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Commission of crime: Gender differences or unreasoned action?

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Abstract

Crime had always been evident in human history; despite recent technological and information management advancement of the twenty first century there is a decent rise. The type of crime is usually an issue in understanding criminal activities. This study examined the relationship between gender and type of crime committed, and relationship between impulsivity and types of crime. Using an ex post facto design, conveniently drawing from 945 convicted and awaiting trial inmates, 102 convicted inmates. We found there was significant influence of impulsivity on the type of crime committed ($X^2=3.012$; $df=1$; $P<.05$) while there was no significant difference among males and females on the types of crime ($X^2=.005$; $df=1$; $P>.05$). Impulsivity influenced the type of crime committed and need for more proactive efforts to help impulsive inmates for better living after prison terms and level playing ground for both male and female to reduce their crime involvement.

Keywords: Crime, Impulsivity, Gender

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1. Introduction

Crime is a human act that pervades all its existence. It is an act of commission or omission that negates any law that guides a group of people. According to Sutherland (1978), crime is that behavior that is prohibited by the states and an injury to the state against which the state may react... by punishment. In recent time, hardly you find any sector of the society without a spillage of criminal activities. The rate at which this phenomenon is growing is alarming considering the rate almost the sectors of the society floundering in the mess of crime dominance.

Crime is a multifaceted phenomenon. For its discussion to be meaningful there must be a distinguishing feature between types of crimes. Crimes may range from violent and property crime. Violent crimes are defined as those offenses which involve force or threat of force, while the term property crime typically refers to the criminal offenses of burglary, larceny, fraud, embezzlement, forgery, motor vehicle theft, and arson (Inciardi, 1998). In other words, property crimes are seen as material crimes of the society. In this current study, violent crime is defined as the crime that involves violence, use of threat or force while property crime is seen as the crime that does not.

According to FBI report in 2010, there were nearly ten times as many property crimes as violent crimes; though violent crime in the range of 1.2 million cases decreased by 6% in 2009, property crime in the range of 9,082,887 cases also decreased by 3% . But when serious crimes do occur they are emblazoned on the front page of newspapers, although property offenses are much more common. Individuals may believe personal crimes have more serious consequences than property crime, Caudwell, (2012).

In Nigeria, statistics has reliably shown that crime is on the increase; there is a progressive increase from 2011 figure though lower than 2010 where nearly one in two persons experienced criminal victimization, CLEEN Foundation Department, (2012). Violent crimes especially armed robbery (with 17% increment from 2010), physical assault (19% increase from 2011), armed violence other than robbery which encompasses acts like terrorism, bombings and community violence among others indicated that 5% of respondents were victims while 4% was the national rate for rape, 3% reported to have attempted murder before. Property crime figure appears less stark than violent crimes as it was reported of theft of mobile phone remaining the number one crime committed in the country in the past three years though national average declined from 50% in 2011 to 47% in 2012 survey. Under car theft, 8% of respondents attested their cars were stolen, CLEEN Foundation (2012). The study made use of victims rather than criminals themselves.

Reasons abound why people commit crime; the need for economic and political survival has made some individuals to engage in many unapproved and condemnable behavior such as crime. An extension of this fact is given by Agnew, 1992 while submitting that joblessness contributes to violent behaviour because it triggers frustration and anger and also, that unemployment provides individuals more time to commit crime, (Felson, 1998). In fact, a small increase in unemployment rate increases property crime but the effect of this on violent crime is smaller compared to violent crime, Edmark, (2005). Some Nigerians reportedly commit all sorts of crime on a daily basis just to gain economic and political survival, Tor-Ayiin, 2010. But some studies have forwarded psychological reasons for violent crimes. Such studies believe that individuals commit crime because they possess certain psychological variables that predispose them commit crime, Lynam et.al (2000).

Apart from the economic reasons given above, psychological factor is also another factor responsible for crime. Some people commit crime for the fun of it while some commit base on their level of thinking. Lack of coping ability make some people to engage in crime. They do this in order to avert what they regard as their short-comings. And for some people there is weakness in them, they perceive imbalance and this resulted in criminal act. The level of cognitive reasoning plays important role in every individual. A person with a normal cognitive reasoning thinking of the consequence of his/her action, therefore he is very conscious of his action and a person that lacks the cognitive reasoning may act on impulse or behave irrationally without considering the consequence of his/her action.

As a matter of fact, impulsivity has been implicated as one of the major psychological factors in commission of violent crimes. Considering impulsivity as single symptom in antisocial personality, the individual is characterized with low tolerance for frustration or acts impetuously, with no apparent concern for the consequence of their behavior. They have poor control of their impulses. They may engage in criminal activity impulsively, and 50 to 80 percent of men in jail may be diagnosable with antisocial personality disorder, (Krauss and Reynolds, 2001). Conley, 2010 reported a link of gene mutation with impulsivity and possible violent outbursts occurring in Finnish men, but that alcohol intoxication predisposes the genetic mutation.

Impulsive violence crimes have also been traced to another genetic variation, especially of serotonin neurotransmitter. Elevated levels of serotonin activity in the brain are associated with feelings of calm and contentment; low levels are associated with irritability and gloom. It has been shown that impulsive violence is more common in persons with low levels of serotonin activity, (Blumensohn et al., 1995; Virkkunen et al., 1996).

Impulsive crime has been found to occur within approximately one hour of the time the criminals thought about it. This was supported by the study of Zamble and Quinsey (1991) on Canadian Federal recidivists. Meier, (2008) found out that being delinquent is as a result of being impulsive and then living in criminally high risk neighbourhood. In summary, the study provides that delinquency is as a result of the adolescents being impulsive and then living in criminally high risk neighbourhood.

A study by Delong et.al (1992) that was examining the link between recidivism and impulsivity, using a 348 Finnish sample, evidently correlated impulsivity and recidivism for both general and violent recidivism. The correlation between impulsivity and recidivism occurred for both general and violent recidivism.

Cherek et al. (1997) demonstrated that impulsivity is more common in violent offenders than in nonviolent ones. This was as a result of the impulsive choices on the delayed gratification task exhibited by more by violent offenders than non-violent offenders.

Motor impulsiveness, cognitive impulsiveness, and impulsive non -planning as constructs of Impulsivity were examined by Stanford and Barrat (1992) using Barrat Impulsivity Scale and it was found out that only motor impulsiveness predicted impulsive behaviour.

The study of crime especially in relation to impulsivity cannot be said to be a mere one as impulsivity is considered to be a predictor to many crimes in adult offenders' sample. Gender as a demographic factor is so

pervasive in behavioral sciences. It can serve as a prejudicial basis of judging behaviour, predicting an act and explaining why committing a particular crime.

According to James and Hernstein (1985), male offenders report more crime and violence than female offenders in any given society. Although the view that males are more criminally minded than females are common, studies have shown us that females are becoming more involved not only in crime but the patterns of crime which they were known for have changed, Chukuezi (2009). This view may be fuelled by the belief that women are more at the receiving end of societal-subnormal behaviour such as unwanted pregnancy, adolescent motherhood, sexual abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence and depression.

In a careful frequency distribution of male –female prisoners in Owerri in 1980-2000, Chukeyi (2009) found that there was a significant increase of female crime (1980:223, 27% to 14, 10% male-female), (1990:250, 31%-48, 36%), and 2000(338, 42%-73, 54%) despite the fact that there were more male prisoners over the years. The percentage increase is highest for female than for males. This seems to suggest that females are trying to come out of their shells, debunking the views of not being able to hurt a fly and beating their chests against males in crime.

Furthermore on this, females are found to commit more than males in domestic-violent offence against a current or former heterosexual intimate partner (Renauer and Henning, 2005). Also, women are shown to be more significant on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) than men and that their pattern of violence differs from that of men (Mennard and Godbodt, 2007).

In the study of Deschenens and Esbensen (1999) who related items such as carrying weapons, hitting people, attacking someone with a weapon, shot at someone and armed robbery to violence found significantly lower involvement by females in comparison to males on these crime types. The result found out that twenty percent of females and 39% of males reported ever carrying a hidden weapon. Ten percent of females and 18% of males reported attacking someone with a weapon. Even though the type of weapon was unspecified, since only 2% of females and 8% of males reported ever having shot at someone. There was a significantly low comparison rates for females rather than for males, but overall, the prevalence rates for committing a violent offense in the past year differed significantly by gender, with half of the females and two-thirds of the males reporting involvement in the past 12 months.

The issue of increasing crime in the nation begs for answers most especially the factors that can cause crime. There is the need to evaluate the reason which could be responsible for increase in the incidence of crimes. The modern day scientific research has shed more light on determinants causes of people cruelty and atrocities and has made us to know that crimes of different forms can be attributed to people's psychosocial factors. But for the purpose of this current study, the statement of problem ask would gender have any significant effect on type of crime committed, secondly, would impulsivity have a significant effect on types of crime. While the hypotheses tested were Convicted prison inmates who are high on impulsivity will commit more of violent crimes than convicted inmates who are low on impulsivity and there will not be a significant relationship between gender and types of crime. The results when confirmed would be a useful data in the literatures. Also, forensic experts would find it useful in criminal profiling references while prison authority can make use of it for intervention planning purposes for convicted inmates.

2. Methods

The study adopted an ex post design. This was considered adequate because none of the independent variables (gender and impulsivity), was consciously manipulated by the researchers; they had already occurred and were measured as such.

2.1. Setting

This study was conducted in Agodi prison Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. Agodi prison was used because it is a normal prison that accommodates different group of ethnicity, tribes, religion which makes the study enjoyed rich participants.

2.2. Sample size

The participants were drawn from the general population of 945 convicted and Awaiting Trials inmates. The total sample participants of one hundred and two convicted inmates were conveniently drawn for the study. The numbers of males were 89{87.3%} while females were 13{12.7%}.The sample comprises 37{36.3%} as single, 57{55.9%} as married while divorced were 8{7.8%} respectively. They were conveniently selected from the prison inmates in Agodi prison in the research setting. Examples and percentages of violent crimes are: assault (11.8%), murder (3.9%), manslaughter (2.9 %), rape (7.8 %), rape and kidnapping (1.0%), robbery (14.7%), armed robbery (2.9%), fighting (3.9 %) while that of property crimes are: breaking and entry (1.0%), diversion of funds (2.9%), drug peddling (7.9 %), embezzlement (2.2 %), fraud (2.9%), impersonation (1.0 %), Obtaining by trick (OBT) (5.9 %), Prostitution (1.0 %), stealing (21.6 %), human trafficking (4.9 %), unlawful possession of arm (1.0 %).

2.3. Procedure

The researchers got the consent of Prison Authority and the participants' consents were sought. The researchers met the inmates at the counseling room to administer the questionnaires and some of the questions were read to the inmates because of level of illiteracy while the others answered the questions independently.

2.4. Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the research hypotheses. The descriptive statistics used involved frequencies, mean and standard deviation for socio-demographic variables while the inferential statistics was Chi-square analysis for statistical correlation.

2.5. Research instrument

2.5.1. Socio demographic information

This section made use of demographic features such as age, sex, marital status, occupation prior to conviction, jail term, crime type, conviction status, and numbers of conviction.

2.5.2. Impulsivity Information (Barrat Impulsiveness Scale)

The instrument involved in this section was "Barrat Impulsiveness Scale 11". (BIS 11) (Patton et al., 1995) is a 30 item self report questionnaire design to assess general impulsiveness taking into action the multi-factorial nature of the construct. The structure of the instrument allows for the assessment of six first-order factors (attention, motor, self control, cognitive complexity, perseverance, cognitive instability), non planning impulsiveness (self control cognitive complexity). The Cronbach's alpha obtained for the purpose of the study was .92. A score total was obtained by summing up all the factors on the scale.

3. Analysis and results

Hypothesis one states that convicted prison inmates who are high on impulsivity will commit more of violent crimes than convicted inmates low on impulsivity. This hypothesis was tested with the Chi-square analysis and the result is presented on Table 1.

Table 1. 2X2 Contingency table showing difference in type of crime committed on levels of impulsivity

Impulsivity	Type of Crime			X ²	Df	P
	Violent	Property	Total			
Low	22 (21.6%)	34 (33.3%)	56 (54.9%)	3.012	1	<.05
High	26 (25.5%)	20 (19.6%)	46 (45.1%)			
Total	48 (47.1%)	54 (52.9%)	102 (100.0%)			

The figures on Table 1 shows significant influence of impulsivity on type of crime committed by convicted prison inmates in Agodi prison ($X^2=3.012$; $df =1$; $P<.05$). This result shows that impulsivity influenced the type of crime committed by convicted prison inmates. This significant difference can be observed where participants who are high on impulsivity were more in number (26) than those who are low on impulsivity (22) on violent crime. The hypothesis is therefore confirmed. Hypothesis two states that there will be a significant relationship between gender and types of crime.

The figures on Table 2 show there is no significant influence of gender on types of crime committed by convicted prison inmates in Agodi Prison ($X^2=.005$; $df=1$; $P>.05$). This result shows that male commits more property crime than violent ones and female population reveals the same thing. The hypothesis is therefore disconfirmed.

Table 2. Contingency table showing the difference between gender and types of crime committed

Gender	Type of Crime			X2	Df	P
	Violent	Property	Total			
Male	42 (47.2%)	47(52.8%)	56 (100%)	.005	1	>.05
Female	6 (42.8%)	7 (53.8%)	46 (100%)			
Total	48	54	102			

4. Discussions

Hypothesis one proved that high scorers on impulsivity will be involved in violent crime than low scorers. This means that an individual that acts before he thinks would be more vulnerable to committing violent crime than those who consider their actions before taking them. This reflected the result in Cherek et.al, 1997 in a study involving a general sample of male offenders on parole, with the question linking offence type and violence, and it was found out that impulsivity is more common in violent offenders than in non-violent ones. Similarly, Zamble and Quinsey (1991) for a recidivistic population demonstrate how typically impulsive many offenders are in the commission of their crimes.

The result showed that there is no significant relationship between gender and types of crime. This suggests that if a crime occurs in as much as a woman can be culpable, a man can equally be. While this may be negating popular belief that men commit crime more than women, it is finding support in the results of Chukuezi (2009) that females are becoming more involved not only in crime but the patterns of crime which they were known for have changed. It was found out that despite the fact that there were more male prisoners over the years; the percentage increase is highest for females than for males. This seems to suggest that females are trying to come out of their shells, debunking the views of not being able to hurt a fly and beating their chests against males in crime. Further evidence is being forwarded against this hypothesis by the study of Deschenens and Esbensens (1999), with the assertion that though there was a significant low comparison rates for females rather than for males, the prevalence rates for committing a violent offense in the past year differed significantly by gender, with half of the females and two-thirds of the males reporting involvement in the past 12 months. This is still holding onto the view that men remain most often the robbers, the cheats, the fraudsters, and the snatchers while the women may be anyone of these but less often i.e. if there is a crime, check amongst the men before the women.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that there was higher score on impulsivity level against violent offenders compare to non violent offenders in Agodi prison. This indicates that high score on impulsivity has a strong relationship on violent offenders. In other words violent criminals are highly subjective to lack of self-control which is a core element of impulsivity.

It can also be inferred from the study that there was not much different between men and women when it comes to committing crime.

6. Recommendations

It is high time mental health professionals got more involved in the forensic mental health profession to assess for impulsivity and treat it accordingly so that inmates will come out better than they went into prisons.

With the view of crime changing now involving both male and female formerly considered as weaker sex, it won't be abnormal to suggest equipping both men and women equally for challenges ahead of them, in terms of education, healthcare, skills acquisition, employment opportunities and more in order to minimize their involvement in criminality.

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