

## An Assessment of Determinants and Consequences of Female Involvement in Crime in Nigeria in a Covidom

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v3i2.439>

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### ABSTRACT

*The wave of crimes involving the female gender globally and locally is unprecedented in recent times. This has left scholars to worry more about the sanctity of womanhood. The phenomenon poses a tough challenge to the moral rectitude of the family institution; this is against the backdrop of long-held notion that unarguably, the woman cross-culturally is the major custodian of the all-important society's fibre. The objective of this study is to investigate the determinants and consequences of female involvement in crime and its impact on the wellbeing of society. The study was a survey, relying on secondary data. The study was anchored on General Strain theory of crime. Besides poverty, unemployment and feminist movement as causal determinants, it was also revealed that the phenomenon of female criminality has a huge dent on the moral fibre of society. Findings also show a causal relationship between family disintegration and female criminality. It was thus recommended that stakeholders and policy makers should find ways to strengthen the family institution thereby curbing criminality in the society.*

### KEYWORDS

*covidom; criminality; female; womanhood.*

### INTRODUCTION

On May 8, 2019 a female armed robber and suspected kidnapper escaped jungle justice in Mararaba, Lafia Nasarawa state, but two of her male co-travelers all of whom were members of an 8-man gang were not so lucky, as they met their brutal end in the hands of irate mob. Earlier, on February 13, 2017, Metro News reporter, Opemipo Adeniyi reported a story on a lady allegedly arrested for drugging a medical doctor and carting away his personal effects including phones, laptop and a Volkswagen Passat Wagon, 2001 model.

At its end, the post-Cold War effect culminated in the dismantling of the socio-political and economic barriers in Europe and around the world (Viano, 2010). The dismantling of the economic barriers not only changed the way of trade, movement of people, and capital flows between democracies and free market countries and the formerly closed societies, but sadly, it placed a huge burden on the shoulders of developing economies. This burden is in the area of increased crime rate of catastrophic dimension. Ebbe (2011) contends that there is a huge connection between the incidences of female criminality in Nigeria and the socioeconomic and family background of offenders. The Western African sub-region has been on the news for the wrong reason occasioned by armed conflicts and other violent crimes since the twentieth century. Stanojoska and Jurtoska (2018) holds the view that much of society including women, in the area of criminological research have not attracted the much-needed scholarship. The scholars argue that the patterns of women's involvement in crime are a reflection of their socio-cultural status. However, the new millennium brought with it even more worrisome destabilizing crime-wave involving the hitherto excluded gender-the females in purview (Aning & Bah, 2009; UNSC Report 2011).

Many factors have been adduced by studies for this rising phenomenon of female involvement in criminal activities in recent time. Stanojoska and Jurtoska (2018) concluded a study on the Macedonian City and reported that unemployment of women (64%) as against the men (36%), and the activity rate of the women (44.9%) as against that of men (68.9%) was a major factor driving women into crime. On the other hand, Warraich and Farooq (2015) maintain that the socio-political and economic movements by women between the last millennium and now accounts partly for the observable upsurge in female gender involvement in crimes. The scholars note that such movements not only provide them with power but also with deviant persona which was previously associated with masculinity in society.

Among the many fallouts of globalization is the flow of economic benefits across nations and economies of the world. But within such benefits, crime and criminality also find a safe heaven. This is the reason scholars (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) 2003; Jensen2007; de Silva, Ratnadiwakara & Soysa2009,) have often contended that the economic gap noticed since the advent of the capitalist revolution has been tremendously closed due to ICT revolution occasioned by globalization. While there are material facts to conclude that the benefit of ICT such as the telephony and the e-business does help reduce the gap that exist between people and enhance their socio-economic functioning, it is sadly a technology that has been usurped by criminal networks.

In his 2013 study, Li Meixiang submitted that crimes committed by females overrun those committed by males in China. The scholar concluded that this was perhaps due to factors such as weak family systems and low moral standards. Part of the Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs Report 2013) states that in Africa, only 18 percent of women work, against the global average of 48 percent. It is unarguable to suspect that, due to their economic challenges women in today's world would expectedly want to devise other means to survive. Rampell, (2013) notes that the gender wage gap in countries of the world are bare factors to push the women into other means of securing a better livelihood for themselves and their families including resorting to untoward acts

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Female criminality is a burgeoning phenomenon in society. Many attempts have been made to situate the dilemma within scholarship. Against the backdrop, there is a near consensus on the indicators of the upsurge in female participation in crime. Whereas some schools of thought hold that crime wave involving females is a reflection of our moral decadence (Meixiang, 2013; Kamppainen, Jokelainen, Isohanni, Järvelin & Räsänen), others (Oketch, 1999; Leonard; 1982; Smart; 1977; Void; 1959.) see it as a fall out of the industrial revolution (materialism). While some argue that it is a product of economic downturn caused by huge unemployment, rising cost of living and stigmatization (National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), 1985; Warraich & Farooq, 2015; Alemika, 2014), yet there are those who believe it is a negative response to gender mainstreaming movementism (Stanojoska & Jurtoska, 2018; SAGE, 2019). The theorists conclude that the above stated factors necessitate criminal involvement of women in crime and criminality in society.

The determinants of female criminality may not necessarily be the likely consequences. However, the consequences rests squarely on society. Female participation in criminal activities has a catastrophic effect on family institution, on the economy, on crime prevention and on the effort of correctional services (Ojukwu, 2017). Chukuezi (2009) in his study stated that presumed changes in the pattern of crimes by women are drawing the

attention of the popular media as well as sociologists and criminologists. Most of the early studies of female crime concentrated on two or three main areas: witchcraft, infanticide and prostitution. In recent times, inquiry into female crime has broadened to include such other crimes as drug trafficking, armed robbery and white-collar crimes in government offices.

However, moral advocates who see females in crime as a result of fallen moral standards argue that the upsurge in female criminality is a direct consequence of lack of proper family values and moral values (Meixiang, 2013).

### **Study objectives**

The general objective of this study is to underscore the determinants and consequences of female involvement in crime in a Covidom. However, the specific objectives are;

- I. To assess the factors predisposing females into criminal activities
- II. To highlight the impact of female involvement in criminality on society
- III. To suggest ways through which the surge can be curtailed

### **Scope, Rationale of the study**

The universe is the scope of this study. However, the unit of analysis is the female gender. The study is interested with the pull and push factors necessitating the involvement of females in crime activities. While relevant literatures are cited from across the globe to substantiate the study, empirical survey is done using local Nigerian incidences. By critical references, it should be stated that the scope of the study is the female gender in Nigeria.

Available literature indicates that the crime rate in Nigeria involving the female gender is on the increase. Only recently, Opemipo Adeniyi reported in a News tabloid that a lady Drugged and robbed a Medical Doctor in Lagos and made away with the victim's car, laptop and Phone (Metro News, February 13, 2017). Although Ebbe (2011) suggested that there is an inverse correlation between socioeconomic measures and involvement in property crimes (Ebbe, 2011), SAGE (2019) blamed the upsurge on socio-economic and political efforts of feminism. In their published work, Michael, Chinwokwu and Inyang (2017) held that as society undergo development, a portion of the population often succumbed to the temptation of yielding to criminal behaviour. This is said to account partly for the involvement of females in criminal acts. On the strength of the aforesaid therefore, the rationale of this study is borne out of the need to properly situate the determinants of female involvement in crime for policy and scholarship purposes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Determinants**

#### *Consequences*

Consequences here refer to resultant effect of particular and general crime commission by females. The extent of harm to which female participation in crime inflict on victims of their acts is what this study termed consequences. The victim s here could be the offender, their families, or the society as a whole.

#### *Crime*

Crime has been viewed by Scholars overtime as an act which negates the criminal code of a society (Olukolade & Adeyemo, 2013). Ronczkowski (2012) admitted that until September 11, 2001, terrorism was a foreign concept reserved only for third world nation struggling for identity. The scholar notes that the event of September 11, 2001 changed the

narratives in American security architecture. This is a proof that crime has been changing for a long time, and so do those involve in the act.

This is a causative factor in the commission of crime. It basically refers to every primary and secondary push factor that the female gender experience that makes them go into criminal activities. As used in this study, determinants are understood as the motivating elements in the life of the female criminal.

**Covidom**

The concept of Covidom (researcher’s coinage) is used to represent the period of the corona virus pandemic and its attendant global, regional, national and local (State) response to the scourge. It refers to human (critical) existence amidst the corona virus pandemic. The Corona virus disease made its global debut in December 2019 when it was first announced that a certain viral disease is on the prowl in Wuhan City, People’s Republic of China. No sooner has the virus been discovered than it was codenamed COVID-19. The world literally came to halt within the first few months of the year 2020, with lockdowns and *No Fly in* Orders by national and international governments due to the ravaging scourge of the disease. Among other attendant consequences to these restrictions which were meant to help contain the disease, are criminal indulgence by some Nigerians who, due to hardships and unemployment, had to find ways to stay alive. The female folks who constituted part of the vulnerable segment of society were not left out, as many have families to cater for, a situation made worst by the restriction of movement, businesses and other engagements for private, corporate and public individuals and institutions.

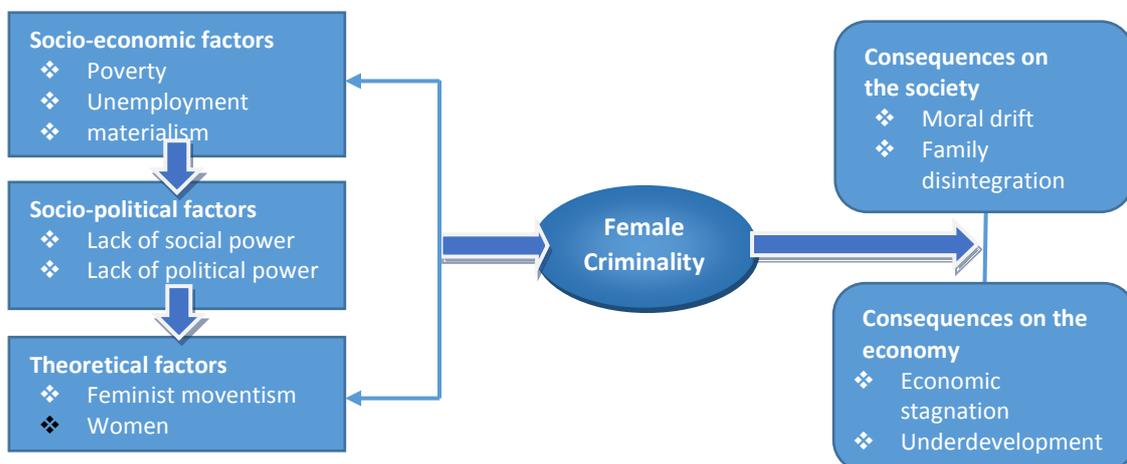
**Female**

This is the gender that is the direct opposite to the male. It is the gender that is socially constructed as the weaker sex (Joireman, 2008).

**Involvement**

This is the level of participation in crime by the females. It is the frequency and the veracity with which the female gender in modern times participate in criminal activities. In their published work titled “*Non-vulnerable against the vulnerable: A socio-criminological analysis of herdsmen attack on vulnerable population in Nigeria*”, Michael, Inyang and Ukpong (2017) opine that in their determined effort to grab scarce resources (grazing fields), the Non-vulnerable populations have resorted to involving women and children in their reign of terror against the Vulnerable populations.

**Conceptual framework Model: Cause-Effect-Consequence factor**



Source: Author, 2021

### ***Theoretical justification: General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992)***

The theoretical justification for this study is built on General Strain Theory (GST) of crime and delinquency popularized by Robert Agnew in the early 1990s. General strain theory is a theory which was developed in response to the orientation of Merton's (1910-2003) Anomie or Strain Theory of crime. Merton argued that the reasons for, or driving force for criminality is the failure of individuals to achieve material goals. He asserts that the disparity between goals and means provides pressure for individuals who daily toil to achieve them, even though the institutional means are not equally available to all classes. He concluded that since they all subscribe to the cultural aspirations or goals but institutionalized means are not necessarily equally given, frustrations are bound to set in in form of strain. Merton called this strain- producing frustration *anomie* (Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 1995 p.111).

Scott and Marshall (2005) argued that anomie as a theoretical conceptualization originated with the works of Emile Durkheim, who first sort to explain the transition of society from mechanical to organic solidarity in his work titled '*the division of labour in society*'. According to Scott and Marshall (2005), Durkheim also used the term anomie in his *suicide*, where he argued that as a feature of organic society, anomic suicide was the result of economic factors rather than any other. This is true of the experiences most women go through.

To properly situate the argument, two fundamental questions about gender and crime begs for answers:

- (i). How can we explain the higher rate of crime among males?
- (ii). How can we explain why females engage in crime?

With respect to the first question, classical theorists suggest that gender differences in types of strain and the reaction to strain help one understand the gender gap in criminal behavior (SAGE, 1997, 2019). It subsumed that the cultural understanding of gender and criminality makes it almost acceptable to have males as criminals, while the females are excused (Farooq & Warrach, 2015; Mustapha, 2018). With respect to the second question, it is argued that several types of strain may lead to female crime under the proper circumstances. In this area, GST has much in common with numerous accounts that explain female crime in terms of oppression).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopted the survey method. Sources of data was got from secondary information. Many scholars have in the past done enormous work on related issues which were relied on as sources of information gathering for the study. Related literature was reviewed to give vent to the subject matter of female involvement in criminality.

The scope was the Nigerian society and the unit of analysis was the Nigerian woman. The Nigerian woman has come a long way in history and her place in the making of Nigeria is not one of a second-fiddle. History is replete with many instances where she (the Nigerian woman) has successfully played a leading role in the realization of what is known today as the Nigerian nation (Inyang & Adaka, 2016).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Statistical information available to research indicate that the phenomenon of female criminality is only burgeoning, due to ancillary environmental circumstances surrounding the female gender in modern times. It is suggested that amidst daunting economic and security challenges the women face, the pressures from family is not helping to mitigate

the issues. Many women whose spouses suffer job loss and the reality of withdrawn income stares them in the face may resort to criminality as a means to sustain the family.

The Cause-Effect-Consequence factor Model which the study adopted suggests that a number of factors are responsible for the observed increase in female involvement in criminality.

### ***Socio-economic factors***

#### ***Poverty***

Whereas Olukolade and Adeyemo (2013) holds the view that socioeconomic and political factors are the precursors to poverty and crime, Alemika (2014) admits that the increase in the number of cases of female criminality is due largely to poverty, which is fueled by urbanization. Poverty and crime appear to be intertwined as causative factors of female criminality (Simpson, 1985). A school of thought also strongly believes that the feminization of urban which took strong roots in the 1990s, and manifested itself in a disproportionate number of women in informal employment (Naila, 2003), was primarily a causative factor for female criminality. In this wise, this study aligns with the view of Alemika (2014) who suggested that the vice of female criminality can be whittled down if they are empowered economically

#### ***Unemployment***

Unemployment as advanced by this study presupposes the state of joblessness or lack of resources to get paid employment or engage in self-employment. Identified as a reason for many of the recorded incidences of female crimes, unemployment is a serious pandemic globally, but worse in the developing world. Agnew (1992) submitted that unemployment accounts for the incidences of violent behaviours as it triggers frustration and anger, which are the main feeders of criminal tendencies (Felson, 1998).

#### ***Materialism***

The drive for materialism is an inherent instinct of modern man. However, as advanced by scholars, (Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975; Ameh, 2013) the desires to get material things is encouraging many, females inclusive, to engage in criminal acts just to satisfy these urges. However, Igbo (2007) argued that women participation in the labour force renders preponderant to participation in criminal activities, on account of their coming in contact with the difficulty in providing for their families. Chukuezi (2009) in his study "Change in pattern of female crime in Owerri, Nigeria 1980 – 2000" emphasize that a number of factors influence female criminality including their increased roles in the family, the social system and the existence of property ownership in today's capitalist society. This study thus concludes that female involvement in crime is a result of the unregulated desire to make money, own material wealth and live as materially comfortable as their peers (Merton, 1938).

### ***Socio-political Factors***

#### ***Lack of Political Power***

Against the torrents of scholastic and legal arguments in favour of women empowerment in Nigeria and the demand for their full participation in the political and economic fronts, women's participation in politics is still a far cry (Anyanwu & Anyanwu, 2008; SAGE, 2019). The lack of political power for most women is readily seen as a precursor for angst against the men, and by extension, the society. This has very negative effect on their pattern of behaviour as some manifest this observed inequality or imbalances in untoward

acts, which often times is in criminal forms. It is suggested that since political power affords the opportunities for bargain, the women must be given equal share in the elective/appointive offices so they can use such platforms to leverage on their economic potentials, and reduce the push-factors for committing criminal acts (Naila, 2003; Chukuezi (2009).

### ***Lack of Social Power***

Warraich and Farooq (2015) believes that the lack of social power by women increases their criminal enterprises. Earlier, scholars (Adler, 1975; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Collier, 1998; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Okin, 1999) hold the opinion that as more women were disenfranchised and placed at the bottom of the social ladder, more and more struggle through thick and thin to eke out a satisfactory living for themselves. In the process, some found out that they could actually challenge the menfolk in many areas that where hitherto the exclusive preserves of the men. In this ensuing discovery occasioned by the narrowed social conditions for women, female criminality began to be recorded (Imai & Krishna, 2001; Mahmood & Cheema, 2008; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010; Sweeney & Payne, 2011, 2012; & Hicks & Hicks, 2014).

### ***Feminist Movement***

Adler et al (1975) had argued that feminist movements started in the United States of America gave rise to, among other things, female involvement in criminal acts. Warraich and Farooq (2015) also agrees that feminism plays a critical role in shaping the aggression of women, which the scholars found out was demonstrated in criminal forms. SAGE (2019) reports that feminism does play a significant role in the political and social lives of women, and this also have affected their involvement in criminality.

### ***Women empowerment***

As wealth accumulation continue to drive society's attention, more and more women continue to find their way into the labour market, thereby participating in economic endeavour. This makes the social status of men and women more akin one to the other. As a result, it was not surprising that women began to participate in criminal activities like their men counterparts (SAGE, 2019). Studies (Cook & Fonow, 1986) have also identified the feminist calls for equality of empowerment between women and men in all patriarchal societies as stiffly connected to female criminality.

### ***Consequences on the Society***

The society is already suffering untold pressure occasioned by the upsurge of female criminality. This study took time to summarize the consequences in two broad perspectives

- I. Moral drift
- II. Family disintegration

### ***Moral Drift***

There has not been a sustained argument about the consequences of female criminality as it has to relate to moral decadence. Amidst all the raging debates is the nexus between the female gender, the family and continuity of the society, which scholars wonder should this vice of female criminality continue, what shall become of our ethos as a people? Who shall instill these in the young? What shall mothers with criminal minds be expecting their innocent kids to learn from them? What kind of society or its leaders shall criminally-

mindful mothers be producing? These are endless questions that still beg for answers among scholars. Whereas Denno (1994/1995) sees the woman as genetically and biologically more equipped to foster human moral standards, Chukuezi (2009) agreed that with increased cases of female criminality, decadence (moral) in society is way off, on account of women losing that platform with which to challenge and advocate for uprightness in society.

### ***Family Disintegration***

As a result of shame and stigma, many families whose female spouses have one criminal record or the other are known to experience disintegration. Warrach and Farooq (2015) contend that societies where the family institution is not bonded enough to socialize its members firmly according to approved and cherished societal norms, usually experience disintegration, which in turn fuels criminal adventures and indulgence among females who hitherto sees the family as their model. Oketch (1999) in her study “*Factors affecting female criminality in Kenya: A case study of Lang’ata maximum women prison*” observed that among the effect of women imprisonment on the society is spiraling poverty, child mortality and family disorganization. She contended that families who have their female members incarcerated bear the burden disintegration, often contribute to malnourished street children and child prostitution. The mother figure in the African family setting usually carries the baton of socialization; hence her absence for whatever reason, especially on account of criminality and imprisonment, usually leaves a devastating effect on the family, offspring, and the society.

### ***Consequences on the Economy***

#### ***Economic Stagnation***

The contributions of the women to economic development both in developed and developing countries cannot be overemphasized (Leka 1997). Meixiang (2013) draw a sound correlation between female crime and economic stagnation in his study “Discussion on the causes of female crime and its control and prevention” and stated that the wave of economic development brings with it many negative challenges that threatens the survival of women. The scholar insisted that with the demands of the current era, most females are not able to meet their material needs, hence the resort to criminality. Li Meixiang went further to say that such practices or infringement by women stagnates the society as material luring makes some educated but highly gullible women fall into the abyss of crime. This, Meixiang attribute to the widening gap between the affluent and those in squalid conditions, and the influence of junk culture transported by the medium of globalization. The society becomes stagnated when more and more women are involved in criminal activities rather than engage in productive enterprises. As a result of their criminal acts, the resources deployed to protect their victims, and to put them to trial and corrections deplete the efforts to develop the society.

#### ***Underdevelopment***

The resultant consequence of female criminality is underdevelopment. A developing society like ours would find it difficult if there is a high rate of crime as criminals have the potentials to thwart investment drives, blot thriving business and make live unsafe for the people. Development in itself presupposes a condition of decreased crime rate, as more and more people are self-sufficient and therefore may have little reason to indulge in property theft, which is the crime most women are commonly associated with. Alemika (2014) had argued against the backdrop of female involvement in crime that it accelerates violence and impedes security and development.

## CONCLUSION

This study is a bold treatise on female criminality: determinants and consequences. As we can deduce from the literatures consulted, it is obvious that the vice of female involvement in crimes is endemic with far reaching consequences. Besides some of the determinants which are outside the control of the female criminal culprits, the criminogenic environment that most of these women interface with is identified in this study as causative. The study therefore concludes that on account of its determinants, female criminality can be checked, should there be concerted efforts at national, state and local government levels in a bid to addressing the blight.

This study has also brought to the fore, the consequences inherent in female criminality in Nigeria, particularly with regards to the female gender itself as culprit, as victims of the causative factors and the society at large which suffers the brunt of female criminality. The cited literatures supported the expose of this study that the consequences of female crime transcend the individual into the larger Nigerian society. It is trite to state that aside from the degrading posture female crime foist on the female criminal based on the social status theory consensus, denying her that hitherto most cherished place in society, the participation of females in crime has other far-reaching societal consequences. These include threat to social engineering which scholars (Ebbe, 2011) believe women are the prime custodians, decayed moral standards of society, personal security of people, their properties, and it has the overwhelming capacity to blur national growth and development.

## Recommendation

The sensitive nature of the study calls for a holistic approach to address the phenomenon. The study has yielded huge data upon which some salient conclusions have been drawn. In the light of this, the following recommendations are put forward to help stem the tide of female involvement in crime.

The government should declare a national emergency on poverty. This is borne out of the conclusion from findings that poverty accounts for a huge percentage of female criminality in Nigeria. Should more women be lifted out of the poverty line, this study believes the effort would reduce the rate of women engaging in criminality.

Unemployment. Unemployment constitutes a bane on development anywhere in the world. It readily leads to untold hardships and has the capacity to lure the unemployed to venturing into the forbidden. Consequently, this study recommends that to address this determining factor, the government and all stakeholders must open up the employment fulcrum. The Nigeria entrepreneurial and industrial landscape is still a virgin, technically speaking, hence stakeholders must seize the opportunity and redirect the energies of women and other unemployed members of society to find employment in these areas. This the study believes, would assist in no small measure to reduce female crime wave.

A lot has been documented in the area of socio-political power and female criminal participation. As a recommendation, this study aligns with cited works that an unempowered woman is a vengeful woman. When women are robbed of their socio-political and economic power, it can be expressed in many ways, sometimes, as exposed by this study, in criminal vengeance. To this end therefore, we insist that women should be given equal power; be it political, economic or social, so that they can use it to the advantage of their families and society at large.

The Nigerian woman must be made to understand that feminist movementism is not a call to criminality. Even in the United States and the United Kingdom, female criminality is never excused on account of its leaning on feminism. Criminality is never a *sine qua non* for feminist successes. In this wise therefore, we boldly recommend African Womanism

for the Nigerian woman, in place of its western version. African womanism speaks for truth, chastity, virtue, hardwork, uprightness and love for family and community. It abhors vices such as criminal engagements of any form by and/or against women, and quickly calls attention to acts inimical to good neighbourliness.

The family is the basic unit of the society; therefore, this study recommends that public debates on the sanctity of the female gender in society and how it helps to sustain continuity of the human race be regularly conducted across board. This way, it would strengthen families and institutions handling issues related to women, including the justice system and the correctional centers, in order to help mitigate some of the family disintegrations muted from the hallowed chambers of these institutions.

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