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FEMALE CRIME, CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRACTICE AND GENDER ROLES: JUDICIAL PROFESSIONALS' PERSPECTIVES

Gender has been identified as an important and consistent variable that differentiates crime behavior in which men have traditionally been associated with the offense and the exercise of authority, and women suffering victimization. Criminal statistics in recent years contradict this assumption and document an increase in female crime around the world and the greater involvement of women in the criminal justice system. In turn, the influence that gender role has on attitudes about female and male crime may also impact the way in which judicial professionals operate on female involvement in crime and the type of risk assessment performed, also affecting policies prevention and intervention. Using a qualitative methodology, the present study aimed to analyze and characterize the practices of the criminal justice system in cases involving female crime, based on the perceptions of judicial professionals. More specifically, it was intended to: i) analyze the perception of judicial professionals about female crime; ii) analyze how socially established gender roles are used to explain the female crime; iii) analyze the factors that may contribute to possible gender differences in the decision-making of judicial professionals. Ten judicial professionals, mostly male (70%), with an average age of 46 years and with an average professional experience of approximately 20 years, were interviewed.

Participants pointed to a growing criminal parity between men and women, as a result of social progress and new opportunities. However, they also identified differences between female and male criminal activity (e.g., less serious female criminal conduct, less female recidivism, less female criminal agency). The results also revealed an ambivalent position regarding the performance of the criminal justice system in relation to crime in women. The perception conveyed by the judicial professionals about the absence of female identity in crime and an existing ideology about the role of women in society, promotes not only a certain benevolence in judicial decisions, but also ignore certain risk behaviors. This could compromise the risk assessment of female criminal conduct, and subsequent judicial intervention, so it is important to promote greater awareness of crime in women, deconstructing stereotypes around the role of women in society.

Keywords: *Female Crime, Gender Role, Criminal Justice, Judicial Professionals.*

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