

## Chapter 1

# THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF FEMALE OFFENDING AND INCARCERATION PATTERNS

## INTRODUCTION

There is one universally accepted fact about crime – men commit more crime than women. This finding persists regardless of time, culture, criterion measure (e.g. official versus self-report) or scholarly orientation (e.g. feminist or evolutionary). This chapter addresses three main areas. First, female offending patterns are described relative to those for males. Conclusions are based on research findings derived from multiple sources, including official arrest statistics, self-report crime surveys and victimization studies. Some studies that have examined trends in crime rates over time are also included. Second, historical and contemporary incarceration trends are discussed. Third, qualitative and quantitative research that has examined the nature or 'gestalt' (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996) of female crime is reviewed. Throughout the chapter we also provide international and ethno-cultural comparisons when available.

## FEMALE OFFENDING PATTERNS

Recently compiled statistics from various countries have demonstrated that females are three to five times less likely than males to be arrested, charged or detained in police custody. In Canada, women accounted for 17% of all adults charged with a criminal offence in 2003 (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2004). Likewise, in England and Wales, 17% of all arrests in 2003/2004 were attributed to females (girls and women) (Murray & Fiti, 2004). Moreover, a national Australian survey also illustrated that females (girls and women) were less likely (17%) than their male counterparts (83%) to be placed under police custody (Taylor & Bareja, 2002). Lastly, in the United States, females (girls and women) accounted for 23% of all arrests in 2002 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002). Thus, while American females were markedly less likely than American males to be arrested, they still accounted for a greater share of their country's

overall arrest rate relative to their counterparts in Canada, Australia or England and Wales.

Not only does the recent statistical portrait support the position that females engage in crime less frequently than males, but a number of reviews have reached the same conclusion (Belknap, 2001; Campbell, 2002; Ellis, 1988; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Steffensmeier, 2001a). For example, Ellis' (1988) comprehensive review revealed that males committed more crime than females in virtually all of the 77 studies that were examined. This conclusion was based on a heterogeneous group of studies from around the world that employed a variety of different outcome measures. Similarly, self-report studies derived primarily from non-adjudicated samples of youths have also confirmed that young females commit less crime relative to their male counterparts (Canter, 1982; Cernkovich & Giordano, 1979). However, self-report methods have illustrated that the 'gender gap' in crime, particularly less serious crime, is markedly less when juxtaposed against the official portrait. For example, two American studies (Canter, 1982; Cernkovich & Giordano, 1979) demonstrated that, compared to girls, boys were only twice as likely to self-report criminal conduct. Furthermore, the gender differences virtually disappeared when the analyses were restricted to the least serious forms of crime (e.g. minor drug use and shoplifting). Conversely, the gender gap widened considerably (i.e. an average male to female ratio of 5:1) when the analyses focused on more serious types of crime such as burglary, robbery and car theft. Also noteworthy, Cernkovich and Giordano (1979) showed that non-white girls were significantly more likely than their white female counterparts to self-report violent offences that were relational or interpersonal in nature (e.g. fist fighting, using a weapon to attack someone, gang fighting, extortion and carrying weapons).

It is important to highlight that the American findings are consistent with results obtained from a prospective cohort study that examined the criminal trajectories of children ( $N = 1037$ , 52% male, 48% female) born in Dunedin, New Zealand (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001). This study collected multiple waves of data on 91% of all children born between April 1972 and March 1973. In sum, Moffitt and Caspi (2001) reported that the male-to-female ratio for individuals classified as adolescent-limited (i.e. criminal conduct begins during adolescence, is relatively minor and short-lived) was only 1.5:1. In contrast, the male-to-female ratio for individuals described as 'life-course persistent' (e.g. antisocial conduct begins during childhood, is serious, diverse and persistent) was considerably higher at 10:1.

Moffitt and Caspi's (2001) conclusion that gender disparities in criminal conduct are greatest for serious crime has also been observed in regards to violent criminal conduct. In particular, Ellis (1988) observed that the gender differential in criminal conduct was always strongest for aggressive crime. The author defined aggressive crime as the intentional harming or threatening of another person. In brief, his review of 37 studies revealed that the male-to-female ratio for aggressive crime was substantial, ranging from 5:1 to 10:1. Unfortunately the results were not reported separately for adolescent and adult offenders.

Official statistics have reported similar gender differences in regards to violent crime. For example, in Canada, women account for only 16% of all violent charges brought against adult offenders (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2004). However, they account for a relatively higher percentage of property charges (23%). Similarly, females in England and Wales are arrested most frequently for theft (41%) followed by violence against the person (24%) (Murray & Fiti, 2004). Lastly, Steffensmeier's research has also demonstrated that females are substantially less likely to be arrested for violent crime in comparison to their male counterparts. Moreover, this finding has persisted across time (e.g. 1965 to 1995) and has been found to exist in 'adult only' female cohorts (Steffensmeier, 1980, 1993, 2001b).

Evidence that further corroborates the gender disparity in violent criminal conduct can be gleaned from victimization surveys, notably Greenfeld and Snell's (1999) research. Greenfeld and Snell analysed five years of data (1993–1997) from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted annually in the United States. In brief, the NCVS collects information about crime (regardless of whether or not it was reported to the police) from a nationally representative sample of US residents age 12 or older. Overall, their analysis was derived from approximately 40 000 interviews with individuals who reported experiencing some form of violent victimization. A number of noteworthy results emerged. Of the identified violent offenders, 14% (or 1 in 7) were female. Not surprisingly, the gender disparity was greatest for violent sexual offences (1 in 50) and least for simple assault (1 in 6). Moreover, the victims reported that the vast majority of female perpetrators were adults (72%). Similar trends emerged for the male perpetrators (74%).

In sum, evidence gleaned from official statistics, self-report surveys as well as victimization studies has illustrated that females are markedly less likely than males to engage in physically violent behaviour. Interestingly however, another body of literature has illustrated that when 'aggression' is broadly defined to include both overt and covert forms of violence, gender disparities disappear (Quinsey, Skilling, Lalumière & Craig, 2004). Briefly, overt or physical aggression is defined as harm to others through damage or threats of damage to physical well-being. Thus, expressions of overt aggression are likely to attract legal attention. In contrast, covert or *relational* aggression harms others through damage or threat of damage to relationships, and can be direct or indirect, as well as verbal or non-verbal. Examples include threatening to end a friendship unless a peer complies with a request, gossiping and spreading disparaging rumours, and using the 'silent treatment' to punish or control others (Crick, Ostrov, Appleyard, Jansen & Casas, 2004). While covert forms of aggression are generally perceived as less serious than overt forms, it has been persuasively argued that relational violence causes significant short- and long-term harm (Putallaz & Bierman, 2004). Although the study of relational violence is relatively new, it has garnered considerable momentum in regards to young girls and pre-schoolers. For example, the term *relational violence* is referenced in almost every chapter in a recent multi-authored, edited book (Putallaz & Bierman, 2004) entitled *Aggression, Antisocial Behaviour, and Violence among*

*Girls.* Nonetheless, there is a paucity of research pertaining to adult female offenders.

A fair body of longitudinal research has been devoted to describing female offending patterns over time. Steffensmeier and colleagues, for example, have conducted the most exhaustive and statistically sophisticated analysis in this area. This research spans almost two decades and has been instrumental in dispelling the notion that females have somehow 'caught up' with males in terms of offence frequency and severity and that the Women's Movement was causally related to the narrowing gender gap in crime (i.e. Emancipation Theory).

Building on his previous works in 1978 and 1980, Steffensmeier (1993) examined female arrest statistics reported in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data during the period from 1960 to 1990. In brief, his analysis indicated that changes in offending were similar for both genders over the 30-year period of study. For example, Steffensmeier (1993) reported large increases in the following offence categories: larceny, fraud, driving under the influence, drug violations and assault. Conversely, decreases were observed in arrest rates for public drunkenness, sex offences, vagrancy, suspicion and gambling. More recently, Steffensmeier (2001b) extended the time frame to 1995, and similar trends were noted.

The cross-gender stability in patterns of arrest rates over time has also been reported in Canada. Boritch and Hagan (1990) demonstrated a number of similarities between the genders in regards to arrest rates incurred in one Canadian city (Toronto) between 1859 and 1955. Not only did male and female arrest rates decline but there were striking similarities in the long-term patterns for different offence categories. In particular, while males evidenced higher violent arrest rates throughout the study interval, violent arrest rates declined in both genders, although the decline was somewhat more acute for females. Interestingly, crimes of public disorder (e.g. drunk and disorderly, vagrancy) accounted for the largest percentage of arrest rates in both genders.

Campbell's (2002) review of the extant literature has revealed similar patterns. In particular, she reported that male and female crime rates co-vary at exceedingly high levels (e.g. correlations in excess of 0.95). Moreover, Campbell's conclusions are based on research conducted in England and Wales and the United States, as well as research that was conducted by the International Criminal Police Organization. Lastly, Beattie (1975) and Hanawalt (1979) have observed that male and female crime rates in England have risen and fallen together as far back as the thirteenth century.

Thus, the existing trend analyses involving arrest rates have revealed overwhelming similarities between the genders that have persisted across time. However, one noticeable difference has emerged. Specifically, Steffensmeier (1978) has illustrated that female arrest rates (girls and women) for property crime have increased at a faster rate relative to males, specifically from 1960 to 1975. He also demonstrated that the increase was primarily due to minor property crimes perceived as traditional 'female' crimes (e.g. shoplifting, theft of services, fraudulent cheques/credit cards) – a finding he later replicated with an independent adult female sample (Steffensmeier, 2001a). Belknap (2001) has

reached similar conclusions; specifically she posited that 'women's offending rates appear to be "catching up" to men's in the area of larceny/theft' (p. 117). Similarly, Campbell (2002) also concluded that women's involvement in petty property crime has demonstrated a marked increase relative to that for men during the last 30 years.

Collectively, the trend analyses stand in stark contrast to conclusions reached by other influential authors (e.g. Adler, 1975) who, at one time, emphatically argued that women were 'catching up' with men in the criminal underworld. Theories that emerged from this erroneous conclusion (e.g. the liberation hypothesis) are discussed at length in Chapter 2. Perhaps one of the most important implications of these findings is that they strongly support the hypothesis proposed by some authors (e.g. Campbell, 2002) that similar aetiological factors account for both male and female criminality. The validity of this hypothesis is also explored at length in Chapter 2.

## INCARCERATION TRENDS

A number of reviewers have provided historical accounts of female incarceration patterns (e.g. Dobash, Dobash & Gutteridge, 1986; Feinman, 1983; Heidensohn, 1985; Morris, 1987). Based on these collective works, Belknap (2001) has traced the evolution of female incarceration patterns from the sixteenth century through to the present day. In brief, she has made the following observations. While imprisonment became a regular form of punishment during the late sixteenth century, it was not until the late nineteenth century that society readily accepted and endorsed its use. Importantly, this trend did not vary as a function of gender. Additionally, Belknap (2001) has noted how historical accounts have underscored some notable differences between male and female incarceration experiences. Specifically, the practice of housing females in male prisons, a practice that persisted until the 1850s in England and the 1870s in the United States, resulted in a number of harsh consequences unique to women. In particular, although women were housed in separate living units, they were still highly disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts in terms of vulnerability to rape, restricted access to women-specific services and the absence of female guards.

Next, Belknap (2001) described how prison reformers in the United States and England were instrumental in transforming the prison environment for women. Most notable among these reformers was Elizabeth Fry. Elizabeth Fry, who commenced her work in the UK in 1816, was the first prison reformer to focus exclusively on women. Along with countless other reformers (e.g. Quakers, charity workers, early-day feminists), Elizabeth Fry worked throughout the nineteenth century to improve the incarceration experience of women. The most notable changes brought on by these reformers were: (1) a paradigm shift from punishment to rehabilitation, including the need to provide women-specific treatment; (2) a recognition that viable employment options must be provided to women; and (3) the creation of female-only reformatories that resembled cottages and were staffed with female guards.

The final segment of Belknap's (2001) review focuses on changes that occurred in the twentieth century. In brief, she describes how the twentieth century ushered in the 'progressive era', a period characterized by the professionalism of female prison administrators as well as the establishment of offender classification, largely the purview of physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists. However, she argues that little in the way of 'reform' occurred throughout most of the twentieth century. She concludes by outlining contemporary problems still faced by female inmates, specifically: (1) sizeable geographic distance between incarcerated women and their loved ones due to the sporadic and isolated location of female prisons; (2) limited options available to women in the areas of education and employment; (3) absence of specialized treatment programmes for women; and (4) failure to segregate the more serious and mentally ill offenders from the less serious offenders. Thus, from a historical vantage point, female incarceration experiences have improved; however, some problems persist in contemporary settings.

Recent estimates indicate that women comprise approximately 5% of the world's prison population (Lemgruber, 2001). More specifically, women comprise only 5 to 7% of the incarcerated adult populations in the following Western countries: Canada (5.0%), the United States (6.9%), Australia (6.9%) and England and Wales (5.9%). However, women account for a relatively higher share of the incarcerated population in Hong Kong (21.6%) and in Thailand (18.4%) (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2004).

While women constitute a small proportion of the incarcerated population relative to men, the evidence indicates that the proportion of females incarcerated is growing and, in some countries, at a faster pace than that for men (Lemgruber, 2001). For example, in the United States, Harrison and Beck (2005) recently reported that the female incarceration rate increased almost 34% between 1995 (47 per 100 000) and 2004 (63 per 100 000). Although the national incarceration rate for males also increased during the same time period (i.e. 789 per 100 000 to 923 per 100 000), the relative increase was substantially smaller (17%). Similarly, in Australia, Cameron (2001) illustrated that the female incarceration rate has outpaced the male incarceration rate. For example, between 1991 and 1999, the female incarceration rate (per 100 000) grew from 9.2 to 15.3, representing a relative increase of 66%; and although the male incarceration rate also grew (194 per 100 000 to 241 per 100 000), the relative increase was markedly less (24%).

Additionally, Cameron (2001) compared indigenous and non-indigenous incarceration rates for women. She demonstrated that the incarceration rate almost doubled from 1991 to 1999 for Indigenous women (from 104 per 100 000 to 207 per 100 000, representing a 99% relative increase). In comparison, the increase for non-indigenous women was substantially lower (from 8 per 100 000 to 12 per 100 000, representing a 50% relative increase). She concluded by noting that while the absolute number of incarcerated indigenous women was small in 1999 (273), the rate per 100 000 (207 per 100 000) was comparable to that of men in the same year (241 per 100 000). Similarly, in the United States, black women (359 per 100 000) were almost 4½ times more likely to be incarcerated in 2004 compared to white women (81 per 100 000). A relative disproportion was also

noted for Hispanic women (i.e. incarceration rate: 143 per 100 000) (Harrison & Beck, 2005).

In Canada, parallel trends have emerged. For example, between 1981 and 2002, the incarceration rate for federally sentenced women<sup>1</sup> increased at a faster pace relative to the federal male incarceration rate. Specifically, the female incarceration rate increased 27.2% during this time period (from 2.2 per 100 000 to 2.8 per 100 000). Although the male incarceration rate also increased during this time period (from 96 per 100 000 to 110 per 100 000), the relative increase was markedly less (14.5%) (Sinclair & Boe, 2002). Finally, similar trends have been observed in England – for example, between 1993 and 1999 the female incarceration rate rose 100% relative to a 43% rise in the male prison population (Home Office, 2000). In brief, while incarceration rates for females have increased at a faster pace relative to male incarceration rates, men still significantly outnumber women in prison populations world wide.

Given that a corresponding increase in female arrest rates has not been observed, there is consensus in the literature that procedural factors have been largely responsible for the observed increase in female incarceration rates rather than an actual increase in female crime. Proposed procedural factors have concentrated primarily on changes in sentencing practices such as the implementation of harsher penalties for drug-related crimes (Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Home Office, 2000; Lemgruber, 2001; Mauer, Potler & Wolf, 1999; Owen, 2001). For example, Owen (2001) states: 'Quite simply, the war on drugs has become a war on women and it has contributed to the explosion in women's prison populations' (p. 245). Lastly, it is necessary to emphasize that the incarceration data mirrors the arrest data, at least to some extent. In general, women are being incarcerated primarily for property, non-violent and drug-related offences (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2001; Home Office, 2000; Lemgruber, 2001; Owen, 2001).

Virtually every profile analysis has revealed one consistent finding: incarcerated female offenders are poor, young, uneducated and lacking in employment skills. Moreover, this finding has been reported world wide (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2005; Cameron, 2001; Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2001; Her Majesty's Prison Service, 2004; Lemgruber, 2001). Additionally, there is evidence that visible minorities and indigenous or Aboriginal peoples are disproportionately represented within female prison populations. Further, the data suggest that while this disproportionate representation is observed for both genders, it is even more evident among female inmates. For example, in England and Wales, 24% of the incarcerated male population belongs to a visible minority group. Unfortunately, an even higher proportion (31%) of the incarcerated female population belongs to a visible minority group (Her Majesty's Prison Service, 2004). Similar trends have been observed in Canada (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2001), the United States (Harrison & Beck, 2005) and Australia (Cameron, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup>In Canada, offenders sentenced to periods of imprisonment of two years or more fall under federal jurisdiction. Those sentenced to less than two years are the responsibility of the provinces.

As Lemgruber (2001) aptly noted, 'being poor, uneducated and unemployed' is not a uniquely female problem. Male inmates are also likely to be poor, uneducated and unemployed. However, it is important to emphasize that a number of reports from various countries have illustrated that female inmates do evidence different, albeit not necessarily criminogenic, needs in comparison to their male counterparts. For example, Her Majesty's Prison Service (2004) reported that women are more likely to demonstrate certain mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or phobia (66%) relative to their male counterparts (20%). Similarly, women inmates are more likely to require medical intervention. Specifically, about 20% of the incarcerated female prison population asks to see a medical professional each day, a figure that is twice as high as that of men. Moreover, women prisoners account for a disproportionate number of self-harm incidents. For example, while females only comprise about 6% of the prison population they account for 25% of self-harm incidents. Also 55% of the adult female prison population consists of primary caregivers responsible for children and elders (Her Majesty's Prison Service, 2004). Similar trends have been reported in the United States (Bloom et al., 2003) and Australia (Willis & Rushforth, 2003). Lastly, it is important to note that the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse in women is typically higher relative to that reported for males (Bloom et al., 2003; Morash, Bynum & Koons, 1998; Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990).

### OFFENCE GESTALTS

It is a commonly held belief that the context of female offending is markedly different from that of male offending. Research that has examined the situational context or the 'gestalt' (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996) of female offending has focused primarily on motivational factors and the nature of the relationship between the offender and the victim. This section examines the current information on the 'gestalt' of women's offending patterns, both violent and non-violent.

Official statistics world wide confirm that less than 1% of all arrests or charges are for homicide-related crimes (Corrections Statistics Committee, 2004; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). However, females are still relatively less likely than males to commit homicide, particularly premeditated homicide (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2004; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

Greenfeld and Snell (1999) examined the characteristics of all homicide offences that occurred between 1976 and 1997 in the United States. In brief, their analysis was based on 60 000 homicides committed by females and 400 000 homicides committed by males, and the following observations were noted. Females (60%) were markedly more likely to have murdered an intimate partner or family member compared to their male counterparts (20%). In contrast, females were substantially less likely to have murdered a stranger (1 in 14) in comparison to their male counterparts (1 in 4). These findings have been replicated by other researchers who have used data from the



United States and Canada, as well as England and Wales (Gauthier & Bankston, 1997; Mann, 1996; Wilson & Daly, 1992). For example, researchers have found that approximately two-thirds of lethal violence by males is levied against non-familial victims. Conversely, less than 50% of lethal violence by females occurs outside the family. Greenfeld and Snell (1999) also reported that mothers and fathers accounted for roughly the same proportion of homicides against children (both biological and step-children). However, mothers were more likely to have killed children during infancy while fathers were more likely to have murdered children over the age of 7. Lastly, while Greenfeld and Snell (1999) did not disaggregate the data by offender age, they did report that the vast majority (approximately 94%) of female-perpetrated murders were committed by adult females. A comparative analysis of male homicide offenders was not reported.

Interestingly, Kruttschnitt (2001) has noted some motivational similarities between males and females in regards to non-familial homicide. Specifically, she described how males are likely to kill acquaintances as a result of disputes over status competition and 'face-saving' (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Similarly, she observed that females who commit non-domestic assault appear to be doing so for the same reasons as males, specifically vindication and/or an attempt to restore personal integrity. Kruttschnitt's (2001) interpretation was based largely on Daly and Wilson's (1988) evolutionary explanation of homicide offending as well as Anne Campbell's (1984) ethnographic research that involved female gang members in New York. In sum, while the existing evidence is scant, it does suggest that gender does not moderate the motivation underlying non-familial homicide or assault.

In contrast, motivational factors appear to diverge with respect to intimate homicide. For example, there appears to be consensus in the literature that when females murder intimate partners, it is largely in response to years of domestic abuse (Belknap, 2001; Owen, 2001). Conversely, jealousy, infidelity, desertion and control appear to be the catalysts motivating males who murder their intimate partners (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

Daly and Wilson (1988) identified youthfulness, poverty and single parenthood as key risk factors in the explanation of maternal infanticide. In the case of mothers who kill older children, they assign a central role to depression. In contrast, they posit that fathers are more likely to kill children in response to uncertain paternity. This hypothesis was supported by Wilczynski's (1995) research conducted in England and Wales. Wilczynski examined the factors that motivated 20 fathers and 28 mothers who had murdered their children. In brief, he found that male-perpetrated child-killings were motivated by one of three reasons: (1) retaliation (e.g. anger against spouse redirected towards the children); (2) jealousy or rejection by the victim (e.g. believes the child is not his; feels that the mother gives too much attention to the child); and (3) discipline killings (e.g. child killed during the course of punishment). In contrast, the motivational patterns of the mothers were strikingly different. Specifically, the following motives were identified: (1) killing of unwanted or unplanned children (e.g. usually occurring within the first 24 hours of birth); (2) altruistic killing (e.g. 'mercy killings'); (3) psychotic killing; and (4) Munchausen Syndrome

by Proxy (i.e. when the parent induces an illness in the child and repeatedly seeks medical attention).

Researchers have also investigated women's participation in other forms of violent offending, specifically in the context of robbery and assault. Sommers and Baskin (1993) conducted 65 in-depth interviews with violent female offenders who had been arrested and/or incarcerated for a variety of violent street crime (e.g. robbery, burglary, arson, homicide, kidnapping and weapons-related offences) in the United States. The study revealed that 89% of the robbery incidents were economically driven. Further, the vast majority (81%) of women who were financially motivated reported needing the money to support a drug habit. Furthermore, the victim was usually a stranger (72%). Lastly, two-thirds of the robberies occurred during the commission of other crimes such as prostitution, drug-dealing or theft. In regards to assault, the motivations and circumstances were varied, and often described as impulsive, disorganized, frequently involving weapons and related to intoxication. Moreover, the authors reported that the majority of assaults (72%) were characterized by situations in which the victim precipitated the assault to some degree.

Miller (1998) compared the motivational and situational factors in a small sample of female ( $n = 14$ ) and male ( $n = 23$ ) robbery offenders. In brief, two notable findings emerged. First, the motivations associated with robbery were gender invariant – males and females both reported committing their offences primarily for financial reasons (e.g. to obtain material goods). Other motivations (e.g. support a drug habit, thrill-seeking or revenge) were less frequently reported in both genders. Second, the strategies used to commit robbery varied as a function of gender. Men were more likely to use direct forms of violence (e.g. gun). Women, on the other hand, were more likely to use varied approaches that were typically less violent in nature – for example, they often targeted other women as victims, or promised to exchange sex for money but did not comply with their part of the agreement. Lastly, they often reported working with male co-offenders. In sum, it would seem that when women commit non-familial violent crime the 'gestalt' is markedly similar to that of men. However, the paucity of research in this area, particularly research that includes male comparison groups, precludes the formulation of firm conclusions.

Qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that female offenders are less likely to use weapons in comparison to males. As noted, female robbers are less likely than their male counterparts to use weapons during the commission of a robbery offence (Sommers & Baskin, 1993). Similarly, Greenfeld and Snell's (1999) quantitative analysis also revealed that violent female offenders are less likely to use weapons relative to violent male offenders. In particular, Greenfeld and Snell's five-year analysis (1993–1997) of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data in the United States revealed that, of the estimated 2.1 million female violent offenders identified in the survey, only 15% had used a weapon (e.g. blunt object, knife, firearm). In contrast, 28% of the identified male violent offenders (13.1 million) had used a weapon (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999).

The 'gestalt' literature has also attempted to describe the nature of non-violent crime in women relative to men. In short, this body of literature suggests that women commit property crime out of economic necessity (e.g. to feed and clothe

children) (Belknap, 2001; Campbell, 2002; Carlen, 1988; Chesney-Lind, 1986; Gilfus, 1992; Hunnicutt & Broidy, 2004; Miller, 1986a). In contrast, it is argued that men commit property crime as a means of adventure and status enhancement. Campbell's (2002) vivid description accurately captures this position:

Unlike the low-profile, mundane involvement of women, men use their criminal profits to furnish a conspicuous and lavish lifestyle. For men, the aim is not simply to pay the rent but to broadcast their over-the-top lifestyle in the local community and thereby to gain indebtedness, prestige and respect. (p. 220)

Relative to men's property crime, women's is more responsive to personal or family need (rather than desire for a hedonic lifestyle), is viewed as a form of work (rather than adventure), involves more frequent offences with smaller returns and is characterized by concealment (rather than advertising) of their criminal activities. Women need resources as an end in themselves. Men use resources as a means to status and respect. (p. 222)

Three studies (Daly, 1989; Goldstraw, Smith & Sakurai, 2005; Zietz, 1981) have specifically examined the nature of white-collar crime in females. While Daly and Goldstraw et al. included a male comparison group, Zietz's analysis did not. Zietz studied embezzlement and fraud in a sample of women incarcerated in a correctional institution in California. Based largely on the in-depth analysis of six women incarcerated for embezzlement (breach of trust offences), Zietz (1981) devised a 'typology' of female embezzlers: (1) the obsessive protectors (motivation: children); (2) the romantic dreamers (motivation: to preserve the love of a husband); (3) the greedy opportunists (motivation: originally do it for children or to secure the love of a husband, but continue doing it because they are now accustomed to the 'good life'); and (4) the victims of pressure or persuasion (motivation: do it out of fear that they will lose a significant other). The belief that women commit property crime, specifically white-collar crime, 'out of love for family' is also supported by Campbell (2002):

Lest we fall into the trap of imagining a female executive busily transferring funds and stocks into her account on a computer, these offences encompass passing bad cheques, defrauding an innkeeper, other thefts of service, credit-card fraud, welfare fraud, stealing from an employer and shoplifting. Criminal women are more likely to be lying to welfare agencies or stealing tonight's dinner than transferring funds to offshore accounts. (p. 219)

Daly's (1989) study of white-collar crime in the United States noted several gender differences in convicted men and women. Specifically, women were more likely to have worked alone and were more likely than men to have identified 'family need' as a driving motivational factor. Additionally, women were typically employed in clerical roles (e.g. bank tellers) whereas men were more often employed in managerial or administration positions. Lastly, the convicted men in the study garnered larger financial gains in comparison to the women.

The final and most recent study was conducted by Goldstraw et al. (2005). The researchers examined the nature of serious fraud in a sample of 155 separate cases brought before either the Australian or New Zealand court system. Cases met the definition of serious fraud if a financial loss over \$100 000 was incurred, if there was evidence of sophisticated planning and formal organization and if the offenders were considered to be professionals. In brief, the authors concluded that, despite popular belief, women do commit sophisticated and well-thought-out cases of serious fraud. Moreover, while greed was the most frequently cited primary motive in both genders, women were twice as likely to cite 'please others' as a primary motive. Examples within this category included: 'not being able to refuse their families anything', 'supporting children after the break up of a relationship' or 'wishing to buy gifts for partners as a means of demonstrating affection'. Interestingly, half of the women committed the crime with a male co-offender while the remaining half acted alone. Similar to Daly's findings the average loss was substantially lower among the female offenders (average cost of the fraud: \$165 505 excluding one case involving \$80 million) in comparison to their male counterparts (average cost of the fraud: \$1 340 532). Further, while both genders were highly educated, 16% of the male offenders belonged to professional associations or possessed statutory registration in their respective professions. In comparison, none of the female offenders possessed either of these two characteristics.

The nature or 'gestalt' of drug-related crimes committed by females has also been explored. Belknap's (2001) review of the extant literature examined gender differences pertaining to drug use and drug dealing. In terms of drug dealing, she suggests that the greatest gender difference revealed in the literature is that women are typically relegated to the lower echelons of the drug trade (e.g. courier) relative to their male counterparts who typically wield the greatest power. In terms of drug use, she cites Inciardi, Lockwood and Pottieger's (1993) research, which has shown that female drug users are more likely than male drug users to have been indoctrinated into drug use by an intimate partner. However, she also cites Maher's (1995) research illustrating that a multitude of factors, not just the negative influence of an intimate partner, contribute to female drug use, including same-sex peers, opportunity, cost and past drug experience. Lastly, in regards to maintenance, there is evidence that while females continue to use drugs as a coping mechanism, males are more likely to continue their drug use as a result of peer pressure and pleasure (Inciardi et al. 1993).

Research pertaining to drug use has examined its linkage to other forms of crime, namely, prostitution. Chesney-Lind's research (e.g. Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998) has described how childhood victimization, running away, prostitution and drug use are inextricably linked. These linkages have been organized into a theoretical framework, *feminist pathways research*, that is described in Chapter 2.

Lastly, the final 'gestalt' component deals with the role men play in female offending patterns. Steffensmeier and Allen (1996) have concluded that 'the role of men in initiating women into crime – especially serious crime – is a consistent finding across research' (p. 467). While this suggestion has been supported by some researchers (e.g. Brownstein, Spunt, Crimmins & Langley, 1995; Covington,

1985), others have challenged this contention. In particular, Kruttschnitt (2001) has recommended that this statement be qualified. Specifically, she notes that while women may be more likely to commit robbery with an accomplice, the accomplice is not necessarily male. Moreover, she emphasizes that women are more likely to act alone in the commission of an assault or homicide. Likewise, Sommers and Baskin (1993) have demonstrated that while female robbers often acted with accomplices (63%), the accomplices were either female (38%) or male (25%).

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the commonly held belief that males are the primary instigators in female crime can be garnered from Greenfeld and Snell's (1999) five-year analysis (1993–1997) of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data conducted in the United States. Specifically, among the estimated 2.1 million female violent offenders included in their analysis, most (53%) acted alone. Thus, over 1 million female violent offenders committed their violent crimes in the absence, or at least in the apparent absence, of men. Moreover, 40% of the female violent offenders acted with a *female* accomplice. In contrast, only 8% were in the company of at least one male co-offender. Interestingly, only 1% of the male violent offenders (there were 13.1 million male violent offenders in the study) committed the crime with a female co-offender. Thus, the belief that men play a pivotal role in the initiation of female crime has not been fully supported in the literature.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, which reviewed the nature and extent of female offending – in particular, adult female offending – a number of notable trends emerged. First, women commit less crime than men. Moreover, the gender disparity is greatest for violent and serious offending. In general, the 'gender gap' in crime, particularly violent and serious crime, has persisted across time, across countries and across studies published by varied scholarly orientations, using various methodologies. However, the magnitude of the gender difference does vary as a function of the outcome measure employed, with self-report strategies yielding the smallest differentials and official statistics generating the largest differences. Additionally, while the gender gap is widest in reference to overt forms of aggression – a finding confirmed in both official and self-report studies – it virtually disappears when relational or covert forms of aggression are considered. In brief, research focusing on self-reported crime in adult women as well as relational aggression in incarcerated adult women is noticeably absent.

On average, women comprise 5% of incarcerated populations world wide. However, statistical analyses have indicated that, in the last two decades, the female incarceration rate is growing at a faster rate than that of males. This finding is consistent across a number of countries including Canada, the United States, England and Wales and Australia. Most importantly, however, there is consensus that the observed increase has most likely resulted from changes in judicial processes (e.g. sentencing practices) rather than true differences in female criminal behaviour. Moreover, world wide, the average female offender is poor, uneducated and lacking in employment skills.

Lastly, this chapter examined the 'gestalt' of female offending and the following observations were noted. Women's violence does appear to be more relational and directed against familial members, particularly intimate partners. Moreover, the motivational factors that contribute to familial female violence appear to differ from those of their male counterparts. There are also similarities and differences in terms of the motivational factors that contribute to male and female drug and property offending.

In sum, women commit less crime, particularly less serious crime, than men, their incarceration rates are increasing at a faster rate relative to men and they evidence similarities as well as differences relative to men in terms of the contextual factors that characterize their crime. Future research must continue to explore gender differences in offending and incarceration patterns as well as the offence 'gestalt'. We now turn our attention to understanding female offending patterns through the lens of various theoretical perspectives.