

## **Sociological factors of women criminality: A systematic review**

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### **Abstract**

The number of women prisoners is rising globally, yet many rehabilitation programmes predominantly emphasize the psychological aspects of female inmates. This review underscores the importance of investigating the sociological factors that precede women's criminal behaviours. The systematic review encompassed documents from five databases: Emerald Insights, ERIC, PubMed, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. The inclusion criteria were documents published between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024, full-text articles, studies that involved incarcerated women over the age of 18, investigated the social factors that lead women into crime, and studies written in English. The exclusion criteria comprised studies that solely involved male offenders, before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and after 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024, unrelated content, duplicates, abstract-only papers, editorials, author responses, theses, books, book chapters, review studies, studies without available full-text, or serials. Out of 11,594 documents, 21 studies were finally selected for review. The sociological factors contributing to women's criminality revolved around family and intimate partner abuse victimization influenced by traditional gender roles, criminal community, as well as financial motivation and the impact of social media. These findings accentuate the importance of rehabilitation programmes addressing sociological factors to meet the unique needs of women offenders. In conclusion, this systematic review provides an in-depth understanding of the sociological factors that led women into crime, serving as important insights to the development of prison interventions.

**Keywords:** Female prisoner, rehabilitation programmes, social factors, systematic review, victimization, women's criminality

### **Introduction**

Global statistics evidences a significant surge in the population of women and girls in prison, rising nearly 60% since the year 2000 (Fair & Walmsley, 2022). It is imperative for researchers and policymakers to prioritize the well-being of incarcerated women by developing rehabilitation programmes that address their specific needs. While many existing prison rehabilitation programmes focus on psychological health aspects of female inmates only (Song et al., 2021), it is concerning that they often neglect sociological factors that also significantly influence the lives of women in prisons.

Psychological health, specifically mental health issues; often stemmed from past traumas (DeHart, 2008; Messina & Grella, 2006). Addressing the mental health aspects of women prisoners often focused on surface problems, as some of the psychological interventions in prison may not fully resolve the mental health issues they faced due to the presence of socioenvironmental challenges (McKeown & McCrory, 2019; Messina & Calhoun, 2022). To truly address the root problems, it is essential to also focus on the sociological aspects

that contribute to their criminal behaviours. Comprehensive programmes that tackle both psychological and sociological factors are more likely to support sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration of women inmates by reducing recidivism and improving their overall well-being.

The environment that women inmates live in is one of the important contributors to their criminal behaviours (Estrada & Nilsson, 2012). The environment will enable and develop social influences on an individual's opinions, beliefs, and behaviours; due to the connections within a closed network (Sweet & Adhikari, 2023). Often, these influences lead individuals to align more closely with the views and behaviours of those they are connected to (Sweet & Adhikari, 2023), and sometimes these connections are to people with pro-delinquent or pro-criminal attitudes and behaviours. In the field of sociology, it is important to understand that criminality cannot exist in isolation; it is intricately linked to society in which a person is in (Rachel, 2021).

This review focuses on identifying the sociological factors that contributed to women's criminality. It has the potential to assist criminologists, psychologists, and prison authorities in designing effective, evidence-based interventions tailored to the specific needs of female inmates, which differ from those of male inmates.

## **Method**

This systematic review adhered to the guidelines provided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021) to report the findings. The study protocol has been registered with the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) (CRD42023440087).

### *Identification of literature*

After reviewing the existing literature on sociological factors that contribute to women's involvement in crime, it was noted that the terms "criminal" is often used interchangeable with "antisocial", and "female" is frequently utilized interchangeably with "woman". In this study, a search string [("social" OR "sociological") AND ("criminality" OR "criminal behaviour" OR "criminal behaviours" OR "criminal behavior" OR "criminal behaviors" OR "antisocial behaviour" OR "antisocial behaviours" OR "antisocial behavior" OR "antisocial behaviors") AND ("female" OR "woman" OR "women")] was combed across five databases: Emerald Insights, ERIC, PubMed, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. These keywords were utilized after taking American and British English spellings into consideration.

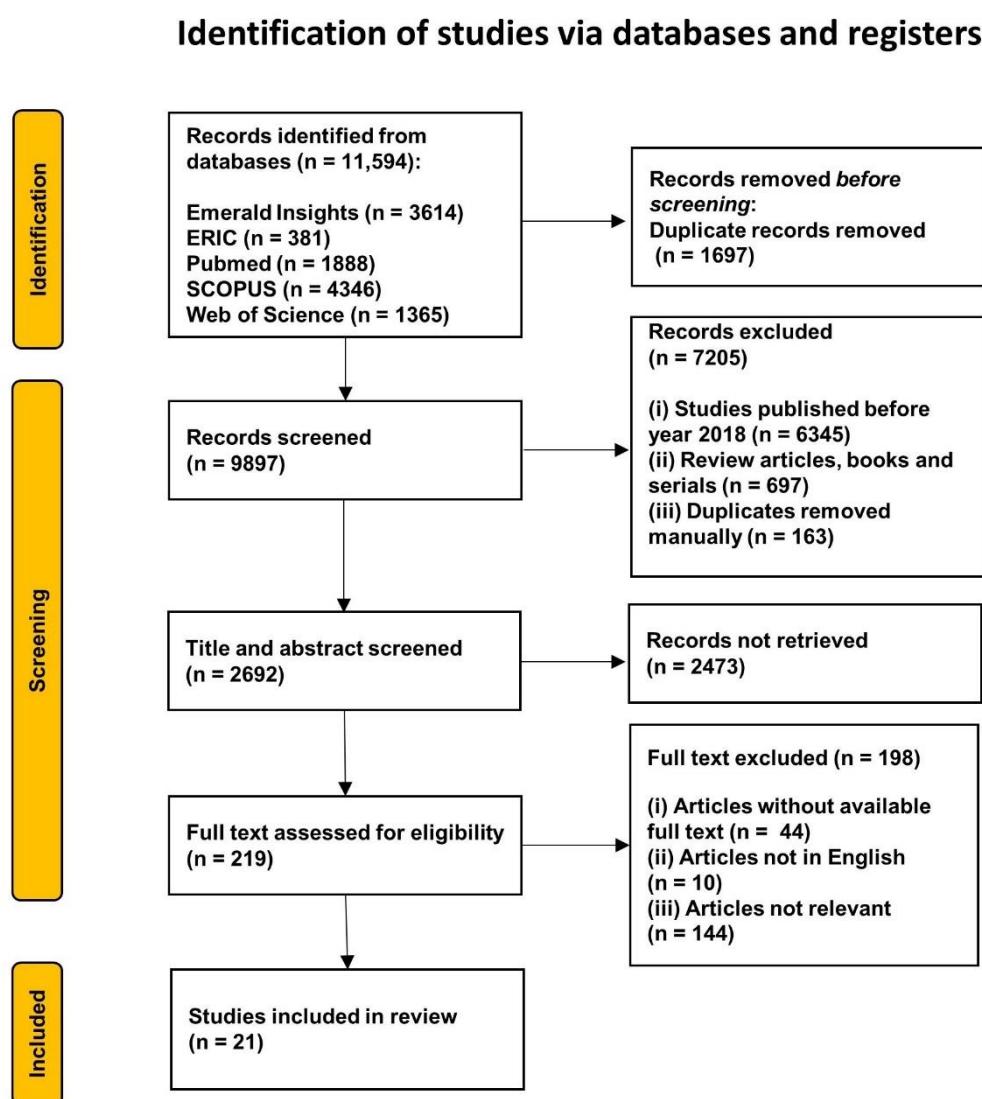
### *Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria*

In order to be reviewed in this study, several criteria were applied while screening for materials. The inclusion criteria for this review included documents that: (i) investigated the social factors that lead women into crime, (ii) involved women inmates aged 18 years and above, (iii) published between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024, (iv) published in Emerald Insights, ERIC, PubMed, SCOPUS, or Web of Science, (v) full text articles, and (vi) in the English language.

Studies that were excluded in this review were: (i) studies that were published before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and after 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024, (ii) duplicate or overlapping data, (iii) were actually unrelated content, and (iv) abstract-only papers, editorials, author responses, theses, books and book chapters, articles without available full-text, serials, or review studies.

### Screening and selection process

The screening process comprised of three steps: identification, screening, and inclusion (depicted in Figure 1). The review involved an extensive search across five reputable databases, resulting in the identification of 11,594 sources. After eliminating duplicates, 9,897 documents were subjected to screening based on the previously outlined exclusion criteria. Following this initial screening, 2,692 documents underwent further evaluation based on their titles and abstracts. Subsequently, 219 documents were retrieved for a detailed eligibility assessment. Furthering this, 198 documents were excluded because they were either not available in full-text online, not in English, or did not align with the inclusion criteria. Finally, 21 studies met the criteria for inclusion in this review.



Source: Page et al., 2021

**Figure 1.** Flow chart of article identification, screening, and inclusion

**Table 1.** Summary of included studies

No.	Authors (year)	Sample	Type of offences	Countries	Research methodology	Sociological factors	Measurement/ Tool	Findings
1.	Agboola et al. (2022)	11 former women inmates and parolees	Not specified	South Africa	Qualitative	Inmates' life experiences before imprisonment	Not specified	Discovered three themes: unhealthy and unsatisfying marriage, histories of sexual and emotional maltreatment, and financial purpose.
2.	Altintas & Bilici (2018)	200 inmates (100 males & 100 females)	Property crimes, sexual crimes, and violent crimes	Turkey	Quantitative	Childhood trauma and negative family experiences during childhood	Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28)	Childhood trauma, especially sexual abuse, had an impact on female offenders committing violent crimes in adulthood.
3.	Aristizábal (2020)	27 women inmates	Not specified	Colombia	Mixed method	Partner's bonds	Emotional co-dependency test (ICOD MP92-100) to assess emotional co-dependency and semi-structured interview guide	The quantitative results showed that most of the participants exhibited emotional co-dependency with their partners before and/or during imprisonment. The qualitative results were organized into three key themes: (i) "I would rather keep silent", (ii) "I did it for him", and (iii) "Although he doesn't love me".
4.	Becerra & Serra (2019)	94 women (81 inmates & 13 former inmates)	Not specified	Uruguay, Mexico, Colombia, and Spain	Qualitative	Inmates' life stories	Not specified	Women's involvement in crime was often attributed to affective bonds and gender violence within intimate relationships.
5.	Broidy et al. (2018)	470 female inmates	Property crimes and violent crimes	Australia	Quantitative	Childhood experiences (sexual abuse and physical or emotional abuse)	Self-created questionnaire	There is no relationship between abuse and the age of first offense, nor is abuse associated with the chronicity of offending. Physical and emotional abuse were more common among the younger onset group, while sexual abuse was more significant for the adult-onset group.
6.	Carvalho et al. (2023)	12 convicted women (aged 20-49)	Not specified	Portugal	Qualitative	Perspective of women inmates on their experiences in crime and social	Semi-structured interview guide	Three key themes emerged: (i) spatial concentration and risk of female deviant and offending behaviour, (ii) traditional female roles and offending across

						processes that structure and influence these non-conforming gender experiences.		generations, and (iii) changes in female roles in deviant and criminal activities.
7.	Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García (2022)	51 female inmates & 20 prison staffs	Drug related crime	Spain	Qualitative	Reasons of female criminality and their involvement in the international cocaine trafficking business.	Not specified	Three key themes emerged: (i) sociological profiles and geographical and social contexts of female drug mules (ii) recruitment, participation, and positions of women in the international cocaine business, (iii) benefits and risks of cocaine trafficking for female drug mules.
8.	DeHart (2018)	60 women incarcerated in a maximum-security prison	Homicide, robbery, drug related crime, homicide by child abuse, forgery, burglary, arson, shoplifting, kidnapping, assault and battery, felony DUI, child neglect, lewd act on a child, grand larceny, and financial transaction card theft.	Not specified	Qualitative	Life course experiences, gender neutral, and gender responsive factors.	Not specified	Findings demonstrate five different groupings: (i) aggressive career offenders, (ii) women who killed or assaulted persons in retaliation or self-defence, (iii) women who maltreated children, (iv) substance-dependent women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV), and (v) social capital offenders.
9.	Holligan et al. (2019)	9 female inmates	Drug related crime	Scotland	Qualitative	Participants' complicated lives and the diverse identity roles of women.	Not specified	Three themes emerged: (i) keeping it in the family, (ii) managing market domination, and (iii) females doing the business.
10.	Kalemi et al. (2019)	307 women (157 inmates & 150 women without a criminal record)	Homicides, serious physical harm, drug-related crimes, thefts, and white-collar crimes.	Greece	Quantitative	Childhood maltreatment	The Self-Perception Profile for Adults	Childhood maltreatment was associated with higher levels of aggression among inmates.

11.	Karatzias et al. (2018)	89 female inmates (Mean age = 34.5, SD = 9.97)	Not specified	Scotland	Quantitative	History of traumatic events	Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) and Life Events Checklist (LEC)	Almost all of the women experienced traumatic events during childhood and adulthood. The sentence length was associated with several traumas. The only significant mediator between childhood trauma and later offending was adult trauma experience.
12.	Lee et al. (2020)	770 criminal justice-involved women	Not specified	USA	Quantitative	Romantic relationship quality, status, and dissolution	Self-created questionnaire	The quality of the relationship and being in a relationship did not influence women's involvement in criminal activities, whether as a protective factor or a risk factor.
13.	Liu et al. (2021)	242 ex/offender (194 males & 48 females)	Not specified	USA	Quantitative	Adverse experiences and family bonds	Not specified	Female respondents who experienced early adversities showed higher risk of recidivism. Frequent visits to close relatives had only a minimal impact on reducing recidivism among female participants.
14.	Love et al. (2023)	10 convicted female sex traffickers	Sex trafficking (ages 24-56)	USA	Qualitative	Life experiences	Structured interview guide	Parental or family exploitation, physical and mental abuse, lack of educational opportunities, and limited access to social and economic support all contributed to women becoming involved in sex trafficking.
15.	Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour (2024)	4 homeless women who engaged in criminal activities for survival	Assault	Canada	Qualitative	Homelessness	Not specified	Protective factors against criminal behaviour include being away from unsafe neighbourhoods, interacting with prosocial individuals, receiving psychological therapy, and maintaining healthy relationships. Risk factors encompass frequent changes in caregivers, violent spouses or deviant peers, mental health issues, substance abuse problems, and behavioural problems.

16.	Morse et al. (2022)	31 drug use women	Drug related crime	USA	Qualitative	Related social determinant of health challenges, victimization, public health opportunities, and gender-based criminogenic risk factors	Not specified	Several main themes were identified: past histories of childhood or adolescent abuse, adult abduction or assault experiences, and trauma resulting from witnessing abuse of others.
17.	Nemavhola et al. (2024)	65 female observandi charged for non-violent crimes	Property crimes, crimes against the person, and crimes against the state	South Africa	Quantitative	Age, marital status, and employment	Retrospective record review	Age is linked to a higher likelihood of women being charged with crimes against individuals and property-related offences. Conversely, older age is associated with a lower probability of being charged with crimes against the state. Most observandi were found to be single and unemployed.
18.	Perkins et al. (2018)	89 female inmates	Not specified	USA	Quantitative	Social media usage and substance dependence	Texas Christian University Drug Screen (TCU-DS-II) to assess substance use and self-developed social media questionnaire	Participants spent a lot of time on social media, using it as a platform for criminal behaviours. Interestingly, many planned to reactivate their social media accounts upon release, even though seeing pictures of friends using drugs on social media served as a trigger for relapse.
19.	Scicluna & Clark (2019)	12 high-risk drug-using women prisoners (aged 23 – 51)	Not specified	Republic of Malta	Qualitative	Offending, victimization, and addiction	Not specified	This study identified women's pathway into crime through experiences of childhood victimization and intimate partner violence during adulthood. These experiences led participants to develop a victim identity, which they used as a coping mechanism for drug use.

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20.	Shen (2020)	2 rural-to-urban migrant female offenders	Illegal pyramid selling related crimes	China	Qualitative	Characteristics of women's criminal behaviour, as well as their entry into and roles within criminal enterprises	Not specified	Participants' involvement in illegal pyramid selling crimes was primarily driven by low pay rates and low education levels. Both of which were motivated by the pursuit of economic gain.
21.	Thornton (2024)	6 female offenders	Assault, prostitution, drug related crimes, and property crimes.	South Africa	Qualitative	Criminal community	Semi-structured interview guide	Women often reoffend due to living in violent communities, growing up in gangster families, the financial needs of their families, and easy access to criminal activities.

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## Results

### *Overview of included studies*

A summary of reviewed documents is presented in Table 1. By referring to the inclusion criteria of this systematic review, three studies required special attention. For studies conducted by Altintas and Bilici (2018) and Liu et al. (2021), which examined both male and female inmates; only findings related to females were included. In Carvalho et al.'s (2023) study which investigated women inmates across various age groups; only the findings from subsample 3, where the respondents were over 18 years old were included. The social factors determined in this review were intricately tied to women's lives, which can be categorized into eight themes: (i) childhood abuse, (ii) adulthood abuse, (iii) dysfunctional families, (iv) relationships with partners, (v) traditional women roles, (vi) criminal community, (vii) financial motivation, and (viii) the influence of social media.

### *Childhood abuse*

Childhood abuse is a significant factor that contributed to the criminality of women offenders. This deplorable pattern of abuse included physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and verbal abuse (Agboola et al., 2022; DeHart, 2008; Karatzias et al., 2018; Love et al., 2023; Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024; Morse et al., 2022; Nemavhola et al., 2024; Scicluna & Clark, 2019; Thornton, 2024). These traumatic experiences were frequently perpetrated by men (Agboola et al., 2022; Karatzias et al., 2018; Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024; Morse et al., 2022; Scicluna & Clark, 2019).

Women involved in violent crimes often have higher incidences of childhood trauma, particularly sexual abuse (Altintas & Bilici, 2018). Many of these women faced the challenges of having absent parents or guardians; during their upbringing or had parents struggling with drug abuse (DeHart, 2008). At various stages of life, they also witnessed violence in their home or surroundings, sometimes including tragic events like violent deaths (DeHart, 2018; Morse et al., 2022). In some cases, women physically attacked their molesters to prevent further assaults on others (Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024) or fought to protect themselves and ended up killing their abusers (DeHart, 2018), leading to their imprisonment.

The age of onset for female criminals was closely linked to their experiences of childhood abuse (Broidy et al., 2018). Women who experienced numerous types of childhood abuse were more likely to engage in criminal activities at a younger age (Broidy et al., 2018). Specifically, physical and emotional abuse often led to earlier criminal behaviour, while sexual abuse was more commonly associated with those who started later in adulthood (Broidy et al., 2018).

However, there were conflicting findings regarding the seriousness of offences and childhood trauma. While Broidy et al. (2018) reported no significant relationship between negative childhood experiences and the chronicity of offending, Karatzias et al. (2018) found that experiencing multiple traumas was linked to the chronicity of offence. These discrepancies could be due to Karatzias et al.'s (2018) specific focus on the number of traumas experienced by female inmates.

Furthermore, women who experienced childhood maltreatment exhibited higher levels of aggression compared to those without criminal records (Kalemi et al., 2019). This underscored the long-term impact of early-life trauma and victimization on behavioural outcomes. Notably, the recidivism rates were conspicuously higher among female offenders who had endured childhood abuse (Liu et al., 2021).

### *Adulthood abuse*

Two studies provided some evidence that women inmates had experienced traumatic events in adulthood, including unwanted sexual coercion, physical assault, and witnessing harm inflicted on others (Karatzias et al., 2018; Morse et al., 2022; Nemavhola et al., 2024). Additionally, some of these women had been kidnapped, held captive, and subjected to prolonged abuse or forced to earn money for their captors (Morse et al., 2022). These evidences expound on the complex and distressing backgrounds of some female inmates who experienced crime victimization beyond childhood.

### *Dysfunctional family*

In this review, it became evident that the families of women inmates often failed to function properly, with both fathers and mothers not fulfilling their roles. Many women inmates were abandoned by their parents during childhood, leading to homelessness and placement in foster homes or under grandparents' care (Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024). After leaving foster care, this residential and family instability caused them to associate with antisocial peers and engage in criminal activities to survive on the streets (Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024).

Family members played a significant role in influencing women to engage in criminal activities. In particular, Love et al. (2023) found that mothers were often the ones who introduced the women inmates to sex trafficking by selling them off for drugs and money. Family members also influenced the development of substance abuse disorders among these women (Love et al., 2023; Morse et al., 2022). Consequently, these women were compelled to engage in sex trafficking to support their drug addictions (Love et al., 2023).

Contrarily, the strength of family bonds, which is measured by the frequency of visits to close relatives; did not contribute as a protective factor against recidivism among women (Liu et al., 2021). These findings suggest that female criminality is not primarily influenced by the strength of relationship with family itself, but by the actions and behaviours of family members and the failure of parents to fulfil their roles. These factors play a decisive role in leading to criminal behaviour, even after release from prison.

### *Relationship with partner*

Women tend to value love, lifelong commitment, and faithfulness in relationships compared to men (Meier et al., 2009). This gender difference highlights the significant role that relationship with a partner plays in women's lives. This is further supported by Agboola et al.'s study (2022) which showed that a woman inmate's unhappy relationship with her partner, stemming from her husband's infidelity; drove her to commit a crime against her husband's lover out of jealousy. This is indicative of a sequential causal chain of events rather than impetuous decision making.

Most of the women offenders had suffered from intimate partner violence, and one of them was imprisoned because she retaliated to protect her son from a man who was attacking him (DeHart, 2018). Intimate partner violence compelled women to escape from their abusive partners, which in turn pushed them into criminal activities (Becerra & Serra, 2019). In contrast, Aristizábal (2020) discovered that some women inmates struggled to leave abusive relationships due to emotional and/or financial dependency on their partners (Aristizábal, 2020).

Lee et al. (2020) found that the status and quality of their relationships did not influence their offending behaviour, either as protective factors or risk factors. Instead, the behaviour of partners was a more significant predictor of women inmate' criminal behaviour (Lee et al., 2020). However, there was contradictory finding in Moffet-Bourassa and F.-Dufour's (2024)

study which indicated that having a healthy relationship with a partner was a protective factor against criminal conduct.

### *Traditional women roles*

Perceptions of traditional gender roles have both advantages and disadvantages for the women inmates. On one hand, was the advantage of being able to evade police scrutiny during searches and to be perceived more likely as victims rather than suspects. On the other hand, disadvantages include becoming victims of a patriarchal society and having less power.

Women often experienced abuse or harm inflicted by their abusive male partners or family members, which then pushed them into committing crimes (Becerra & Serra, 2019; Scicluna & Clark, 2019). The criminal behaviours of women were a product of a patriarchal society where there was no difference between being a provoked victim or an offender (Becerra & Serra, 2019). The root cause of abuse against females regularly lay in the imbalance of power between males and females (Scicluna & Clark, 2019).

This systematic review evidenced that gender discrimination was not limited to normal organizations; it also manifested within criminal organizations. Women frequently assumed the role of drug mules, which placed them at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy; while male figures held positions of power as bosses or higher-ranking officials (Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García, 2022). Moreover, men typically received higher pay than women who worked as drug mules (Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García, 2022).

Women took on the role of caregivers and assumed responsibility for their families by becoming involved in drug dealing (Holligan et al., 2019) and cocaine trafficking (Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García, 2022). They did so to avoid other options, such as engaging in prostitution or migrating to other places; primarily because they had children under their care (Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García, 2022). They often became exposed to these types of criminal activities through family members, such as siblings and uncles (Holligan et al., 2019). Furthermore, women involved in drug dealing or trafficking could serve as a "cover" for men when they travelled together (Holligan et al., 2019).

Women turned to drug dealing and continued selling drugs for an extended period because law enforcement typically focused their searches on men, allowing female prisoners to avoid detection more easily (Carvalho et al., 2023). In some cases, women were sent to prison instead of other members of the gang or syndicate who were considered superior because they were perceived as more vulnerable or disposable collateral as the women who end up in prison often lacked family support (Carvalho et al., 2023). This dynamic highlighted how traditional gender roles and societal perceptions play roles in the criminal justice system.

### *Criminal community*

Thornton (2024) found that women living in violent neighbourhoods often witnessed violence and eventually resorted to harming others during conflicts. Despite their desire to avoid criminal activities, these women felt rehabilitation in prison was pointless if they were to return to the same environment that originally drove them to commit crimes (Thornton, 2024).

The study highlighted that living in a pro-criminal community is a cause of criminal behaviours among women. Leaving such a community becomes crucial for crime desistance. This is demonstrated in Moffet-Bourassa and F.-Dufour's (2024) study, where leaving a dangerous neighbourhood and distancing oneself from antisocial friends enabled a woman to adopt a healthy lifestyle, leading her to stop drug abuse and criminal behaviours.

### *Financial motivation*

In this systematic review, financial motivation among women inmates was observed through three distinct factors. One was due to poverty (Agboola et al., 2022; Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García, 2022; DeHart, 2018; Holligan et al., 2019; Love et al., 2023; Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024) and the others were driven by the desire for financial gain (Agboola et al., 2022; Nemavhola et al., 2024) or career advancement (Shen, 2020); and sometimes all three factors. When women became primary breadwinners for their families but had limited skills and were trapped in low-paying jobs; they turned to criminal activities as a quick means to obtain money (Agboola et al., 2022; Carvalho, 2023; Castillo-Algarra & Ruiz-García, 2022; Holligan et al., 2019; Shen, 2020; Thornton, 2024). Moreover, homelessness drove some women to theft or shoplifting as a means of survival (Moffet-Bourassa & F.-Dufour, 2024). Conversely, women with a high education level resorted to white-collar crime to increase their income for the same reason (Agboola et al., 2022).

### *Influence of social media*

Women inmates used social media as a platform to commit crime (Perkins et al., 2018). Despite social media being a factor that led them into criminal activities, many still planned to reactivate their social media accounts upon release. This was the case even though seeing pictures of friends using drugs on social media acted as a trigger for drug relapse (Perkins et al., 2018). This suggests that social media has a possible influence on the criminal actions of ex-inmate women.

## **Discussions**

This systematic review explores the sociological factors that contribute to women's criminal behaviour, which have received less attention compared to psychological and criminological aspects. Women often juggle multiple roles as daughters, mothers, and partners, leading them to place their families' emotional and financial needs ahead of their own (Bevan & Wehipeihana, 2015). This highlights the importance of investigating the social factors influencing women's criminal behaviour.

Abuse and dysfunctional families often lead women to homelessness, where they may engage in criminal activities to survive on the street. Positive relationships and friendships during childhood help women develop healthier survival strategies, while the lack of such connections increases the likelihood of turning to crime when they become homeless (Thornton, 2024). Additionally, abuse and dysfunctional families are linked to violent crime, where women physically attacked or killed the perpetrator to protect themselves and others (DeHart, 2018).

Abuse also leads to mental health problems, which can result in drug abuse problems (Bloom et al., 2003). To support their drug addiction, women often resort to criminal activities such as shoplifting or theft (Bloom et al., 2003). These findings suggest that women are the victims of societal conditions.

With limited skills and low education, women who are primary breadwinners often turn to crime for quick monetary gain. Family members also influenced women to involve in sex trafficking and substance abuse (Love et al., 2023; Morse et al., 2022). This indicates that women's criminality is shaped by the behaviours of family members and the failure of parents to fulfil their roles.

Living in environments with easy access to drugs and other criminal opportunities can lead individuals to revert to old habits and reoffend (Thornton, 2024). Providing halfway

houses for women inmates and their children after release might be a better solution to prevent recidivism, as most women are primary caregivers. Halfway houses can protect women from abuse and offer job opportunities, thereby supporting their reintegration into society.

Social media significantly impact individuals today as it serves as a platform for spreading violent ideologies such as promoting extremism and hate crimes (Mengü & Mengü, 2015), as well as facilitating illegal activities like drug distribution (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009) and human trafficking (Fraser, 2016). However, only one study investigated the effect of social media on women's criminality in this systematic review. More studies are needed to better understand the association between social media and female criminality, particularly as triggers for criminal behaviour or recidivism.

## Limitations

This systematic review has several limitations. Firstly, the findings were derived from specific databases (Emerald Insights, ERIC, PubMed, SCOPUS, and Web of Science) and confined to articles published between January 2018 and 9<sup>th</sup> July 2024. This timeframe potentially excludes studies conducted earlier or more recently, which could impact the comprehensiveness of the results. Secondly, the review focused solely on women prisoners and former women prisoners, limiting comparisons across genders.

Thirdly, the generalizability of the results may have been impacted by excluding non-peer-reviewed journals and grey literature. To gain a more thorough understanding on social factors behind women's criminality, a broader range of information sources should be considered. The pilot study conducted by Perkins et al. (2018) may not provide robust or conclusive results, as it was intended to assess the research feasibility.

## Conclusions

The social lives of women inmates often revolved around experiences of abuse and trauma, when they became victims of a patriarchal society. The behaviours of people around them significantly influence their involvement in criminal activities, especially when influential people in their lives are already involved in criminality. Women, traditionally raised to prioritize family and partners are often motivated to commit crimes due to the behavioural role models in their lives.

Promoting healthy family functioning and fostering well-behaved partners can help reduce criminal behaviours among women. However, achieving this goal requires collective efforts from both society and government to create a safe environment, as well as provide education and support to parents on effective parenting practices. By addressing these broader societal issues, we can work towards reducing factors that lead to criminal behaviours among women and create a more supportive and nurturing environment for families.

Examining the social factors contributing to women's criminal behaviour is essential for understanding female inmates' lives and addressing the root problems that often begin in childhood or adolescence. Offering social support to these victims, especially considering the prevalence of childhood abuse among them; is crucial in overcoming the challenges women inmates encounter and facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

In conclusion, this systematic review contributes to the growing body of literature on the sociological factors leading to women's criminality. Through analysing existing research, it has deepened our comprehension of the varied social factors that shaped and influenced the lives of women inmates. These findings offer important insights for researchers, practitioners,

and policymakers; guiding the development of prison interventions aimed at improving the lives of women offenders and facilitating their successful reintegration into society upon release from prison.

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