



IZA World of Labor REPORT: The Gender Gap in Crime

Over recent decades women's participation in the labor market has converged towards the participation rate of men. A revised [IZA World of Labor report](#) finds a similar movement towards gender convergence in the criminal world.

The economist Nadia Campaniello of the University of Essex analyzed UN survey data on crime trends for six countries showing that while the crime participation gap is common to many countries, female crime in these countries has been rising. With crime no longer just men's business, the author stresses the importance of investigating female criminal behavior to determine whether the policy prescriptions to reduce crime should differ for women.

There are differences between female and male offenders. Women commit fewer and different crimes than men. Studies show women, on average, tend to commit mostly property crimes, in particular theft, fraud, and drug offences. Women commit more theft while men commit more robbery. Generally, women commit less violent crime. Even in the criminal world there is a "gender wage gap": men earn 13% more than women. And women are less responsive to a change in expected incentives, i.e. a rise in illegal earnings. On the other hand, men face a 9% higher probability of arrest. Judges seem to be more lenient with women, which might partly explain the rising tendency for women to commit crime.

Better education is generally thought to be an effective policy measure when addressing the causes of crime. However, some studies find this positive effect to be much stronger for men than for women, which might partly explain the narrowing of the gender gap in crime. Over the last decades, relative wage inequality has been increasing more for women than for men, which might have pushed more women at the low end of the wage distribution to commit crimes.

Furthermore, for women, the decision to engage in criminal activity cannot be explained simply in terms of opportunity cost in the legal market. Child rearing and housekeeping play a potentially more important role for women than they do for men. But in recent years technological progress and social norms have freed women from the home, increasing their participation in both the labor and the crime market. Women have more freedom than in the past, and with that come more opportunities for crime. According to the author these findings suggest that policymakers should take into account the possibility that positive changes that narrow gender gaps in the labor market and positive changes in social roles might have induced more women to participate in crime.

Campaniello concludes: "*Policies that help reduce wage disparity across skilled and unskilled female workers, such as incentivizing female education, might deter disadvantaged women from engaging in criminal activities.*"

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World of Labor
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Notes for editors:

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The site offers relevant and succinct information on topics including diversity, migration, minimum wage, youth unemployment, employment protection, development, education, gender balance, labor mobility and flexibility among others.

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