

Gender Differences: A Factor in Criminal Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored how gender differences may be associated with criminal behavior while considering attachment, family dynamics, personal experience, emotional strain, and general perceptions of offending. Five informants were selected on the basis of relevant experience, family context, behavioral background, or personal attachment to the situations examined. Informal interviews were conducted through Facebook Messenger using an interview guide focused on rape, murder or homicide, sexual harassment, and crime of passion. Responses were coded and organized into four analytic areas: attachment, family dynamics, personal experiences, and general perception. The accounts described proximity to a convicted offender, involvement in an impulsive violent incident, exposure to family disruption, sexual abuse or harassment, trauma, fear, depression,

psychosis, and violent ideation. Across the cases, the dominant pattern concerned self-protection, emotional overload, impaired coping, and impulsive rather than premeditated action. The findings suggest that gender alone does not sufficiently explain criminal behavior. Instead, gendered expectations may interact with trauma, strain, relationship conflict, family conditions, emotional regulation, and opportunity. The study concludes that criminal behavior should be interpreted through an integrated, context-sensitive perspective rather than through biological or stereotypical assumptions about men and women. Trauma-informed support, ethical interviewing, broader participant representation, and more systematic research are recommended.

Keywords: *gender differences, criminal behavior, trauma, family dynamics, impulse control, qualitative research*

INTRODUCTION

Gender is one of the most frequently observed correlates of criminal offending, but it should not be treated as a simple or deterministic cause. Research has consistently documented a gender gap in many forms of crime, especially serious and direct violence, while also showing that the size and meaning of the gap vary according to offense type, age, social context, and method of measurement (Archer, 2004; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). A responsible analysis must therefore distinguish broad statistical patterns from individual pathways and avoid reducing criminal behavior to biology or stereotypes.

Explanations of gender and crime commonly combine individual, relational, and structural factors. Strain, low self-control, exposure to criminal opportunities, gendered socialization, and expectations surrounding masculinity may shape how people respond to anger, competition, humiliation, or conflict (Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Burton et al., 1998; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; LaGrange & Silverman, 1999). Biological factors have also been studied, but reviews indicate that relationships between testosterone and aggression are generally modest and strongly influenced by context, motivation, and individual differences (Archer, 2006).

The relationship between victimization and offending is particularly important. Childhood abuse, neglect, interpersonal violence, and cumulative adversity have been associated with later delinquency, violent behavior, and recidivism, although these experiences do not inevitably lead to crime (Maxfield & Widom, 1996; Widom, 1989; Yohros, 2023). Gendered-pathways research further suggests that trauma, mental-health concerns, poverty,

abusive relationships, and survival strategies may be especially salient in some women's routes into offending, while many risk factors also operate across genders (Jones et al., 2014).

The source manuscript approached this issue through five informants whose accounts involved attachment to offending, family disruption, victimization, emotional distress, violent ideation, and an impulsive violent act. The study sought to determine whether gender differences appeared to influence criminal behavior or whether contextual forces such as economic survival, coping with stress, and family dynamics were more central. Its qualitative focus provides a small-scale view of how people interpret the interaction of gender, emotion, relationships, and offending.

Accordingly, this article examined the experiences reported by the five informants, organized the accounts into thematic categories, and interpreted the findings in relation to gender-and-crime scholarship. The purpose was not to establish causal differences between men and women, but to clarify how gendered expectations may intersect with attachment, trauma, family dynamics, emotional regulation, and impulse in perceptions of criminal behavior.

Literature Review

Gendered Patterns and the Limits of Deterministic Explanations

The gender gap in crime is well established at the aggregate level, particularly for serious violence, yet criminological scholarship cautions against assuming that men and women possess entirely different psychological profiles. Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) argued that gender shapes exposure to risk, opportunity, social control, relationships, and the meaning of offending. Archer's (2004) meta-analysis similarly found stronger male involvement in direct and physical aggression, while differences in anger were far less pronounced. These findings support attention to gendered patterns without equating gender with an inevitable disposition toward crime.

The gender similarities hypothesis provides an additional caution against exaggerated claims about male–female differences. Hyde (2005) concluded that males and females are similar on most psychological variables and that observed differences are often context-dependent. Applied to criminal behavior, this perspective suggests that gender may influence pathways, opportunities, and social responses, but should be analyzed together with situational and developmental factors rather than used as a stand-alone explanation.

Strain, Self-Control, Masculinity, and Impulsive Action

General strain theory proposes that crime may emerge when people experience adverse conditions, relationship conflict, humiliation, or blocked goals and respond through anger or maladaptive coping. Broidy and Agnew (1997) emphasized that men and women may encounter different forms of strain and may differ in the resources or responses available to them. This approach is consistent with the source accounts, in which betrayal, family conflict, fear, and emotional pain appeared more central than gender alone.

Self-control and opportunity also help explain why strong emotions do not always result in offending. Burton et al. (1998) and LaGrange and Silverman (1999) found that self-control and opportunity account for part of the gender gap in offending. At the same time, expectations of hegemonic masculinity may discourage emotional disclosure and encourage dominance, toughness, or risk-taking in some settings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These perspectives frame impulsive violence as an interaction among emotion, learned expectations, situational opportunity, and control rather than as a fixed male characteristic.

Trauma, Victimization, and Gendered Pathways

Victimization can shape later emotional and behavioral outcomes through fear, distrust, depression, hypervigilance, and defensive responses. Prospective research found that childhood abuse and neglect increased the likelihood of later arrest and violent offending, although most victimized individuals did not become offenders (Widom, 1989; Maxfield & Widom, 1996). A systematic review and meta-analysis also linked adverse childhood experiences with juvenile recidivism, reinforcing the importance of trauma-informed assessment in justice and prevention settings (Yohros, 2023).

Gendered-pathways research shows that some women's offending develops in the context of abuse, coercive relationships, mental-health difficulties, and survival needs. Jones et al. (2014) found evidence of a gendered pathway among female juvenile offenders while also identifying antisocial pathways that resembled those found among males. This supports an integrated interpretation: gender may shape the form and context of adversity, but attachment, family conditions, trauma, and coping remain central mechanisms across individuals.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design. It explored informants' experiences and perceptions concerning whether gender differences may influence criminal behavior. The design was appropriate for organizing personal accounts and identifying recurring meanings related to attachment, family dynamics, lived experience, emotion, and perceptions of offending.

Research Setting

Data collection took place through the digital platform Facebook Messenger. The source manuscript did not identify a specific physical research locale. Online informal conversations were used to reach the informants and obtain their responses to the interview guide.

Participants and Selection Criteria

Five informants participated in the study. They were selected using criteria related to relevant experience, family dynamics, a human-behavior background, or personal attachment to an offender, victim, or situation connected with the inquiry. The source manuscript did not provide complete demographic profiles, a formal sampling label, or a detailed recruitment procedure; consequently, no additional participant characteristics were inferred in this article.

Research Instrument

An interview guide served as the primary instrument. It focused on experiences and perceptions associated with rape, murder or homicide, sexual harassment, and crime of passion. The source did not report the number of questions, validation procedure, interview duration, or whether the exchanges were recorded or transcribed.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher conducted informal interviews through casual conversations on Facebook Messenger. Responses were gathered from the informants through the interview guide. In the journal conversion, identifying details were minimized and the accounts were presented in aggregated thematic form because several narratives involved highly sensitive experiences, victimization, mental-health concerns, and criminal proceedings.

Data Analysis

The responses were categorized and coded to generate common themes. The original analysis concentrated on four areas: attachment, family dynamics, personal experiences, and general perception. The article retained these analytic domains while consolidating the findings into broader themes concerning proximity to offending, family disruption and victimization, trauma and psychosocial consequences, and emotional overload or impulsive action.

Ethical Consideration

The source manuscript stated that the Data Privacy Act of 2012 was emphasized during the study. Republic Act No. 10173 requires responsible processing and protection of personal and sensitive information. The source did not report approval from an institutional ethics committee, written informed consent procedures, safeguarding arrangements, or referral protocols. These omissions are acknowledged because the narratives included sexual abuse, psychological distress, violent ideation, and communication involving a person in custody (National Privacy Commission, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Informant Accounts

The five accounts represented different forms of proximity to criminal behavior and victimization. One informant described a former intimate connection with a person convicted of rape involving someone known to her. Another account concerned a violent act arising from perceived marital betrayal and resulting in a conviction for frustrated murder. Other accounts involved family separation, violent ideation, sexual abuse by a guardian, and sexual harassment by a relative. Because of the small sample and the sensitivity of these situations, the findings are interpreted as thematic illustrations rather than evidence of gender-based prevalence or causation.

Table 1. *Emergent Themes from the Informant Accounts*

Theme	Source-Based Evidence	Interpretive Meaning
Attachment and proximity to offending	Personal relationships connected informants to an offender, victim, or criminal event.	Attachment shaped trust, fear, trauma, and the way criminal behavior was understood.
Family disruption and victimization	Accounts included parental separation, abuse by a guardian, and harassment by a relative.	Family conditions functioned as sources of strain, vulnerability, and reduced protection.
Psychosocial consequences	Reported effects included sleep problems, distrust, fear, impaired concentration, school withdrawal, depression, and psychosis.	The narratives linked victimization and stress with continuing emotional and functional difficulties.
Impulse, defense, and emotional overload	A violent incident followed perceived betrayal; other accounts involved anger, rage, or thoughts of violence.	Actions and ideation were described as defensive or emotionally driven rather than carefully premeditated.

Attachment, Trust, and Proximity to Crime

Attachment emerged as a major interpretive theme. The informants were not positioned as detached observers; their accounts involved former intimate relationships, friendships, relatives, guardians, or direct personal participation. This proximity influenced their emotional responses and perceptions of crime. One account highlighted trauma and difficulty trusting others after discovering the connection between a former partner and sexual violence. Such experiences illustrate how offending affects wider relational networks, not only the direct victim or convicted person.

The theme supports a contextual rather than deterministic explanation. Attachment can intensify grief, betrayal, shame, fear, and confusion, while also shaping whether behavior is reported, concealed, excused, or confronted. Gender may influence expectations within intimate and family relationships, but the immediate mechanisms visible in the accounts were trust, dependency, protection, and relationship conflict.

Family Dynamics, Abuse, and Vulnerability

Family dynamics were prominent in accounts involving separated parents, abuse by a guardian, and harassment by a relative. These conditions were associated with insecurity, fear, difficulty seeking help, and impaired concentration. One informant reportedly left school after experiencing persistent fear and harassment. Another was unable to pursue a complaint because the alleged perpetrator occupied a position of guardianship and control.

These findings are compatible with research showing that childhood victimization and cumulative adversity may elevate later risk for mental-health problems, delinquency, or offending, while never making such outcomes inevitable (Widom, 1989; Yohros, 2023). The accounts emphasize the importance of protective adults, accessible reporting systems, trauma-informed services, and safeguards for people whose dependency relationships constrain disclosure.

Trauma, Emotional Overload, and Impulse

The original analysis identified self-defense and self-protection as the common thread across the cases. Emotional responses ranged from pain and fear to anger, rage, and psychological breakdown. The source described violent thoughts and one impulsive act following perceived betrayal. It characterized these reactions as largely unplanned rather than premeditated, suggesting that the loss of control occurred under intense emotional and situational pressure.

This pattern can be interpreted through strain and self-control perspectives. Strong negative emotion may increase the pressure to act, but behavior also depends on coping resources, opportunity, social support, and the ability to regulate impulses (Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Burton et al., 1998). The source's references to masculinity and emotional suppression may be relevant in some cases, yet they cannot be generalized from five informants. Hegemonic expectations may discourage some men from expressing vulnerability, but individual behavior remains shaped by multiple interacting conditions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Gender as a Contextual Rather Than Deterministic Factor

The source manuscript concluded that gender differences could be considered a factor in criminal behavior, particularly when combined with attachment, family dynamics, experience, emotional pain, and impulse. The present synthesis retains that conclusion but qualifies it in light of the study design. The data do not establish that males are biologically predisposed to crime or that females offend only after prolonged abuse. Those claims would require larger, comparative, and systematically sampled evidence.

A more defensible interpretation is that gendered socialization, social roles, exposure to particular strains, opportunities, and responses to victimization may influence pathways into crime. Evidence that males show more direct physical aggression does not mean that every male is more aggressive, and evidence of gendered pathways among some female offenders does not mean that all women share the same route (Archer, 2004; Hyde, 2005; Jones et al., 2014). The study therefore contributes exploratory insight into the interaction of gender with relational and emotional contexts rather than a causal test of gender differences.

Limitations

The study involved only five informants and relied on informal online conversations. The source did not provide full participant demographics, a documented sampling strategy, interview transcripts, coding procedures, validation of themes, ethics approval, or member checking. Some accounts concerned ongoing abuse, mental-health symptoms, and criminal cases, making safeguarding and confidentiality especially important. The findings cannot be generalized to men, women, offenders, victims, or any population and should be treated as preliminary qualitative observations.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that gender may influence how criminal behavior is perceived and experienced, but it does not operate independently of context. Across the five informants, attachment, family disruption, abuse, betrayal, fear, trauma, emotional overload, and impulse were more directly visible than gender alone. The accounts suggest that some harmful actions and violent thoughts emerged as defensive, emotionally driven, or poorly regulated responses to intense strain rather than as carefully planned conduct. At the same time, the small qualitative sample does not support broad biological or stereotypical claims about males and females. Criminal behavior is better understood through an integrated framework that considers gendered expectations together with trauma, relationships, family conditions, mental health, self-control, opportunity, and available support.

Recommendation

Future studies should recruit larger and more diverse samples of men, women, victims, offenders, mental-health practitioners, and criminal-justice professionals using clearly documented selection procedures. Researchers should use validated interview guides, recorded and systematically coded data, independent or peer review of themes, and careful comparison across gender and offense categories. Studies involving abuse, violent ideation, or incarcerated persons should obtain formal ethics approval, written informed consent, safeguarding

protocols, and referral pathways for psychological and legal support. Practitioners and institutions should adopt trauma-informed and gender-responsive interventions without assuming that gender alone determines risk. Programs addressing family violence, emotional regulation, healthy masculinity, victim protection, conflict resolution, and access to mental-health care may help reduce harm while recognizing the distinct circumstances of each individual.

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