

WOMEN AND CRIME IN KARACHI: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

Aqsa Idrees

⁴BS Criminology, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto University of Law, Karachi, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: *

Aqsa Idrees

Received	Accepted	Published
01 January, 2026	15 March, 2026	31 March, 2026

ABSTRACT

This study explores socio-economic factors contributing to female criminality in Karachi, focusing on substance abuse, income stability, and arrest history. Highlighting the unique challenges faced by female prisoners, it aims to understand how these factors influence the nature of crimes committed. Using simple random sampling, the research provides insights into the often-overlooked experiences of women in the criminal justice system, offering a foundation for developing targeted interventions.

Key Words: - investigate, criminality, challenges, prisoners, and target.

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute the cornerstone of any family, particularly in South Asia, where they are viewed as the guardians of social norms, traditions, and customs. In addition to caring for their families, women in every society also bear the additional responsibility of forming their own identities. However, it is disheartening to observe that women's achievements are being extended to criminal activities. Female criminality is on the rise, and this has become a major source of concern for legislators and researchers seeking to understand the reasons behind such criminal activity (Bose, 2024). Over the years, as per the data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau in India, the rate of women criminality has increased drastically. Their evolving role, move-in occupation, desire to change status, the idea of women liberation, claiming of rights, financial freedom and political autonomy has opened up the passage for the women for participating in different roles and activities which has in turn increased their exposure to various facets of the society. However, recent studies show that women commit crime mainly under the influence of their family. Improper socialization, broken homes, parental pressures, lack of emotional support, mental tortures by in laws, lack of love and affection, etc. are all major reasons for women getting involved in criminal activities (Bose, 2024). In a data provided

by Crime in India Reports (2003) reveal that the number of females arrested for criminal activities were 1, 51,675, and which increased to 1,54,635 in 2007. The nature of crimes committed by are also witnessing a change, Like, previously they were much involved in softer crimes but as per the recent reports of NCRB in the year 2005 almost 3439 women were arrested for the charge of murder; in the year 2007 this number increased to 3812 and in the year 2009 it reached to 4007 which is an increase from 5.4% to 6.4%. The crime rate among female criminals has risen from 5.4% to 6.2% from 2001 to 2011 (Female Criminality in India: Prevalence, Causes - ProQuest, n.d.).

Criminologists and Sociologists analysis

According to a number of criminologists and sociologists, a major reason for increased women crime arose as a consequence of women liberation; as compared to house women, the women at work face more financial sorrow and greater than before municipal disorganization. Furthermore, deception and fake marriage are reasons that provoke women-type crimes (Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2004). Women criminology is no less common is Pakistan; a country where social norms are quite strictly followed. The women criminology is quite a vast field that encompasses social, public, intellectual,

financial and opinionated milieu of Pakistan. Socio-economic and cultural factors i.e. low level of education, economically dependency and patriarchal system are the dragging factors which are forced the women to commit crimes in Pakistan (Zafar, et al., 2013, Abbas and Manzoor, 2015).

On the other hand, females in addition are obligated to violent behavior for numerous similar reasons men do such as capital, authority and compensation (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006). Involvement of Pakistani women in crime is increasing at an alarming rate. This involvement has reached a frightening stage that has forced a large number of responsible scholars seek the prime causes of female crimes that has led to tremendous increase in statistics of violence by women. Out of 207 million Pakistanis, 101 million are women (GOP, 2017) and they live under such conditions that may possibly protect them from the recognition and prosecution of the crime. Moreover, women deprive the right of mate selection, isolation, ingratitude, helplessness; desperation and extra sexual relation are those social elements which are indulged women in Pakistan toward crimes. Therefore, women criminality has been drastically increasing in the Sindh, Pakistan hence required an in-depth analysis into the cause-and-effect relationship. The notion of women criminality is hidden cultural issue in Pakistan that has been dumped at the hands of male dominance and stereotypes attached in the Pakistani culture (Gillani et al., 2015).

Women in state prisons in 2003 were more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug offense (29% vs. 19%) or property offense (30% vs. 20%) and less likely than men to be incarcerated for a violent offense (35% vs. 53%) (Brown et al, 2005). The gravity of in hand research can be observed by The Nation News (2012) it was reported that in Punjab Police department have notorious at least 4,000 females' criminals were concerned in kidnapping, theft, put to death, and other hideous crimes transversely the area. Particular information prepared by the regional police, explained that these females have murdered over 200 citizens and offended 560 others throughout a range of incidents. These females have also carried out physical attack on 9 public servants, kidnapped 1,635 people, and committed 12 robbed and dacoits over 60 homes during 2011. In reference to the report, it is stated that women criminals were also caught up in 1070 incidents of robbery, 325 cases of

deception, two cases of fraud, 35 cases of narcotics like drugs and some 22 crimes that come under local and special laws. Official records additionally show, around 360 cases that were registered against women on charges of illegal relations, 29 cases of kidnapping for revenge, 235 cases of relatives and dowry disputes, 15 cases of love affairs, over 70 cases of old enmities, 115 of simple aggression and quarrels, 12 cases of monetary disputes and 35 cases of marriage and nikkah disputes. Some 115 cases were lodged against women in connection with quarrels with their husbands. The number of women in prison has increased at nearly double the rate of men since 1985, 404 vs. 209, respectively. Women are usually involved in murder of their own husbands, siblings, and children etc. A horrible incident took place in Multan southern Punjab, Pakistan in which a newly married Pakistani woman has been arrested on murder charges after she allegedly poisoned her husband's milk and it inadvertently killed 17 relatives, a senior police officer says (BBC News, 2017). A recent incident in Karachi in the month of August, 2024 where a women killed 2 people. Karachi police on filed a fresh case under the Hudood law against Natasha Danish – the driver booked in deadly Karsaz traffic accident that killed two and injured three people – days after police said that her medical report showed she was under the influence of methamphetamine (crystal meth) (Ali, 2024).

One significant aspect that differentiates female delinquents from their male counterparts is the profound influence of family dynamics. Research indicates that female delinquents are more likely to come from non-intact families, where the traditional family structure has been disrupted. Rosenbaum (1980) highlights that only a small percentage (seven percent) of delinquent girls come from intact homes. The instability in family structure, characterized by frequent remarriages (an average of four marriages by the time these girls were 16), contributes significantly to the emotional and psychological turmoil experienced by these young women. The chaotic family environment, often marked by multiple siblings from different parents, exacerbates the feelings of neglect and rejection, which are pivotal in the development of delinquent behavior. The presence of criminality within the family is another critical factor that predisposes women to criminal behavior. According to the study, 76 percent of the girls came from families with a history

of criminality. This intergenerational transmission of criminal behavior suggests that criminality may be normalized within these families, reducing the perceived severity of engaging in such behavior. Additionally, family violence, though not comprehensively documented, is evident in many of these homes. The exposure to violence at a young age desensitizes these girls to aggressive behavior, which may later manifest in their delinquent activities (Effects of Criminal Parents on Children [Marrimedia], n.d.). Family conflict, especially in two-parent households (often stepfamilies), is common among female offenders. According to the study, 71% of parents in these households had regular arguments, frequently on matters pertaining to their children. This ongoing hostility produces an unstable climate that encourages delinquent behavior, particularly in homes with step-siblings. The situation is made worse by the absence of a consistent, caring interaction between parents and children. According to the study, a sizable portion of moms (47 percent) and fathers (53 percent) were thought to be rejecting their children, with many mothers being labeled as apathetic and careless. Whether by emotional abuse or neglect, this parental rejection is a major contributor to women's low self-esteem and consequent criminal behavior (Effects of Family Structure on Female Crime Rates [Marrimedia], n.d.). There are certain factors in a criminal's family life or 'under the roof culture', which are responsible for female delinquency or later criminal activities (Ahuja, 2000). According to Carr (2009), the components of an ideal family are structural completeness, financial stability, moral and cultural conformance, physical and psychological regularity, and functional regularity. Women's involvement in the commission of crimes is referred to as "female offending" (Islam and Khatun, 2013). Crimes done solely by women or in conjunction with other women are referred to as female criminality. Women no longer view themselves as being lesser to males, and since they participate in all activities alongside them, they have no problems about taking up dangerous and unlawful jobs like criminality. Crimes committed by women include murder, drug and child trafficking, prostitution, suicide, adultery, theft, and robbery. Family dysfunction may be a major contributing factor to the commission of many crimes (Islam & Talukder, 2021). Female offense is a crime that goes unreported. In the framework of

gender equality, women's participation in unlawful labor is increasing concurrently with their access to legal possibilities. Women's involvement in illegal activities is caused by family conflict, maladjustment, fractured families, and inactivity of the family. Family issues are the primary reason behind women's criminality. The disparities in the roles that men and women play account for the variations in the rates of criminal activity (Islam & Talukder, 2021).

According to Pollak (1950), female criminality has a concealed nature. All-female crimes are not reported to the authorities, but because of their protective and paternalistic views, the police and courts also have a lot of sympathy for women. Women's social roles make great coverings for crime, and houses act as a smokescreen to conceal it, which contributes to the underreporting of and lack of reporting of female crimes. Simon (1976) examined a number of aspects of female criminality, including the volume and nature of crimes committed as well as how courts and prison personnel handled them. According to her, it all begins in the family, and as a result of being unable to meet their basic emotional and other requirements, they turn to crime and take advantage of other chances. In their 1982 study of female convicts at Bangalore's Remand Home, Shariff and Sekar identified broken homes, inadequate parenting, and rejection from parents as contributing factors to female criminal conduct. Mishra and Gautam (1982) noted that the crisis of shifting social ideals and broken homes are the main causes of female criminality. A child's socialization is greatly influenced by their family. Crime rates and related behaviors are influenced by societal and familial factors. In his research, Ahuja (1986) discovered that maladjustment in the family has the greatest impact on female criminality. According to Pandey's (2006) research, 69.70% of female offenders were classified as coming from a nuclear family, which is in line with Madhurima's findings. A different survey conducted in 2009 by Madhurima on the situation of Punjab's female offenders revealed that 36.5% of them reside in joint or extended families, while the bulk of them (57.5%) live in nuclear families.

Low socioeconomic status, however, is the most important of these contributing elements. Due to financial hardships, employment insecurity, and economic inequality, women are frequently forced to engage in unlawful activity in order to survive or increase their influence in the marketplace

(Samridhi, 2024). Numerous research indicate that socioeconomic factors play a role in female criminality. In her 1975 book *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the Female Offender*, Adler significantly advanced the understanding of the factors that contribute to female criminality. She contended that when women were given access to more roles outside the house and possibilities, this led to a rise in female criminality. Consequently, with the rise in the proportion of women employed, there would be a corresponding in female criminal activity and misbehavior. Adler went on to say that empowered women commit more violent crimes of a serious kind than disempowered women (Adler 1975). Simon (1975) offered a similar explanation, claiming that when women have varying social and economic prospects, their involvement in illegal activities increases. She clarifies, however, that while more options for women lead to a decrease in violent female offenders, property crimes rise in response. According to William Adrian Bonger (2015), the primary cause of crime is the financial strain that the capitalistic system places on people. As a result of industrialism, man has grown more materialistic under this system, and economic insecurity has escalated. This is regarded as one of the key elements that contributes to the causes of crime. In the world's states, Pakistan is currently ranked 147th in the Human Development Index (2015). The gender gap has worsened and human resource development is still being overlooked. With a big family to feed, the high birth rate has made the impoverished even more impoverished. The poor have to deal with a high rate of unemployment, inflation, and consequently, a lack of opportunities and income (Saeed et al., 2018). In research conducted in Pakistan, it was observed that crime was also caused by emotionality and the need for money. They blamed unemployment, inflation, and a corrupt government for their misdeeds. The study also showed that women's socialization is greatly influenced by the media (Saeed et al., 2018). Economic factors play a crucial role in leading women into criminal behavior, as financial desperation often drives them to illegal activities. Poverty is a significant factor, with the lack of basic necessities pushing some women toward crimes such as theft, drug trafficking, or prostitution to support themselves and their families (UNODC, 2018). Economic dependency on partners or family members can also lead to involvement in criminal

activities, either through coercion or as a means of financial survival (Hollin & Palmer, 2021). Women in economically deprived situations are more susceptible to being drawn into criminal networks, where they may be exploited or coerced into illegal activities (Hollin & Palmer, 2021).

Drug use, especially drug addiction, has long been considered a significant contributing factor to property crime. Addiction and female criminal behavior are not related in many studies. 75% of 457 women surveyed after being released from New York City's jail facilities reported having a history of drug addiction (Federal Probation, 1965). Drug misuse and property crime are both on the rise, and within the past ten years, women have been more heavily involved in these crimes. Many studies have examined the connection between drug use and criminal activity in males, but not as much has been published regarding the connection between drug use and criminal activity (apart from prostitution) in females (James et al., 1979). The expense of abusing addictive substances demands a consistent, high income, which few women can obtain from employment that complies with the law. Regular usage of non-narcotic medications bought illegally comes at a somewhat lower cost. While nonnarcotic drugs do not typically produce the same strong physiological desire as narcotics, they might nonetheless result in criminal action. Given that some female criminal lives (like prostitution) are emotionally and physically stressful, some non-narcotic medications (such as amphetamines and other stimulants) may be utilized to help women perform better at work (James et al., 1979). Women's criminality is significantly influenced by substance misuse, which frequently starts an endless cycle of addiction and criminal activity. According to Covington (2002), women who abuse drugs or alcohol are more prone to commit crimes like theft, prostitution, or drug trafficking in order to fund their addiction. Substance abuse and criminality have a complicated relationship because addiction can exacerbate impulsivity, impair judgment, and cause ties with criminal networks (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013). According to Håkansson and Jesionowska (2018), individuals frequently believe that drug addiction is the only thing that results in bad things happening when the substance isn't used responsibly. Moreover, the drug epidemic affects everyone and everything on the world. Emile Durkheim, a sociologist, developed the Anomie

theory, a theory that explains how people can behave badly due to societal norms—or a lack thereof. Anomie is the state in which social norms are unclear. People can experience confusion and frustration when they are unsure about what is right

or wrong. This can occur when children are raised in low-income environments, in dysfunctional households, or in disorderly communities. Young individuals may use drugs or alcohol to help them deal with their emotions under those circumstances.

Theoretical Framework

THEORY	VARIABLE	Study
Social Learning Theory	Family	Morrison, W. (1997).
Strain Theory	Economic	Passas, N., & Agnew, R. (1997).
Social Control Theory	Substance Use	De Li, S., & Mackenzie, D. L. (2003).
Liberation Theory	Criminality	Steffensmeier, D., & Allan, E. (1996).

Theories provides a framework and guideline to fulfill the approaches and endeavors. The main goal of theories is developing knowledge and understanding the previous work or activity with regards to the topic being researched. Social, biological, economic, explanations have been used to develop theories to explain why women commit crime, as well as why they commit less crime than men.

Lombroso's Explanation of Female Criminals

Cesare Lombroso (1990) proposed that female offenders exhibited biological traits typically associated with masculinity. He argued that anomalies in their skill and brain capacity made them resemble men, whether they were normal or criminal. According to Lombroso, female criminals are especially vicious and dangerous because they possess certain characteristics, including:

- Deficient moral sensibilities
- Excessive vanity
- Irritability
- Revengefulness
- Uncontrolled sexual desire
- Unstable characters

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory emphasizes the significant role families play in shaping a child's overall attitude. Albert Bandura (1986) proposed a model where personal factors, environmental events, and behaviors interact with each other, influencing responses in a reciprocal manner. Sociologists consider criminal behavior to be a learned behavior, acquired through interaction with others. According to Social Learning Theory,

criminal activity is not innate but learned, meaning a female can be influenced to engage in criminal activities through interactions with family members, peer groups, relatives, and others (Morrison, 1997).

Strain Theory

Strain Theory seeks to explain why crime is more prevalent among lower social classes. Robert Merton (1968) suggested that the combination of social structure and cultural emphasis creates significant pressure for individuals to deviate from societal norms. Strain occurs when people within a culture are taught to pursue the same goals but are not given equal opportunities to achieve them legitimately. Marginalized individuals, who are most susceptible to this strain, often resort to alternative means to fulfill their unmet economic aspirations (Passas & Agnew, 1997).

Emile Durkheim viewed crime as a universal aspect of both human nature and culture, arguing that in contemporary society, increasing individualism makes crime inevitable (Durkheim, 1984). Siegel (1995) also noted that crime has become unavoidable as society has transitioned into a more complex social structure, with greater variations emerging within modern society.

Social Control Theory

Social Control Theory posits that most individuals conform to societal norms due to the influence of both internal and external controls. This theory suggests that social bonds, including relationships with family, peers, and institutions, play a crucial role in preventing deviant behavior. These bonds are equally significant in influencing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities for both men and

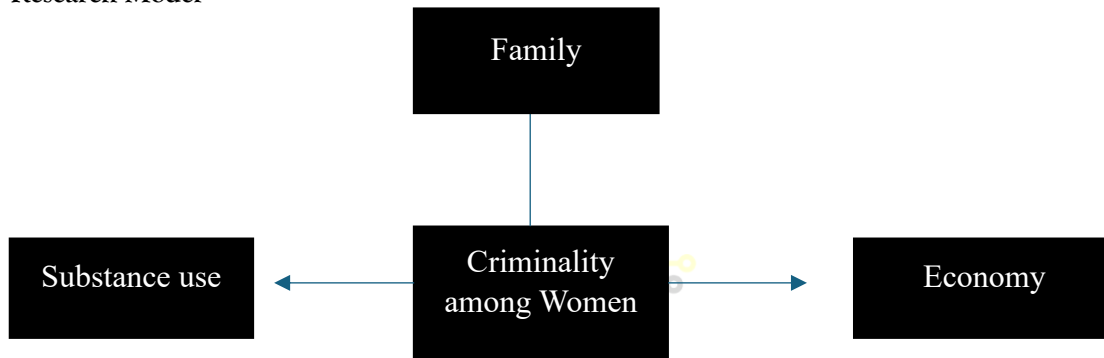
women (De Li & Mackenzie, 2003). In the context of substance abuse, weak social bonds can lead individuals to deviate from societal norms, increasing the likelihood of engaging in substance-related criminal behavior as a means to cope with or escape from weakened social ties.

Liberation Theory

Freda Adler, a key proponent of Liberation Theory, argued that the women's liberation movement has led to an increase in female involvement in violent criminal activities. According to Adler, the liberation movement has encouraged competitive instincts and a goal-oriented lifestyle among women, making them

more assertive, demanding, and aggressive. This newfound assertiveness has driven some women to believe that achieving financial stability and a strong social position are crucial for success. As a result, some women may engage in criminal activities as a means to achieve these goals and secure their place in society. A study by Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) supports this theory, showing that as women have gained more freedom and opportunities, their involvement in certain types of crime, particularly economic and violent offenses, has increased. This suggests that the changes in societal roles and expectations due to the women's liberation movement may have contributed to the rise in female criminality.

Research Model



Summary

The study investigated the “Socio-economic Factors Leading to Criminality among Women in Karachi.” It specifically focused on how substance abuse, income stability, and history of arrest influence the type of crimes committed. Given the unique challenges faced by female prisoners, understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective interventions.

Quantitative research was conducted using structured questionnaires to collect data through face-to-face interviews with a sample of 48 female prisoners, drawn from the central prison for women Karachi. The study aimed to explore the diverse social and economic factors affecting criminal behavior in this population, which is often overlooked in criminological studies.

The target population was selected due to rising concerns about the specific circumstances of female prisoners and the need for focused research on their experiences. A simple random sampling technique ensured diverse representation in the sample. The questionnaires included closed-ended questions, allowing for efficient and reliable data collection. Ethical considerations were strictly

upheld throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need to address the socio-economic factors influencing criminal behavior among female prisoners. The complex interplay between economic challenges, family dynamics, and substance abuse significantly impacts the lives and decisions of these women. Many participants reported financial instability, with 29% earning between 11,000 to 20,000 PKR, and approximately 46% feeling their income was insufficient to meet their needs. This exacerbates their vulnerability and predisposition to criminal activity.

Substance abuse emerged as a critical factor, with 52% of participants acknowledging their drug use prior to incarceration. Tobacco was the most commonly used substance (19%), highlighting the need for targeted interventions that not only address the immediate issues of drug dependence but also tackle the underlying economic pressures

and family conflicts contributing to such behaviors. The stigma surrounding drug use and criminality further complicates their situation, limiting their access to support and rehabilitation. By prioritizing the well-being of female prisoners and addressing the socio-economic factors that contribute to their criminal behavior, we can work towards breaking the cycle of recidivism and fostering a safer, more supportive environment for all women. Ultimately, improving the lives of these individuals is not only crucial for their future but also for the stability and security of society as a whole.

REFERENCES

- Addressing the 105,000 increases in the global female prison population, ten years after the Bangkok Rules were adopted - Penal Reform International. (2020, December 15). Penal Reform International. <https://www.penalreform.org/blog/addressing-the-105000-increase-in-the-global-female/>
- Admin. (2024, September 13). The alarming rise of female criminality in Pakistan: A Call to Action by Kashif Mirza. Voice of World News. <https://voiceofworld.org/2024/09/13/the-alarming-rise-of-female-criminality-in-pakistan-a-call-to-action-by-kashif-mirza/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20report%2C%20a,as%20a%20pressing%20social%20concern.>
- Research, S. (2024). Challenges facing women in prison: A case of Narok prison. Afribary. <https://afribary.com/works/challenges-facing-women-in-prison-a-case-of-narok-prison>
- Category: Faith & Culture - Baptist Standard. (n.d.). <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/faith-culture/page/57/?start=375&print=print-search>
- Birkbeck, University of London. (2023, August 1). New Birkbeck research shows the world female prison population has increased by 60% since 2000. Birkbeck, University of London. <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/news/new-birkbeck-research-shows-the-world-female-prison-population-has-increased-by-60-percent-since-2000>
- Islam, M. J. & Khatun, N. (2013). On the etiology of Female Offending in Bangladesh: Toward a Quest for Alternative Explanation. EUROPEAN ACADEMIC RESEARCH, 401-427.
- Islam, M. M., & Talukder, M. A. (2021). The impact of vulnerable family relation on female criminality: Its forms, causes, and consequences in society. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354116253_The_Impact_of_Vulnerable_Family_Relation_on_Female_Criminality_Its_Forms_Causes_and_Consequences_in_Society
- Pollak, O. (1950). *Criminality of Women*. Baltimore: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Simon, R. (1976). *American Women and Crime. The Analysis of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Sage Publications.
- Mishra, L. & Gautam, B. (1982). *Female Criminality, Causes, and Consequences*. Reading in Criminology, Souvenir Volume.
- Shariff, A. & K, S. (1982). Social Predictors in Juvenile Delinquency. *Indian Journal of Criminology*, 10(1), 42-46.
- Pandy Awadesh S.P, Singh K.R. (2006). *Women Prisoners and Their Dependent Children*, (New Delhi: Serials Publications).
- Madhurima. (2009). *Women, Crime and Prison life*, (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publishing House).
- Jill L. Rosenbaum, "Family Dysfunction and Female Delinquency," *Crime and Delinquency* 35, (1989): 31-44.
- Effects of Criminal Parents on Children [Marripedia]. (n.d.). https://marripedia.org/effects_of_criminal_parents_on_children

- Samridhi. (2024). Unveiling Complexity: Factors Influencing Women's Involvement in Crime. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*, 1-2. <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2024/3/20558.pdf>
- Adler, F. (1975). *Sisters in crime. The rise of a new female criminal*. USA: McGraw Hill Company.
- Simon, R. (1975). *Women and crime*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books.
- Saeed, N., Rehman, T. U., & Usmani, M. A. (2018). A criminological study of the socioeconomic factors of criminality among Pakistani females. *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change*, 5(4), 19-29. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijcesc.2018100102>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2018). *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related Killing of Women and Girls*. UNODC.
- Chesney-Lind, M., & Pasko, L. (2013). *The Female Offender: Girls, Women, and Crime*. SAGE Publications.