationally and locally in recognition of the rise in female criminality within the past few decades (Hudson, 2010; Purcel, 2020, Russell, 2014), factors influencing female criminality in Nigeria (Okafor & Uzoh, 2019; Nwadike-Fasugba, Ezeah and Ikezue 2025), patterns of female

criminality (Stanojoska & Jurtoška, 2018), implications of female criminality (Ameh, 2013), gender disparity in criminal behaviour (Oluwadare & Agboola, 2011), sociological profiling of armed robbery convicts (Aborisdade & Oni, 2020) among others. These studies were largely conducted either in western countries and hence outside the geographical context of this present study. As such, limited studies exist on the prevalence, patterns and consequences of female criminality in South-South Nigeria. This gap in knowledge formed the basis for this study. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing problems that this study is positioned to investigate:-

1. Prevalence of female criminality in South-South Nigeria
2. Patterns of female criminality in South-South Nigeria and
3. Consequences of female criminality in South-South Nigeria.

Review of Relevant Literature

Concept of Female Criminality

Female criminality is a broader concept that looks at the larger societal context in which women engage in criminal behaviour, and often encompasses the various factors that contribute to women's involvement in crime, such as social, economic, and psychological factors (Heidensohn, 1996). In recent years, the concept of female criminality has gained attention within academic literature, and has equally formed part of academic debate in the area of criminology and penology. Earlier conceptualization of the female criminality largely emanated from biological explanation of criminality particularly with the theoretical postulations of Lombroso (1898), who theorised that the female offender has a "*virile cranium*" an overabundance of body hair, and constitutional anomalies and brain capacity which are more similar to those of a man than to a non-criminal woman (Islam, Banarjee & Khatun, 2014). In view of the fact that women were perceived as inherently weak, innocent and victim-like individuals, who are less prone to criminal behaviours (Gauthier & Beland, 2020). Women who committed crime were considered as outliers and that their actions were linked with that of men who were perceived to possess more criminal tendencies. The weaknesses inherent in the biological conceptualization of female criminality gave rise to other perspectives from other academic fields. Sociological conceptualization of female criminality has tended to focus on critical issues regarding the concept such as delineating female criminality from that of male criminality, as well as determining the socio-cultural factors associated with it. Perhaps, a better argument would be whether there are crimes peculiar to females compared to males. To answer this question, some scholars have tried to conceptualize female criminality from the gender dimension. For instance, Otakey, Birai, Jemaku and Ashituabe (2021) argued that female crime refers to crimes committed by women.

This definition gives the impression that there are specific types of criminal behaviours that are peculiar to females. This may not be so in contemporary society because females are now involved in almost all types of crimes that are as well committed by men. Perhaps, a better definition was captured by Meixiang (2016) who described the concept as the intentional violation of the criminal law by a female offender. What this implies is that female criminality occurs when a female breaks the criminal law by committing a crime irrespective of the crime committed.

Prevalence of Female Criminality

It may appear that female criminality may not be as widespread as criminality involving the male gender. Gavrilova (2021) highlighted that the subject of female criminality was somewhat neglected within the ambit of academic research and literature, which resulted in the dearth of theoretical and empirical materials on female criminality. However, more recent research findings have proved that female criminality is becoming even more prevalent, while male crimes are becoming less prevalent (Gavrilova, 2021). To buttress this point, Hatcher (n.d) argued that the prevalence of female criminality is cutting across various crime dimensions particularly technologically facilitated crimes such as online fraud, identity theft, human trafficking and cybercrime. The point here is that the prevalence of female criminality was rarely a topic of discussion in past decades, particularly within the African context. But the topic is gaining significant attention in academic literature in recent times, with significant number of studies are being focused on it, to understand its dynamics particularly in the contemporary African or Nigerian society (Khatun & Islam, 2023; Kiryushina, 2023).

The concept of prevalence simply refers to how widespread a phenomenon occurs within a socio-cultural context or milieu, how consistent the phenomenon has occurred overtime, the frequency of occurrence of the phenomenon, etc. In this light, it can be adduced that there is no uniformity in terms of the widespread nature of female criminality across societies. This is partly due to the fact that females are generally perceived to be less prone to criminality (Stanojoska & Jurtoška, 2018). However, this does not negate the fact that female criminality in the contemporary time, has become a reality, particularly within the Nigerian context, as a number of scholars have documented research evidences to show that there is a significant number of women who are involved in various types of crime, including drug trafficking, theft, prostitution, human trafficking, and other types of organized crimes (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2017; Nyen & Ejue, 2022; Stanojoska & Jurtoška, 2018).

Patterns of female criminality

Pattern connotes the shape or form by which a phenomenon occurs. It could also refer to the dynamics of crime occurrence in terms of regular or repeated patterns of criminal behaviours that occurs overtime and space. Within the context of criminality, scholars have argued that there is a diversity of perspective on what constitute a crime pattern, and that scholars often use different terms interchangeably to describe the term including crime series, hot spot, crime trend, and crime problem (International Association of Crime Analyst, IACA, 2011).

IACA (2011) identified seven common types of crime patterns which could be used in the analysis of crime including: series – referring to a group of crimes thought to be committed by the same individual or group of individuals, spree – referring to a specific type of series characterized by high frequency of criminal activity within a remarkably short time frame, to the extent that the activity occurs almost on continuous basis, hot prey – where a group of crimes committed by one or more individuals, involving victims who share similar physical characteristics, hot product – referring to a group of crimes committed by one or more individuals in which a unique type of property is targeted for theft; hot spot – referring to a group of similar crimes committed by one or more individuals at locations within close proximity to one another, Hot place – referring to a group of similar crimes committed by one or more individuals at the same location, and hot setting – referring to a group of similar crimes committed by one or more individuals that are primarily related by type of place where crimes occurred. From the criminological perspective, scholars have identified several patterns of female criminality. For instance, scholars like Heghes and Schiopu (2020) acknowledged that although female criminality has lower rates compared to that of males, it tends to cover a larger area of severe and brutal felonies with higher impact. Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2013) on their own part identified forgery as the most common crime committed by women. According to them, forgery is number one for women and number five for men of the most common crimes. Campaniello and Gavrilova (2018) on the other hand, documented that shoplifting is a major criminal act by female offenders, and this according to them is because shoplifting is a complementary to regular household activities.

Scholars within the Nigerian context have identified crimes like fraud, theft, embezzlement, drug-related offences, human trafficking, organized prostitution rings, infanticide, child abuse and domestic violence, as crimes peculiar with females in Nigeria (Anukam & Ilo, 2015; Ojedokun, 2014). The pattern of female criminality has also been examined in terms of spatial context, with some scholars noting that that women living in urban areas are more likely to be involved in criminal activity compared to women living in rural areas (Mohammed, 2014). This is arguably due to higher concentrations of population and economic resources in urban areas, which can increase the likelihood of exposure to criminal activities and other social problems. Other scholars have also argued that the pattern of female criminality can vary in terms of neighbourhood characteristics, with women living in high-income neighbourhoods being less likely to be involved in criminal activity compared to women living in low-income neighbourhoods (Nnam & Arua, 2019). The argument here is that women living in low-income neighbourhoods face higher levels of poverty, unemployment, and other social stressors that can contribute to criminal activity. Furthermore, female criminality can also vary according to the occupational status of the females, with working-class women being identified as being more likely to be involved in white collar crimes, embezzlement of public funds, organized crimes such as drug peddling, human trafficking, and other high level crimes, whereas, none working-class women are more likely to be involved in less felonious crimes such as assault, petty theft, character defamation, among others (Adewole, Oyeniran & Oyeyemi, 2019; Ekeh & Ekeh, 2016).

Consequences of Female Criminality

The consequences of female criminality are enormous. Women are expected to take care of the home amongst other responsibilities. However, when a woman is involved in criminality, it tends to negate that general expectation of the people and invokes feelings of disappointment and disillusionment. Vonnermann (2018) conducted a qualitative study on women's offending pathways, focusing on the experiences and needs of women who have been involved in the criminal justice system. The study found that women offenders frequently faced barriers in accessing services and support. Ogar & Abutu (2016) studied the social and psychological consequences of female offending in Kenya. They found that female offenders faced significant stigmatization and discrimination, both in their families and communities, leading to negative psychological consequences such as feelings of rejection and low self-esteem.

Theoretical Anchorage

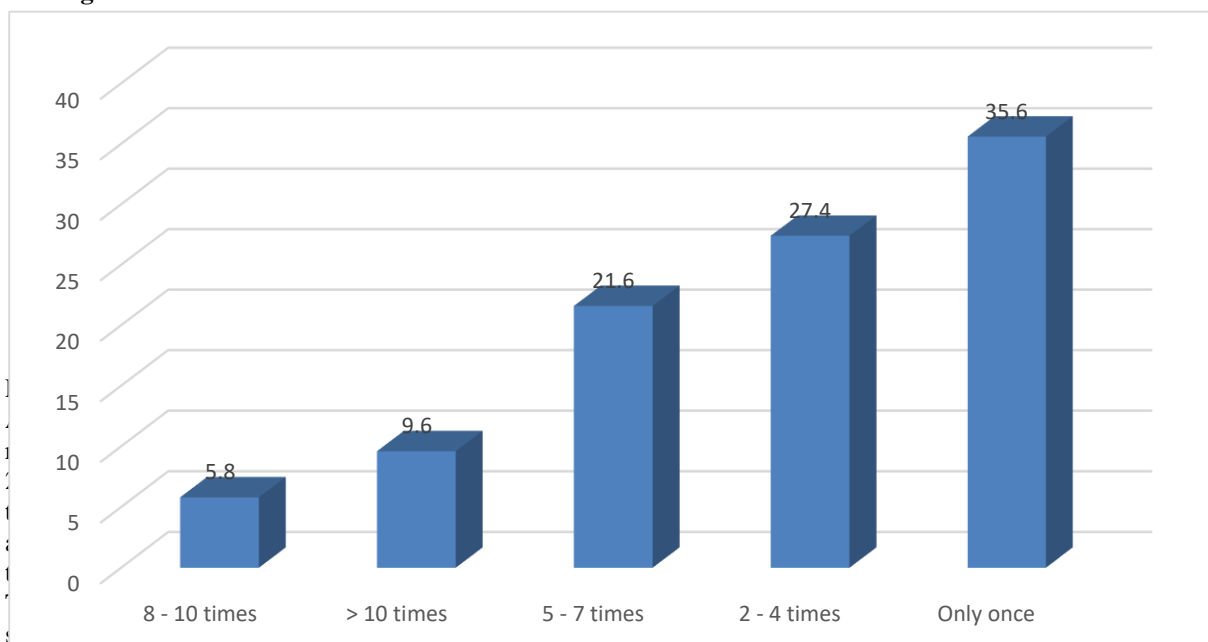
The combination of Feminist Theory and Social Disorganization Theory (SDT) is considered apt in providing a solid theoretical framework for the discourse on the prevalence, patterns and consequences of female criminality in South-South Nigeria. Feminist theory emphasizes the role of structural power imbalances and systemic gender inequality in society, and how these power imbalances lead to marginalization, stigmatization, and exclusion of women, which are precursors to female criminality. Social Disorganization Theory on the other hand, posits that

social structures and networks are disrupted and weakened in areas with high levels of poverty and inequality, leading to the emergence of criminal behaviours. The combination of these two theories provides a broader explanation for socio-cultural factors that influence to female criminality, as well as the prevalence and frequency of female criminal activities in different communities within the South-South region of Nigeria can be understood. The theoretical framework equally provided valuable insight into the various patterns of female criminality, such as the types of crimes committed, the geographical distribution pattern of female criminality, patterns of criminal involvement in terms of age of the female offenders, among other dimensions. In a nutshell, using this theoretical framework, this paper investigated the social contexts that shape the evolving phenomenon of female criminality in South-South Nigeria, by examining how structural gender inequalities interact with social disorganization to create criminal opportunities and risk for women in communities within the region, which can then inform the development of effective crime prevention and control strategies that take into account gender-specific factors in crime analysis.

Methodology

The paper adopted a mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The study organization is the Nigeria Correctional Services (NCS) formerly known as the Nigerian Prison Service (NPS) in the South-South region. A sample size of 208 female inmates was chosen for the administration of the questionnaire while 12 participants were chosen for the in depth interview. The quantitative data were processed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS version 27). The processed data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution tables and charts while the qualitative data were coded into themes, subthemes and analysed using illustrative quotes.

Findings



many of the women we arrested were not habitual criminals; a good number of them were first-time offenders who became involved due to sudden financial or family pressures” (P1, Aged 45, Police Personnel, Port Harcourt Correctional Centre). Similarly, a correctional service official noted: “A large proportion of female inmates committed the offence only once, and for many of them it was a single mistake during a difficult period in their lives” (P4, Aged 52, Correctional Officer, Ogwashi-Ukwu Correctional Centre).

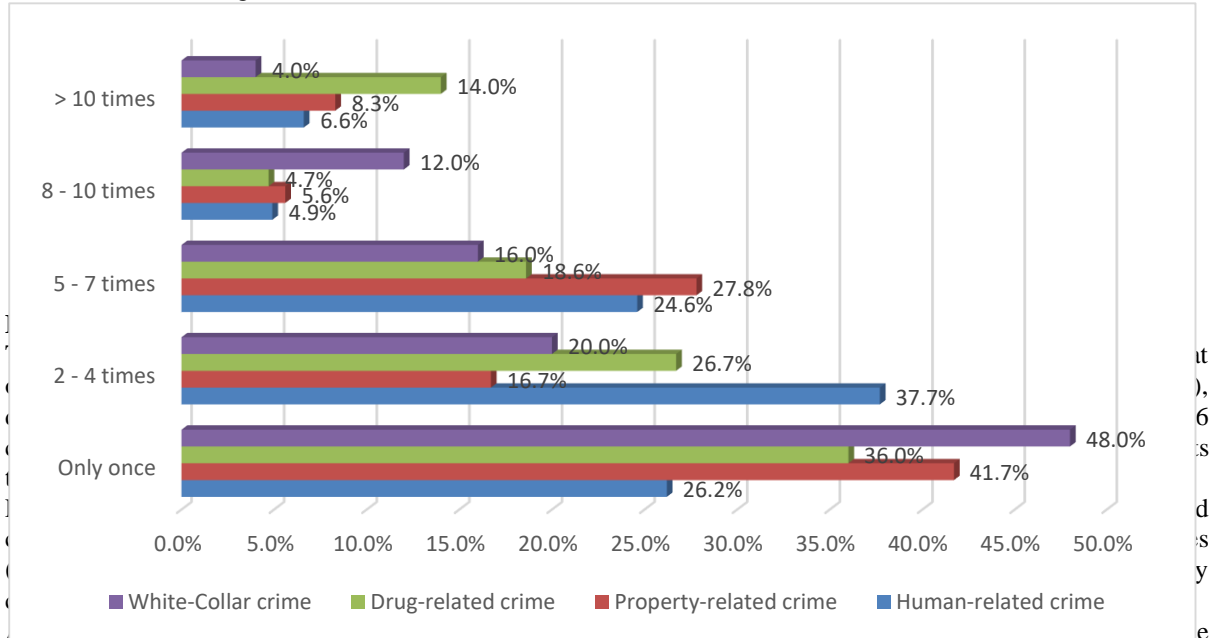
This convergence of statistical and qualitative evidence suggests that female criminality in the region is largely characterised by situational and low-frequency offending rather than persistent criminal careers.

However, the data also indicate that repeat offending is relatively common, with 37% of respondents committing the offense five times or more, thereby highlighting a pattern of recidivism among a notable subset of the population. This finding was further supported by qualitative insights from correctional service personnel and inmates. A correctional service official explained: “While many women are first-time offenders, we also have a significant number who return to custody, especially those without strong support systems after release” (P3, Aged 48, Correctional Officer, Oko Correctional Centre). An awaiting trial inmate added: “After my first arrest, I went back to the same environment and challenges that pushed me into it, and that is why I became involved more than

once”

(P9, Aged 32, Awaiting Trial Inmate, Port Harcourt Correctional Centre). These responses reinforce the quantitative evidence that although first-time offending is prevalent, recidivism remains a significant dimension of female criminality in South-South Nigeria.

Further analysis was conducted to examine the prevalence of female criminality in relation to the categories of crimes as shown in Figure 2.



highest representation (16 cases, 35.6%), followed by human-related crimes (15 cases, 33.3%) and property-related crimes (10 cases, 22.2%), whereas white-collar crimes remained relatively low (4 cases, 8.9%). In the eight to ten offenses category (n = 12), drug-related crimes were the most frequent (4 cases, 33.3%), while human-related and white-collar crimes each accounted for 3 cases (25.0%), and property-related crimes were least represented (2 cases, 16.7%). For respondents who committed the offense more than ten times (n = 20), drug-related crimes were again the most prevalent (12 cases, 60.0%), followed by human-related crimes (4 cases, 20.0%) and property-related crimes (3 cases, 15.0%), with white-collar crimes being minimal (1 case, 5.0%).

Overall, the findings show that drug-related crimes dominate across most levels of offending frequency, particularly among high-frequency offenders, while human-related crimes also maintain a consistent presence across all frequency groups. Property-related crimes appear more concentrated among lower to moderate frequency offenders, and white-collar crimes remain the least frequent across all categories. These results suggest that repeat offending in the study context is more strongly associated with drug-related and human-related crimes than with property or white-collar offenses.

The reasons behind the statistical dominance of drug-related offense category among the respondents were further explained through the perspectives of the interviewees. For instance, an interviewee had this to say: “Drug-related offences are the most common among female offenders in the South-South, often linked to financial desperation or coercion” (P2, Aged 47, Police Personnel, Port Harcourt Correctional Centre). Another interview also added: “Across both first-time and repeat offenders, drug-related crimes remain the most frequent cases among female inmates” (P4, Aged 52, Correctional Officer, Ogwashi-Ukwu Correctional Centre). These data were further supported through the statement of an inmate who share here personal experience saying “My case is drug-related, and it started as a means of survival and as time progressed, I got deeper into the business” (P8, Aged 29, Convicted Inmate, Ogwashi-Ukwu Correctional Centre).

Table 1. Analysis of the number of times the respondents committed the offense leading to incarceration, in relation to inmates’ status in correctional centres

	How many times did you commit the offense that led to your incarceration?					Total
	Only once	2 - 4 times	5 - 7 times	8 - 10 times	> 10 times	
Awaiting Trial Inmate	63	39	33	7	17	159
	39.6%	24.5%	4.4%		10.7%	100.0%

Convicted Inmate	11 22.4%	18 36.7%	12 24.5%	5 10.2%	3 6.1%	49 100.0%
Total	74 35.6%	57 27.4%	45 21.6%	12 5.8%	20 9.6%	208 100.0%

Field Survey, 2025

Among the 159 awaiting trial prisoners, the majority (39.6%) reported committing the offense only once. Approximately a quarter (24.5%) committed the offense 2–4 times, and 20.8% committed it 5–7 times. Only a small proportion had committed the offense 8–10 times (4.4%) or more than 10 times (10.7%), indicating that most awaiting trial prisoners were first-time or low-repeat offenders.

In contrast, among the 49 convicted prisoners, repeat offending was more prevalent. Only 22.4% committed the offense once, while the largest proportion (36.7%) committed it 2–4 times. About a quarter (24.5%) committed it 5–7 times, 10.2% committed it 8–10 times, and 6.1% committed it more than 10 times. This suggests that convicted prisoners are more likely to have engaged in repeated offending compared to awaiting trial prisoners. Overall, across all 208 respondents, the most common occurrence was committing the offense only once (35.6%). Reoffending was still notable, with 27.4% committing the offense 2–4 times and 21.6% committing it 5–7 times. High-frequency offending, defined as more than 10 times, was the least common at 9.6%. These findings indicate that the prevalence of criminal behaviour decreases as the number of repeated offenses increases, with most individuals committing the offense a limited number of times.

Table 2. *Distribution of respondents by role in the criminal activity for which they were charged*

Role in Criminal Offending	Frequency	Percent
Sole Offender	42	20.2
Accomplice	63	30.3
Influenced or Coerced by another person	72	34.6
Unaware of the criminal act initially	20	9.6
None of the above	11	5.3
Total	208	100.0

Field Survey, 2025

The analysis (N = 208) shows that 72 respondents (34.6%) were influenced or coerced by another person. This suggests that external pressure or relational influence played a significant role. This was strongly supported by qualitative evidence, as an inmate stated, “I was pressured by someone I trusted, and I felt I had no real choice at that time” (P9, Aged 35, Correctional Centre Inmate, Ogwashi-Ukwu Correctional Centre). A correctional official added,

“Many female offenders are drawn into crime through intimate partners or close associates who manipulate or coerce them into participating in illegal activities. That is why most of them are charged as accomplices to crime” (P4, Aged 39, Correctional Service Official, Port Harcourt Correctional Centre).

This was followed by 63 respondents (30.3%) who indicated that they acted as accomplices, implying that a considerable number of the women participated in crimes in collaboration with others rather than acting independently. In contrast, 42 respondents (20.2%) reported being sole offenders, indicating that a smaller but notable proportion engaged in criminal activities on their own. Additionally, 20 respondents (9.6%) stated that they were initially unaware of the criminal act, which points to indirect or unintentional involvement in some offenses. A small proportion, 11 respondents (5.3%), selected “none of the above,” suggesting alternative forms of participation not captured by the predefined categories.

Overall, the findings indicate that female criminality in the study context is largely relational and situational rather than purely autonomous. The predominance of coercion/influence and accomplice roles suggests that many female offenders were involved in crimes through social networks, interpersonal relationships, or external pressures. This pattern supports the view that women’s offending is often shaped by contextual and relational dynamics, with fewer respondents identifying as primary or independent perpetrators.

Table 3. *Respondents’ perception about being discriminated or stigmatised due to their criminal status*

Response Options	Frequency	Percent
Certainly	127	61.1
No	52	25.0
Not sure	29	13.9
Total	208	100.0

Field Survey, 2025

The data indicate that a majority of respondents perceive a high likelihood of experiencing discrimination or stigmatization due to their criminal status. Specifically, 61.1% of the participants reported that they would certainly face discrimination, while 25% believed they would not, and 13.9% were unsure. These findings suggest that social stigma is a significant concern for female offenders, potentially creating barriers to their reintegration

and access to opportunities within their communities. An interviewee raised concern that, “In many communities, once a woman has been incarcerated, she is labelled permanently, and this stigma affects how neighbours, employers, and even extended family members relate to her after release.” (P5, Women Rights Activist, Female, 41 years, Ogwashi-Ukwu, 9 years’ experience).

However, a minority perception reflected in the quantitative data is also supported qualitatively, as some inmates did not anticipate strong stigma. “I will not make such conclusion, because there are still some people in my family who still accept me and encourage me to change, so I do not think everybody will discriminate against me when I return home.” (P9, Aged 35, Female Inmate, Ogwashi-Ukwu Correctional Centre).

This statement was supported by a correctional service official who argued that, “not every woman with criminal record experiences open discrimination, but subtle avoidance and mistrust are very common during reintegration.” (P3, Correctional Service Official, Male, 47 years, Ogwashi-Ukwu).

Table 4. Respondents’ indication of experiencing difficulties accessing financial services due to their criminal status

Response Options	Frequency	Percent
Certainly	114	54.8
No	75	36.1
Not sure	19	9.1
Total	208	100.0

Field Survey, 2025

The results in Table 4 indicate that slightly more than half of the participants (n = 114, 54.8%) expressed difficulties in accessing financial services due to their criminal status. In contrast, 75 respondents (36.1%) did not feel so, while 19 respondents (9.1%) reported being unsure. The findings suggest that criminal status constitutes a significant barrier to financial inclusion for a substantial proportion of the sample. With over half of the respondents affirming difficulties, the data point to the potential presence of structural or institutional constraints that may limit access to banking services, credit facilities, or other formal financial products for individuals with criminal records. The qualitative data further gives weight to this finding, as of the interviewees had this to say,

It will be difficult to access loans when your record is known as a former convicted person, because institutions and even cooperative groups become suspicious of your background, even at the informal level, it may be difficult to obtain loan from people around you. (P7, Aged 36, Female Inmate, Warri Custodial Centre).

Another interview also noted, “many financial institutions are reluctant to engage ex-offenders, especially women without stable employment records, which makes economic reintegration more difficult.” (P10, Legal Practitioner, Female, 48 years, Oko).

Table 5. Distribution of respondents by experience of social isolation or exclusion due to criminal status

Response Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	115	55.3
No	93	44.7
Total	208	100.0

Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 5 indicate that out of 208 valid respondents, 115 (55.3%) reported experiencing social isolation or exclusion from family or friends due to their criminal status, while 93 (44.7%) reported no such experience. This suggests that social isolation is a prevalent outcome, affecting more than half of the respondents and highlighting the significant social consequences associated with criminal labelling. This pattern was strongly echoed in lived experience of a correctional inmate who narrated, “after my arrest, some relatives stopped visiting and my social circle reduced significantly, which made reintegration emotionally difficult.” (P8, Correctional Centre Inmate, Female, 29 years, Oko). However, the perspective of a community women leader slightly countered this trend. According to the interviewee, “family reactions are not always negative; in some cases, immediate family members provide support even when the wider community shows rejection.” (P7, Community Women Leader, Female, 50 years, Port Harcourt).

Discussion of Findings

Findings on the trend and evolving nature of female criminality in South-South Nigeria indicate that although women still constitute a relatively smaller proportion of offenders compared to men, their involvement in criminal activities has become increasingly visible, diversified, and structurally embedded. This outcome corroborates earlier empirical observations reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (2017), which documented a gradual

increase in female arrests across Nigerian states, as well as Otakey *et al.* (2021), whose study revealed widespread perceptions that female criminality was on the rise.

Beyond confirming the increasing trend, the present findings refine existing Nigerian empirical narratives that largely framed female offenders as relationally dependent actors within male-dominated criminal networks. Studies such as Ogar and Abutu (2016) and Mohammed (2014) emphasized that women often entered criminality through intimate relationships, kinship ties, or peer associations with male offenders. While the current findings do not entirely negate these pathways, they reveal a significant shift towards operational autonomy among some female offenders, particularly in fraud-related and cyber-enabled crimes. This outcome provides an important empirical qualification to earlier literature and aligns with Chikwendu, Maduagwuna and Adogu (2023), who observed the increasing involvement of females in cybercriminal activities in Nigeria, albeit often in instrumental roles.

In terms of patterns of female criminality, the predominance of drug-related offences, property crimes, and emerging cyber-enabled activities is consistent with empirical findings documented within the Nigerian context by Anukam and Ilo (2015) and Ojedokun (2014), who identified theft, fraud, drug offences, and trafficking as common crimes associated with female offenders. However, the present findings expand this pattern analysis by demonstrating that female offending in South-South Nigeria is largely situational, economically motivated, and episodic rather than career-oriented. Many of the offences committed by respondents were closely linked to survival needs, financial pressures, and family responsibilities, which reinforces the gendered pathways perspective articulated in this study.

The consequences of female criminality constitute one of the most significant areas of empirical convergence identified in this study. The findings reveal a statistically significant relationship between criminal involvement and stigmatization, social rejection, and psychological distress, thereby corroborating the empirical positions of Ogar and Abutu (2016) and Vonnermann (2018), who documented marginalization and reintegration challenges among female offenders. Consistent with the empirical literature reviewed in this study, these outcomes indicate that the impact of female criminality extends beyond formal punishment to encompass social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Beyond interpersonal rejection, the findings indicate that stigmatization has long-term structural implications, including limited employment opportunities, weakened family support, and restricted access to community-based assistance. This supports Ogar and Abutu's (2016) assertion that discrimination constrains ex-offenders' socio-economic recovery and social acceptance.

Conclusion

This study investigated the prevalence, determinants, patterns, and consequences of female criminality among inmates in correctional centres in South-South Nigeria, a growing but under-researched dimension of criminological inquiry. The findings demonstrate that female criminality in the region is not merely an individual behavioural issue but a socially embedded phenomenon rooted in socio-economic marginalisation, gender inequality, family instability, and structural deprivation. Guided by the specific objectives of identifying the prevalence of female criminality, examining its determinants, analysing its patterns, and assessing its consequences, the study provides a comprehensive empirical understanding of the dynamics of female offending within the correctional context. The findings confirm that female criminality is shaped by interrelated socio-economic and structural pressures, particularly poverty, unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and weak social support systems. These factors collectively create survival-driven motivations that push vulnerable women into criminal activities. Furthermore, the study revealed that the patterns of female criminality are largely non-violent, economically motivated, and situational, reflecting adaptive responses to socio-economic hardship rather than entrenched criminal careers. This underscores the gendered nature of crime and challenges traditional criminological assumptions that portray criminality primarily as a male-dominated phenomenon. The diversification of offences committed by female inmates also indicates an evolving trend in female criminal behaviour within the South-South region.

The consequences of female incarceration extend beyond the individual offender to affect families, children, and the wider society. The disruption of maternal roles, social stigma, economic deprivation, and psychological trauma associated with incarceration highlight the broader social costs of female criminality. In addition, institutional limitations within correctional centres—including overcrowding, inadequate rehabilitation programmes, and insufficient gender-responsive policies—further complicate the reintegration process for female offenders. In essence, the study concludes that female criminality in South-South Nigeria is a complex and evolving social issue driven by structural vulnerabilities and socio-economic pressures rather than inherent criminal disposition. Addressing it requires holistic interventions that integrate social welfare support, economic empowerment,

gender-sensitive correctional reforms, and community reintegration frameworks. Such an approach will not only reduce female offending but also enhance social stability and sustainable development in the region.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived directly from the study's findings and aligned with the research objectives:

1. There is a need for the development of gender-responsive correctional policies that specifically address the unique socio-psychological and rehabilitative needs of female inmates, including counselling, trauma support, and family reintegration services.
2. Government and relevant social agencies should implement targeted socio-economic empowerment programmes for vulnerable women, particularly in areas of vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and employment creation, in order to reduce poverty-driven criminal involvement.
3. Correctional centres should strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration programmes through structured vocational education, literacy programmes, and post-release support systems that will reduce recidivism among female offenders.
4. There is a need for increased collaboration between correctional institutions, social welfare agencies, and community-based organisations to provide social support, family counselling, and reintegration assistance for formerly incarcerated women.
5. Public sensitisation campaigns should be intensified to reduce societal stigma against ex-female inmates and promote community acceptance, thereby facilitating successful reintegration and lowering the likelihood of reoffending.

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