



## TECHNOLOGY, CRIME AND GENDER IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS

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### Abstract

The global high rate of crimes necessitated the application of technology to check and track criminals, hence the adoption of the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), surveillance cameras, electronic screening machines, point of service devices etc. in public places especially shopping malls, markets and car parks. Criminologists have over the years associated certain criminal acts with men such as armed robbery, murder, car snatching etc. also, more men are arrested and imprisoned much more than women. Hence, attention on crimes is more focused on men than women. This paper focuses on larceny specifically shoplifting, a crime associated with the female gender. The paper examines the extent to which the use of electronic screening machines has been able to detect, check and deter women shoplifters, with selected shopping complexes in Port Harcourt metropolis: Everyday, Timeless and Prince Mega supermarkets as case studies. This paper recommends the installation of electronic screening machines in public places, identifying and placing the pictures of shoplifters in public places. This study lends itself easily to the functionalist theory.

**Keywords: Crime, Gender, Technology, Electronic Screening Devices.**

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### Introduction

The central focus of this paper is on technology, crime and gender. The aim here is to examine the extent to which technology, particularly electronic screening machines, closed circuit televisions (CCTV) and other electronic gadgets employed by public and private firms have been able to check, deter and detect criminals. Another dimension of this paper is on the ratio of criminal activities between males and females.

One begging question as noted by Anderson (1983) is, do women commit less crimes than men, and if so, why? Are there distinctive characteristics of female deviants? One of the most consistent and strong findings in crime investigations is that females commit much less crimes than males and their crimes tend to be less serious than men's deviant acts. There are over whelming evidences to support this assertion: using data on arrests, convictions, self-reported crimes and victims reports about offenders indicates clearly, that males are more involved in criminal activities than women. As a result of this indication, much attention is placed on criminal

offences committed by men. Many reasons are advanced to illustrate why men are more involved in crime than women. Men are more predisposed to crime due to socialization. So, women who are deviants have violated their gender roles.

To this extent, the study of female deviance has been ignored, or better put, largely an understudied area of criminology. When female deviances are studied, it is often related to few categories of deviant behaviors that evoke sexist stereotypes. As Anderson (1983) argues that studies of female deviances have been typically limited to behaviors that are linked with female sexualities such as prostitution and promiscuity or behaviors seen as stemming from women's alleged inability to control their emotions (such as mental illness, alcoholism and drug abuse).

The paper is organized as follows; introduction, conceptual clarification, a brief review on the subject under consideration; analysis from the three supermarkets within Port Harcourt metropolis selected for the purpose of this paper, they include; Everyday super markets,



Rumuadaolu, Mgbuoba, New G.R.A; Timeless supermarket, Mgbuoba/NTA Road, Ozuoba and finally, Prince Mega supermarket, Rumuola. Women are more involved in victimless crimes – A crime in which the people involved are in agreement.

Having identified that men are more involved in criminal activities much more than women, this paper focuses on larceny especially shoplifting as perpetrated by women.

The findings in this research indicates clearly that women are more involved in larceny particularly shop lifting much more than men. And that even when men do, they shop lift more valuable goods than women who go for cosmetics. The research is mainly a qualitative study. Hence, responses were sought from the mentioned supermarkets.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

It is traditional in academic exercise to explain certain basic concepts as used in a research. The following keywords are explained.

Deviant behavior is any act that violates the standards or conducts or expectations of a group or society (Chuku, 2017). Deviant behavior is a broad concept that includes behaviors that are not in tandem with the morals of the society, both the ones that attract punishments and the ones that do not. But crime on the other hand, refers to acts which laws of a society have declared illegal and punishable if reported or caught. Henry (2014) defined crime as an act or omission against public interest and which is prescribed by law enacted by the legislature in the overall interest of the society, and to which prescribed punishment is attached in the event of violation and it involves four major principles which are public wrong, moral wrong, law and enforcement for offenders. Crime is also seen as violation of rules agreed to be respected by all members of the society and upon which the rest members of the society mete out sanctions upon the offender(s).

**Closed Circuit Television(CCTV)** as defined by Henry (2014) is a surveillance tool to monitor events, people and goods. It is an electronic

screening gadget.

**Shoplifting** is defined typically as the unauthorized removal of merchandise from a store without paying for it.

Etymologically, the word technology is derived from Greek, techno (technical, art, skill) and logos (knowledge) <https://schoolwires.henryk12galls...>

Technically, the term technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industries. Technology is the set of knowledge, skills, experiences and techniques through which humans change, transform and use the environment in order to create tools, machines, products and services that meet human needs and desires.

Technology as noted by Eboh, 2012 comprises of a variety of practical activities that provide goods and services for man's use, enjoyment and welfare. Technology is applied in all facets/aspects of human activities such as manufacturing, transportation, processing of food, conversion of energy into usable forms electricity generating plants, internal combustion engines, marine and medical facilities etc. In a nutshell, the way man uses his inventions or discoveries to satisfy his needs and desires are all based on technology or are technology driven.

**Gender** refers to the social, psychological and cultural attributes of masculinity and femininity that are based on biological distinctions (Chuku, 2017).

**Sex** refers to the most basic psychological differences between men and women-differences in genital and reproduction capabilities. It is the influence of culture that determines gender differences through different gender roles for men and women (Schaefer, 2003).

To this extent, it could be argued convincingly that gender is socially constructed, as people construct gender based on their culture. Hence what is masculine in one culture may be feminine



in another culture. In other words, nobody is born as a man or a woman; rather it is the process of socialization that creates gender awareness.

### **Methods and Theoretical Framework**

The data for the analysis of this paper was collected from three firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

The selection of these firms was largely for convenience. The central focus of the paper is on larceny, particularly shoplifting, which this research with other/similar researches associate strongly with women and the crime genic areas are shops, supermarkets, stores and markets etc.

Being a preponderant female crime, informed the choice of Prince Mega. Prince Mega is a famous cosmetic supermarket situated along Rumuola Road in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The other supermarkets are Everyday supermarkets with branches all over Port Harcourt. However, the ones chosen are situated in Rumuadiorlu, Rumuigbo and New G.R.A, the last supermarket-Timeless is situated along NTA Mgbuoba/Ozuoba Road. Interviews were conducted with some staff of these supermarkets, three each, thus bringing the total of these interviews to 15, with eight women and seven men as interviewees. Apart from these primary sources, secondary sources included books and the internet, including videos on shoplifting in America, Canada and UK. These videos were mostly of women who were apprehended while shoplifting.

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on the functionalist perspective. Proponents of this perspective include Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert .K. Milton, (Chuku, 2017).

The functionalist analysis of deviant behaviors begins with the society as a whole and not with the individual. To functionalists, deviance is a necessary part of the society. No society can exist without deviance. Only when it is much in a society that it becomes dysfunctional. This implies that a certain amount of deviance has positive functions in the society. Predicated on this perceived functions of deviance behaviors,

this paper is of the opinion that the attempt to deter deviants, particularly shoplifters necessitated the use of electronic screening machines. This research concludes that they are effective in checking larceny, particularly shoplifting.

### **Brief Review**

There is no doubt that crime and other social vices have increased considerably in the past few years. In Nigeria many researchers have attributed it to poverty and unemployment. Ojo (2012), argues that it is mostly due to the high rate of unemployment and hunger among the youths in the country. As a result of the rate of crime in the country, it has affected businesses and deterred entrepreneurs who wish to invest in the country.

Olanibi (2012) argues that the quest for progress and development in the country is being threatened by insecurity. The basic forms of insecurity in Nigeria are mainly: kidnapping, armed-robbery, burglary, banditry, religious crisis, cultism/ritual activities, etc.

The overall telling effect of this insecurity is on the economy, as it tends to cripple the economy, local and foreign investors are discouraged. To survive under this insecurity is therefore a top priority for firms such as shopping malls, supermarkets, banks etc. there has been reported cases of armed-robbers operating in banks for hours without police countering their operation. Checking crimes physically in these afore mentioned public places, is not easily obtainable, hence, the use of electronic screening machines. Most organizations/firms in Nigeria prefer the use of the Closed Circuit Television. Henry (2014) defines CCTV as a situational crime prevention system with source crime prevention capability. When installed at some strategic positions, it can trigger a perceptual mechanism in a potential offender that if he/she commits a crime, he/she might be caught. Henry (2014) further argues that CCTV can be used to increase the perceived risk of capture. It can limit the access to an area; make an object harder to steal. As a result of its efficacy, most countries and companies embrace it as a surveillance tool to monitor events, people, and some installations.



The Global Positioning System (GPS) is another electronic gadget that assists in checking criminal activities. GPS is a satellite based navigation system that consists of controls, monitoring systems and it receives the transferred information from satellites and use triangulation to calculate the exact location of the position of any object upon the surface of the earth. This technology has proven to be very efficient in reducing crime rates all over the world. Many stolen vehicles are recovered through this process. Henry (2014) reported how Western Australian police used GPS to determine crime hotspots and deploy their personnel to provide surveillance in that area.

A crime is held to be an offence which goes beyond the personal and into the public sphere, breaking prohibition rules or laws to which legitimate punishments or sanctions are attached, and which requires the intervention of a public authority (the state or the local body). Ideally, the latter administers a formal system for dealing with crime, and employs representative officers (for example a police-force) to act on its behalf (Scott and Marshall, 2005).

For crime to be known as such, it must come to the notice of and be processed through an administrative system or enforcement agency. It must be reported and recorded by the police (or other investigators), it may then become part of the criminal statistics. In the case of larceny in Nigeria, particularly shoplifting, most of the cases are not reported to the police. Hence, it could be said as Scott and Marshall(2005) argued, crime rates are socially constructed and as such, may also leave out hidden crimes, e.g. rape, child abuse, domestic violence, child trafficking.

Society defines a behavior as criminal, but the definition of a criminal act can change overtime.

Anderson, 1988 affirms that most offenses by women are especially on larceny, Victimless crime, in which case, few arrests are made on women as against men. To use the number of arrests to judge crime rates between men and women may be misleading. Therefore, data from

arrests must be interpreted with caution, since arrest rate is only a matter of enforcement, not the actual commission of crime. The issue of prostitution, child abuse and child trafficking appear to be common with women, but few cases are actually reported. However, crime rate among men is certainly higher than women's rate despite the arrest rates.

Horwitz (1986) argues that the vast majority of the female larceny arrests are for shoplifting. Horwitz (1986), also argues that shoplifting among women is also influenced by peer group.

### **Interviews**

The principle method of collecting data in this paper is based on interviews of shop workers/staff. Three persons were interviewed in Prince Mega supermarkets, Everyday supermarkets (three branches); nine persons, Prince Mega-cosmetic supermarkets; three persons and Timeless Supermarkets; three persons, making a total of 15 interviewees.

These interviewees/respondents were interviewed from 28<sup>th</sup>, July-August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at their shopping complexes. The persons interviewed include security personals, the Chief Security Officer (CSO), shop attendants and sales girls managing the Point of Service (POS).

For the purpose of clarity, their responses are aggregated and categorized under the following headlines; social characteristics of respondents, age of the perpetrators of shoplifting; how to identify shoplifters; what happens to those caught etc.

**Social characteristics of respondents;** the respondents in this research are mainly paid staff of the afore-mentioned supermarkets. Their monthly minimum wage is between thirty to forty-five thousand naira only. They are mainly within the age brackets of 25-40 years.

### **What is the age bracket of shoplifters?**

The interviewees affirmed that the propitiators of shoplifting are mostly women. The items collected by women are mostly cosmetics,



creams, perfumes, chocolates and jewelries, men on the other hand steal handsets, quality watches etc. For men, it is not often easy to conceal items, but ladies could easily conceal items in their braziers, or within their under wears.

From the opinion of the respondents, 90% of them suggested that the age bracket of the shoplifters is from 16-30 years. However, from one of the interviews, held in Everyday Supermarket, GRA, Port Harcourt, a teenage boy of 12 years came to shop, in style he picked up some biscuits and concealed them in a black polythene bag and picked some sweets which he paid for at the counter. As he was paying, the CSO observed him closely, knowing very well that the CCTV captured him stealing and concealing the biscuits. So the CSO came down and asked him, what about the biscuits you took? In shock and in shame, he brought them out. The manager of the supermarket decided not to take up the matter because he was a minor.

#### **How do you identify shoplifters?**

Simple, they could be identified in so many ways;

- i) They often come to the shop with large coats or baggy clothes. They do this because people are not allowed into the shops with their bags. They are advised to put their bags in the metal lockers provided at the entrance.
- ii) They avoid eye contacts; they do not like to see people observing them.
- iii) Their eyes are often on the staff and not on the merchandise; they already know the position of what they want to steal. In one of the interviews, a respondent claimed that it is not the capture by the electronic machines that matter, rather, the staff. The machine is essentially videoing, it can capture but it cannot apprehend the offender(s). So the most important person to watch is the staff, as the machine on its own cannot affect arrest.
- iv) Shoplifters are often lurking at the Conner looking for an opportunity to conceal an item.
- v) Peak/rush-hours; shoplifters often make use of the rush-hours to steal.

#### **What happens when caught?**

When asked what the shop management does if the shoplifter is caught. The CSO would want to table the matter before the police depending on the item stolen, the disposition of the thief and finally, the decision of the manager. The interviews by respondents indicated that 80% of the managers do not like taking shoplifters to the police. On further probing, the reason advanced is that the manager would spend more money in making entries in the police station for a case of theft of perfume of ten thousand naira(#10,000) and at the long run, the management may spend more than ten thousand naira pursuing the matter. Not only that, the manager or the CSO would spend quality time in police station, thus, leading to man-hour loss. Furthermore, the police would also insist on closing or killing the matter with money.

#### **Conclusions**

Statistical data illustrates that men commit more crimes than women. Crimes committed by women are mostly victimless crimes or hidden crimes, however, women are more involved in shoplifting than men, male shoplifters go for more valuable goods, women shoplifters go for cosmetics, perfumes, creams, jewelries etc.

The age bracket of shoplifters is mostly between 16-30 years. Electronic screening machines are effective in the detecting and deterring of crimes.

It is easy to detect shoplifters through their dressing, movements, eye contacts etc.

Among the interviewees, they pointed out that the manager would not want a legal battle, so they prefer to let go the shoplifters.

#### **Recommendation**

Science and Technology has contributed immensely to checking crime through the introduction of electronic screening machines. It is hereby strongly advocated that such machines should be installed in public places so as to minimize crime in the country.



The pictures of the shoplifters should be placed at the entrance of the shopping mall.

As earlier indicated in this paper, electronic screening machines cannot arrest offenders. The number of police in Nigeria is grossly inadequate, states police should be established to assist in policing.

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