

Mode of Operation of Female Armed Robbers: An Exposition of Female Enactment of Armed Robbery in Nigeria

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Abstract

Armed robbery is a quintessential violent male crime perpetrated across the globe. The changing roles and behaviors of females have come to include their commissioning of armed robbery over the years. As violent as the crime appears, females are practically involved in the planning and execution of the act. This paper therefore examines the modes of operation by which females enact armed robbery in Nigeria. Anomie theory by Robert K. Merton (1968) was used as its theoretical underpinnings. Being a descriptive and qualitative study, it made use of in-depth interviews as its instrument of data collection from 61 convicted female armed robbers focusing on three purposefully selected Southwestern states in Nigeria: Lagos, Ogun and Oyo in 2022. Data gathered was transcribed, coded and thematically analyzed using Atlas ti version 2.0. The study revealed that female armed robbers in Nigeria leverage on the general notion that females are 'weak, harmless and needing help' on one hand and their 'sexuality' on the other to rob their victims. It also shows that the enactment of armed robbery by females is strikingly unique.

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Introduction

One major factor that shapes and influences the roles women play in the underworld is sex segregation (Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016: 1011). This also applies to the roles women play in the African and Nigerian context (Thobane 2014: 77). Sex segregation shapes the level and nature of females' involvements in collective criminal enterprises especially as it concerns the type of roles they play in male dominated criminal gangs such as armed robbery. Most male dominated criminal gangs believe that females cannot handle issues of secrecy and planning due to their weak nature and flippant tongues as well as enduring the rigorous and physical activities involved (Steffensmeier/ Terry 1986: 310; Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016: 9). Hence the crime tasks environment, criminal network or gangs' attitudes towards females and the usefulness of females for executing criminal acts greatly influence females' involvement and roles in criminal gangs. Hence, they do not occupy leadership positions in complex and violent crimes that require physical means and when they do, it is usually very rare (Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016: 18).

Consequently, females' choices of involvements in criminal activities are strongly determined by the tactics required for the crime, their age, youthfulness, sexuality and the environment in which the crime will be executed (Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016: 10). Most females in criminal gangs are used to execute operations and dumped after the operations with or without pay; the only ones that are repeatedly used are those in love relationships with the males in the gangs, associates and those who are continuously situated in the crime environment e.g sex workers and employees (Aborisade/ Oni 2020; Alker 2022; Brookman et al. 2007; Maher 1997; Miller 1998; Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016: 10).

However, the ways in which females enact armed robbery have been reported to be significantly different from their male counterparts. While males rely on masculinity, intimidation and violence, females are reported to capitalize on femininity and sexuality, with less use of physical might (Alker 2022: 11; Aborisade/ Oni 2020: 8; Brookman et al. 2007; Maher 1997; Miller 1998: 25; Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016: 10).

Many scholarly studies have been done on male enactment of armed robbery in Nigeria and limited studies on females' enactment of armed robbery. But nowadays, females are found playing primary roles in armed robbery in Nigeria (Aborisade/ Oni 2020). There is therefore limited knowledge on the operational modes of females' enactment of armed robbery in Nigeria. Hence, this study examined what female armed robbers did and how, focusing on Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, it examines the socio-demographics of female armed

robbers, characteristics of the armed robbery gangs initiated into, membership composition of the armed robbery gangs, common targets and targets of operation, enlistment and mode of operation of female armed robbers, and roles played by the female armed robbers and weapons used by the female armed robbers.

Literature - Females' Enactment of Armed Robbery

Brookman et al. (2007: 878) found that female armed robbers adopt swiftness and violence as criminal calculations to over-power their male victims in order to dispossess them of their valuables knowing fully well that they cannot adopt intimidation to get compliance like their male counterparts do. They, therefore, use weapons and violence to intimidate their male victims and avoid resistance in the process of robbing them. Rennison/ Melde (2014: 7) in their study titled *Gender and Robbery: A National test* also confirmed that when females use weapons especially firearms in robbery, the most likely victim is a male. In the same study, Rennison/ Melde (2014: 7) found that females used physical force to rob both males and females which is inconsistent with Brookman et al. (2007).

Females seldom run after their male victims but are found to be with their male victims before robbing them (Brookman et al. 2007; Miller 1998). This indicates that females who robbed males who were in their companies often did so as a result of arguments over money, revenge or payment for sexual pleasures offered (Aborisade/ Oni 2020; Maher 1997). In particular, studies suggested that females target drunken and incapacitated males to rob because they are perceived to be vulnerable and unable to resist attack (Alker 2022; Brookman et al. 2007: 879; Miller 1998: 20). Brookman et al. (2007: 879) also found that female armed robbers are more likely to minimise danger and maximize profit in the enactment of robbery. They therefore follow their perceived victims to a safer and lonely place where they can easily escape apprehension before robbing them. Like Miller (1998) mentioned, they often walk towards their victims to rob them of their belongings. Hence, they are less likely to rob their male victims on the spot (Brookman et al. 2007: 877). On the contrary, Rennison/ Melde (2014: 25) found that female robbers are courageous and not afraid to apply force when robbing their victims. Generally, female armed robbers mostly attack strangers and females who are perceived to be easy and vulnerable targets from which they can make fast cash (Brookman et al. 2007: 878). When such females refuse to let go their items, they are faced with high level of violence such as beating and kicking from the female armed robbers (Brookman et al. 2007: 879; Miller 1998: 18).

Daly (1994) in her study of females who commit robberies noted that females were just as likely to dangerously wave a knife or gun in the same manner as males, and they do take active participatory roles as males in carrying out the offences. The significant difference according to Daly (1994) is that women robbed in mixed gender groups, whilst most male groups are all males. Besides, females tended to rob the people they “know” and “males” only. In robbing males, they avoid body contacts having at the back of their minds that they could easily be overpowered if they got too close to them. They, therefore, drive fear into their male victims by pointing guns at their faces or allowing the gun to touch their heads from a distance far enough to avoid body contact (Miller 1998: 12).

Another study suggested that female armed robbers robbed mostly females because they see them as easy victims who will not resist or fight back and they hardly robbed males unless they have the backing of their male counterparts because they could resist or fight back (Miller 1998). This current study buttresses this point as revealed by the participants. As such they seldom use guns or weapons on their female victims and if they must, knives are easily used and used only on victims that tried to resist them rather than using physical confrontation. Most females who handle guns hardly shoot their victims, likewise most females who brandish knives hardly use them unless their victims proved hard to surrender (Miller 1998: 18). It is important to mention that females who rob often, operate alone or in company of other females rather than males. Meanwhile females who robbed in company of males often provided supportive roles using their sexuality to lure male victims to be robbed by their boyfriends, brothers, cousins or gangs (Miller 1998: 21). Typical examples of this scenario are rampant in Nigeria for instance, there is a report on The Nation Newspaper where a five man robbery and kidnapping gang including a female was arrested by the police and they revealed how they used to lure their male victims whom they met on a dating site called ‘Tinder’ to be robbed in lonely spots and sometimes killed those who are less privileged (The Nation 2021). There was also a case of a female university undergraduate who lured her boyfriend she met on the internet to be robbed by her male accomplices in a hotel in Osun state, Nigeria (Megaiconmagazine.com 2023).

According to the studies that have mentioned females in armed robbery gangs and the roles they played in Nigeria, females have always played the role of assistants to the males. It was first recorded that they were used as baits to get male targets and as agents to receive and sell stolen properties; they never went for operations with the males (Oloruntimehin 1981). She also noted that change in role expectations and social change are possible factors that can lead to

females' involvements in armed robbery. Also very significant are the roles females played as accessory to the act in armed robbery gangs (Abdul-Rasheed et al. 2016; Obi et al. 2014). Another interesting aspect is the fact that females now play the roles of sharp shooters and leaders of armed robbery gangs in Nigeria (Aborisode/ Oni, 2020; Tobazuaye 2017; The Punch 2018; Pulse.ng, 2017; Pulse.ng, 2016) which is contrary to Schwartz/ Steffensmeier (2016) submission that females do not occupy leadership position in complex and violent crimes requiring physical means. Aborisode/ Oni (2020) also found that females initiate robberies by sexually luring their male victims to rob them at gun points when they are drunk or during sex. This study therefore explores the ways in which females accomplish armed robbery in Nigerian.

Theoretical Framework

Merton (1968) suggested that crime and delinquency are reactions or modes of adaptation to strain caused by disjunction between the culturally prescribed goals and institutionalized means of achieving such goals. As such the pressure experienced by those that cannot meet the institutionalized means for realizing the cultural goals can lead them to adopt one or more of five modes of adaptation: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. Broidy/ Agnew (1997) further explained that female criminality is a response to perceived oppressive conditions experienced (response to stressors as reaction to strain). Agnew (1992) stressed on the failure to achieve three related goals: money, status/respect, and for adolescents' autonomy from adults as propelling factors to criminal involvements or abstinence.

In a society like the Nigerian one, where girls have a lower social status than boys, many are abandoned by their fathers based on the belief that girls are worthless and they grew up in deprivation in most aspects of life, like education, finance, or denial of inheritance. As means of survival, many of them found their ways into relationships with males that eventually turned out to be armed robbers. Many also got into sexual relationships as teenagers taking up responsibilities meant for adults early in life. This burden predisposed many females to armed robbery intentionally or unintentionally. Also some females seeking freedom from troubled milieu rushed into relationships with males that provided them with stipends and many moved in with them as live-in lovers and wives without going through proper marriage rites. Similarly, studies revealed that some females got into armed robbery in order to acquire material things that will earn them economic freedom, respect and status enhancement (Aborisode/ Oni 2020; Otu 2010; Chukuezi 2009).

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in three purposefully selected Correctional Centres in three Southwestern states in Nigeria: Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo. The rationale behind their selection was that the three states were mostly on the mass media for their frequent attacks by armed robbers including females. The three Correctional Centres are the major Centres housing female armed robbery inmates in Southwest Nigeria. Finally, there were no female armed robbery offenders/convicts in custody in the other Southwestern states (Osun, Ondo and Ekiti). The participants were also purposefully selected from among the females in custody for armed robbery offences. Only those that have been tried and convicted of armed robbery and a few self-reported armed robbers in custody were selected for this study. Therefore, the total participants that were interviewed from each state were thirty-nine (39) from the Female Custodial Centre, Kirikiri Lagos state, ten (10) from the Correctional Centre Ibara, Ogun state and twelve (12) from the Correctional Centre Agodi, Oyo state. In all, a total of sixty-one (61) participants were interviewed for this study. Letters of introduction to carry out the interviews were written to the state comptrollers of the Nigerian Correctional Services and approval letters for interview received before they were done and all research ethics were strictly observed. Verbal consent was received from the convicts before the interviews. The interviews were done in four languages: English, Yoruba, Hausa and the local Pidgin language. Each face to face interview took a minimum of 20 minutes, maximum of 30 minutes and all relevant themes were noted since audio recorders were not allowed into the correctional facilities. The interviews lasted for about three weeks and coding and analysis of data lasted for two weeks. Hence the interviews and analysis lasted for almost six weeks.

Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographics of the Participants

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21 – 30	22	36.1
	31 – 40	31	50.8
	41 – 50	6	9.8
	61 – 70	2	3.3
Total		61	100
Education	None	2	3.3
	Primary	26	42.6
	Secondary	23	37.7
	Tertiary	10	16.4
Total		61	100
Marital status	Single	32	52.5
	Married	21	34.4
	Single mother never married	2	3.3
	Divorced/Separated	6	9.8
Total		61	100

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 1 shows the majority of the participants (50.8%) were between the ages of 31-40 years, which revealed that armed robbery was perpetrated by females in their youthful and most adventurous age where dreams and aspirations are supposed to be actualized. But instead of achieving set goals through legal means they deviated and decided to adopt illegal means most probably because they could not achieve the educational requirements and suitable employment. Almost half of them (42.6%) have primary school education slightly above half (52.5%) of them were single while 34.4% were married. This also shows that

females that participate in armed robbery are mostly without familial responsibilities, and they are not emotionally responsible to husbands and children to return home to.

Characteristics of the Armed Robbery Gang Initiated into

Looking at the composition of the armed robbery gang the inmates were initiated into, it was discovered that most of them were initiated into gangs which were composed of male and female, while very few were initiated into female only gangs. One of them was in two different gangs, one was a mixture of males and females while the other was females only gang. The membership of these gangs was also described by the inmates, majority of the groups had less than five members, some gangs had two, some three and some had four members. While majority of the inmates belonged to gangs with five members, some of them belonged to gangs with members ranging from six to ten. Whereas there were two who belonged to different gangs of twenty members each.

Table 2: Membership Composition of the Armed Robbery Gangs

S/N	Membership Composition of the Armed Robbery Gangs	
1	Females-only Gang	4
2	Males and Females Gang (Mixed)	57

Source: Field Survey 2022

Common Target and Target of Operation of Female Armed Robbers

The study revealed that female armed robbers have no specific common target and target of operations in general terms rather they take on every opportunity against any available suitable target such as commuters, night clubbers and sex buyers, and drunken men. Even though some go for specific targets, but common among them was the drive for money or other material items like jewelry. They identified their human and non-human targets by their physical appearance, spending and luxurious lifestyle, especially for predetermined would-be victims such as wealthy people, financial institutions like banks and micro-finance houses, and industrialists. Also, some beautiful houses were some of their

specific targets. For example, some female armed robbers have revealed what they target in their operations.

I was aware of the money she wanted to use to pay for a new accommodation. *IDI_Female_53_Kirikiri Lagos*

Through physical appearance and information. *IDI_Female_33_Kirikiri Lagos*

We chose him because he was a white boy, and his father has plenty money. *IDI_Female_25_Kirikiri Lagos*

We do not choose we attacked any passenger that enters our bus. *IDI_Female_28_Kirikiri Lagos*

One respondent attested to the fact that she saw the opportunity to rob and immediately made use of it without considering the risk involved:

I saw the car parked and the key was in the ignition, so I knew that I just needed to enter and start the car. *IDI_Female_44_Kirikiri Lagos*

Corroborating this was the revelations from other female armed robbery convicts who participated in this study:

We mostly attack isolated buildings in quiet areas where we are sure that they are not likely to catch us easily. When we have to attack individuals, our targets are those wearing expensive things and seem to have a lot of money. We will look for opportunity to rob him. *IDI_Female_33_Agodi Ibadan*

Quiet compounds/houses and lone persons on the streets especially in the evening. *IDI_Female_33_Agodi Ibadan*

Some respondents also revealed that their targets were the people they worked with or organizations where they worked as cashiers, bank marketers/managers, hotels and clubs.

I was working with her as a nanny helping her to take care of her son. *IDI_Female_21_Kirikiri Lagos*

It was the cold room where I work as a cashier. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri Lagos*

Our target was the owner of the shop where I work and nearby shops where my friends work because we were in it together. *IDI_Female_21_Kirikiri Lagos*

I robbed the owner of the POS agency where I work. *IDI_Female_28_Kirikiri Lagos*

The target was my new bank customer. *IDI_Female_32_Kirikiri Lagos*

While some others said their targets were their intimate partners, robbing them to settle scores or disputes:

I allowed my brothers to go to my boyfriend's house to beat him up and took his laptop and phones because he beat me. *IDI_Female_23_Kirikiri Lagos*

Even though female armed robbers attack at random and at the slightest opportunity in general, the data revealed certain dynamics among them with some groups emphasized on certain items as preference than others such as money and cars, therefore their common emphasis were people holding money, financial institutions, and owners of expensive cars.

Our common targets are anybody in possession of large amount of money, owners of flashy cars and people who looked flamboyant, expensively dressed with expensive jewelries. *IDI_Female_50_Agodi Ibadan*

I placed sales adverts on the internet giving a phone number I registered with fake information as contact number, a fake name, none existing address and picture as profile details for the advert. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri Lagos*

We usually steal cars that are hot cakes in the market, and they must be looking very clean e.g. Toyota products especially highlander jeep. *IDI_Female_21_Ibara Abeokuta*

Banks, Micro finance houses, lone rangers at night clubs, people supplied by females, sex buyers. *IDI_Female_65_Ibara Abeokuta*

Enlistment and Mode of Operation of Female Armed Robbers

Even though female armed robbers participate in robbery operations, their level of involvement varies depending on the situation and their gang formation. Many of the female armed robbers were not enlisted to directly participate in the field operations, their roles were more of accessories or informants, especially for a mixed robbery gang comprising of both males and females, although there were purely females' gang here in direct field operation by the members as executed. This has been revealed by the female armed robbery convict who participated in this study:

Informant, visiting the location of operation first to give situational report to my gang before they come to operate, supplier of drugs to the gang. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri Lagos*

As a female I played the role of the gang leader, selection of who become a member, initiator, arms buyer and custodian. The other females I recruited into the gang are used for transportation of the arms to the operation sites hours before the boys get there. They also clean, count and ensure that the number of arms taken out is the same with the number of arms

returned. I also used them to survey the target area for weeks before the operation. *IDI_Female_50_Agodi Ibadan (1)*

I was used as shield to deceive unsuspecting police on the highway. *IDI_Female_21_Ibara Abeokuta*

Whereas most female armed robbers played the role of accessories some of them participated on the field operation especially, sometimes with combined roles of being accessories to their male gang members, and the active field operation members that bear arms especially those who have formed a purely female gang:

I was an active member carrying gun in operations. *IDI_Female_28_Kirikiri Lagos*

We break into houses, banks and even attack buses to rob people during the day and at night. *IDI_Female_50_Agodi Ibadan (1)*

I was the one keeping the guns for my man friend and his gang and I was also carrying the guns to meet them in the hotel or anywhere they want me to take it to. I use to give some beggars money to give me information of my man friend and when they are around. The beggar will be the one to tell my man friend where I kept the bag, when I came and all. During election time, we robbed a bank because our insider informant told us that Governor Tinubu brought heavy cash to the bank for election runs. So, we went to the bank to rob at about 11pm, we used heavy duty AK47 guns to scare security away and small bombs to break the entrance of the bank and the office where the safe was kept and also used bomb to break the safe open before we were able to collect the money and escaped. *IDI_Female_38_Kirikiri*

Female armed robbers have multiple and dynamic modes of operation depending on the circumstances. However, for the vast majority, deception and tricks using and exploring their gender status, the trust and sympathy which society accords them of being weak and less venturesome, hence they lure and cajole unsuspecting populace. While many others use their professional status to attack their unsuspecting victims that are usually familiar persons such as clients, bosses, colleagues, intimate friends or other associates. Also, there is no specific hour of operation, even though it was usually at night when attacking random targets, but it was not so among those in the professional sector which were usually within the working hours. A lot of disguise and identity cover, lies and help seeking were some of the usual tactics employed by the female armed robbers, while short guns and knives were the common forms of weapons they used in operation, for those who actively participate on the field, as revealed in this study.

We use to go round Ibadan town with some mad people, some of the boys will pretend to be mad and I will be singing as we moved along the road,

my friend will be beating gong and the other females will be ringing bells and begging for alms to take care of the mad people. While that is going on, I will be looking out for the most beautiful houses on the street, note the height of the fence, note the gate if there are gatemen or electric wire on the fence, colour and number of flats and cars in the compound etc. When we get to the target buildings, we will wait longer to have enough time to do the surveillance. On each operation I use to survey about 5 houses taking note of how to beat their security. They made white garment for me and every one of us was in white garments except the mad people and those of us who pretended to be mad. At the end of the day, every one of us will have different information and the leader will decide on the houses to attack. We usually attack the houses after midnight when everybody will be sleeping. *IDI_Female_30_Agodi Ibadan*

The way we operate is to stand on the road at night like a lady who is stranded begging for lifts if any car stopped, instead of entering immediately I will engage the driver in talking as in trying to describe where I am going to so that my gang members will have enough time to get to the car, point a gun at the driver and ask him to leave his key and jump out of the car leaving every other thing. As soon as he gets out of the car, the other guy will search his pockets and remove whatever he has there and as that is going on, I will get into the front seat and the driver gets into the driver's seat and immediately the other guy is done he jumps into the car and the driver speeds off. Once we start moving it is straight to another state where we have not been in a long while. On our arrival, we contact guys of like minds and get the car numbers, screen numbers, side mirror numbers, engine numbers and colour of the car changed that very night to early in the morning then place the car for sale. While in the hotel, we will pay people to forge papers for the car and give to the buyer when the car is sold. Most times it doesn't take time to sell the car because we will make it very cheap to attract buyers fast. We also have police men that we pay to give us police particulars for the car. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri Lagos*

The incidence happened at Lekki-Ajah expressway at about 10pm, on the fateful day the victim was on his way to his house with the money in a bag on the back seat of his car and I waved him down for a free ride and when he stopped, he was attacked by my gang members and they shot him because he struggled with them, took his phone, money and other items from the car and we left him thinking he was dead. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri Lagos*

This was further supported by the revelation of another female robbery convict interviewed who has organized young females gang deceiving any suitable target, usually private motorist on the street:

We use to go out in twos at about 10pm and one person will hold a gun while the other holds a knife. We will stand on the road waiving down

flashy cars asking for free ride. When anyone stops, we will enter the car and engage the man in a gist mostly appreciating him for stopping to pick us. When we get to the highway, the girl at the back will bring out her gun, point it at the man's head allowing the tip of the gun to touch his skull and command him to park and surrender everything he has on him to me sitting beside him. With smiles I will collect the items from him tell him thank you for the ride and get out of the car while my gang member also gets out. Then tell him to go and pick up his key at the next bus stop.
IDI_Female_34_Kirikiri Lagos

Similarly, one confessed that they operated with cars and tricycles very early in the morning picking and robbing unsuspecting passengers:

My gang operated with cars and tricycle called 'keke marwa'. Me and one of the guys will sit at the back of the car and the other will be the driver. At about 4.30 – 5.30am we will set out on the road calling passengers going to oshodi from Ota along the road. We usually pick those who look like market women and people carrying lap top bags. As soon as we get on the express road, I will shout 'everybody hand over your money and bags' and my gang member will point his gun at them, slap the person sitting next to him and say 'obey quickly or else I shoot you'. After collecting everything from them, the driver will stop the car on the express and order everyone to get out of the car and as soon as they get out, he will speed off. Then we move to another busy bus stop and do same until about 5.30am. Sometimes we do three rounds before 5.30am and other times we do only two rounds depending on traffic. Our other members will also be operating with keke marwa in another area at the same time. We make sure we don't come back home on the same route we started from, and we also make sure that we don't come back in the same vehicle. For instance, only the driver will drive the car/keke back home while individually we take public vehicles back home. We usually meet in the evening to share our loots. *IDI_Female_25_Ibara Abeokuta*

Furthermore, females belonging to professional class or occupation among the female armed robbery convicts used their offices or given assignment to wreck damage on their organizations in collaboration with other persons. They usually leak organizational information to outsiders, and sometimes they participate in the physical operation. The data revealed that another mode of operation commonly used among female armed robbers was to lure friends or intimates who presumed to be trusted. This could be seen in an excerpt from a company employee who was the manager and signatory to the company's bank account connived with her gang and forced another employee who was equally a signatory to the company's bank account to go and withdraw money from their company, and a lady who was advised by her friends lured her boyfriend for kidnapping and collected ransom from his family.

After I have planned the operation with my male friend giving him the time and date we will be going to the bank. On the fateful day at about 12noon, I drove the company car with the other signatory with me to the bank, we both signed the cheque, withdrew the 3million, put it in a bag and as we were walking to the car, the guy entered the bank premises, went straight to the woman pointed the gun at her and asked her to give him the money which she immediately did, but the woman noticed that the gun was a toy gun and she shouted severally and loud that the security came and apprehended him and the money was returned instantly. I stood watching everything as if I was innocent. It was through his confession at the police station that they knew I was involved, and they arrested me immediately. *IDI_Female_36_Ibara Abeokuta*

I planned with my boyfriend to come and attack and steal my madam's money and ATM card and her purse and I gave him the pin number ahead of the robbery. I gave him the information about my madam and when she usually comes back from her shop, and he came to the area and monitored her movement for about one week without notice. On that fateful evening at about 7.30pm when my madam returned from work as she drove into the compound and came out of her car, my boyfriend with his friend followed her and bailed her up with a gun asking her to hand over her bag and my madam quickly obeyed. I was inside the house watching the whole incidence, after they left my madam started shouting and people came out, but the boys were already gone. They started withdrawing from her account that night and the next day morning before she was able get to the bank to block her account, they had already withdrawn 1.7 million naira from POS. *IDI_Female_21_Kirikiri Lagos*

I use to give our gang leader information about the sales we made for the day, where the money is kept and when to come and operate. At about 7 pm when we are trying to close the shop for the day, five guys will come with guns and knives, take one of us and point the gun at her head and take her to our madam inside the shop asking her to surrender her money or he will kill the girl and then kill her also. Our madam will quickly pack the money and hand it over to them and they will leave. *IDI_Female_21_Kirikiri Lagos*

One of the respondents said she lured her white boyfriend to be kidnapped and robbed by her gang members:

I was dating the white boy, and my friends convinced me to set him up to be kidnapped and robbed...I lured my white boyfriend to be kidnapped and robbed by my gang members and a ransom of 5million naira was paid for our release. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri Lagos*

Another one provided shield for her armed robber lover and his gang members:

My involvement in armed robbery was to provide support and shelter for my lover and later it spread to every member of the gang because we have

become one big family. Over time, when the police arrest any of them I will be the one to call my police friends, pay big money and have him released. They also came to my bear parlor after successful robberies to hide till daybreak before going to their different houses while my lover stays back with me. *IDI_Female_39_Kirikiri Lagos*

Some confessed that they lured unsuspecting strangers mostly commuters carrying items of interest or seen to possess large amount of money to be robbed by their male accomplices waiting nearby or sometimes walk up to their victims and zoom off with a bike with their male members:

I lure men and women to my gang to be robbed. I use to stand as a commuter waiting to enter bus, attach myself to a guy I suspect to be carrying money or seen with bag of interest. Take note of the route of the bus he is waiting for and then chat with him by telling him that I am going to the same direction with him and have been waiting there for long without getting a bus, after some minutes I will suggest to him that we walk a little to the front maybe we will get a cab once he agrees, I will walk him into the hands of my waiting gang members and they will attack us and I run away. *IDI_Female_36_Kirikiri Lagos*

I use to go on a bike with the rider who is my gang member when we see somebody we want to rob, we will park at a distance, while I walk to meet the victim, collect what he has with him, at this time the bike would have moved close to me and I jump back on the bike and it zooms off. Other times, I will move close to the victim and press a knife against her stomach by the side, ask her to hand over what she has, collect it and then jump back on the bike and zoom off. *IDI_Female_30_Kirikiri Lagos*

Another confessed that her gang usually employed house helps for unsuspecting clients after which they go to the house, to rob following information got from the house helps:

When I went on 2 days off duty and my cousin's boyfriend saw that I was with my cousin, he sent 2 other guys to my madam's house at night to rob her at about 11.30pm. They tied the gateman's hands, legs, mouth and blindfolded him with a piece of cloth. They entered my madam's house, held her at gun point, beat her, took her money, mobile phones, ipad, laptop and golden jewelries and left. *IDI_Female_24_Kirikiri Lagos*

Very exciting is the confession from a 65 years old convict that graduated from being a gang member to a gang initiator and founder:

In my first gang, I was the one who transports arms from place to place, it could be within the state and sometimes outside the state. My first assignment was to carry arms from Sagamu to Lagos and I disguised as a mad woman in tattered clothes, almost naked, rubbed the bag of arms in mud to look very dirty, carried it on my head, and walked to Lagos at about 11pm and nobody stopped me on the way until I got to the specific

location where I was to drop it. Some other times, I carried arms wrapped in clothes inside black poly bags like a woman returning from the market on bikes and in my car to designated locations before operations. When I saw more roles that females could play in armed robbery, I later formed a gang of 5 females that I used as sex service girls, giving them to rich men who could pay very good money per nights. I also made them charms of sweetness and 'afose' such that any man they sleep with will always want them again and again and whatever they demand from him will be given to them. I will collect the information of the men and gave to my gang, and they will go and rob them later. So, I was gaining from two sides. We were high class call girls highly paid for sex and I got 40% of whatever the girls were paid. While the third gang I joined was when I was when I was about 55 years and I saw that I could not do most of the things I used to do again, I joined the elders in crime. We gave advisory roles to the younger criminals and sometimes go to the station to bail them when they were arrested and used money to close the case where possible and also get lawyers for those that could not be bailed. *IDI_Female_65_Agodi Ibadan*

Some also waylay smugglers on bush paths going to the international border to buy goods very early in the morning:

We attack smugglers passing through the bush path to the border to buy contraband goods. We will just stand beside them on both sides. My friend will threaten them with the gun and ask them to hand over their money to me or he will kill them. Once they see the gun, they will start shaking and begging us not to kill them and bring out their money strapped around their waist and give to me. Before they knew what was happening, we would have disappeared into the bush. Sometimes we approach them pretending that we wanted to help them. *IDI_Female_26_Ibara Abeokuta*

While another one said she used to keep guns for armed robbers that were initially her Indian hemp customers:

When the first customer approached me to be keeping his gun for him, I was first scared that if somebody finds the gun with me it may raise suspicion. I also knew that my children or husband may stumble on it by mistake if I kept it inside my room so I decided that I will be keeping it inside my shop by wrapping it with a cloth and keeping it in the middle of a bag of garri. When the guns became more than one, I decided to have two bags of garri that I dedicated to keeping the guns. So, I will wrap each person's own in a small bag provided by the person, wrap it in separate clothes and put them in the bag of garri each bag containing 3 guns and I did that successfully for more than 2 years before I was arrested. *IDI_Female_45_Kirikiri Lagos*

Roles Played by the Participants

The roles and positions of these convicts differed in their various gangs, although, some of them played more than one role in their group. The majority of them declared that they were informants to the other members of their gang, they informed them about the targeted victims, suggested victims to their gang members and monitored the movements of the targeted victims. Some were aiders and abettors to the armed robbery gang they belonged, they played such roles as keeping and transporting arms, drivers to the vehicles that carry the gang members (to prevent being stopped by the police), cooked for the gang members and offered sex to specific members (usually the leader).

I started by giving my gang information about rich men in my area and nearby areas I hawk to. Hawking alcoholic drinks made it easier for me to get victims information. *IDI_Female_31_Agodi Ibadan*

I acted as an arms transporter, doctor to the gang, provided shield and marital duties to my husband. *IDI_Female_40_Kirikiri*

Cook, housekeeper and sometimes I acted as the driver of the vehicle we use for escape. *IDI_Female_40_Kirikiri Lagos*

I was an arms keeper and transporter. *IDI_Female_24_Ibara Abeokuta*

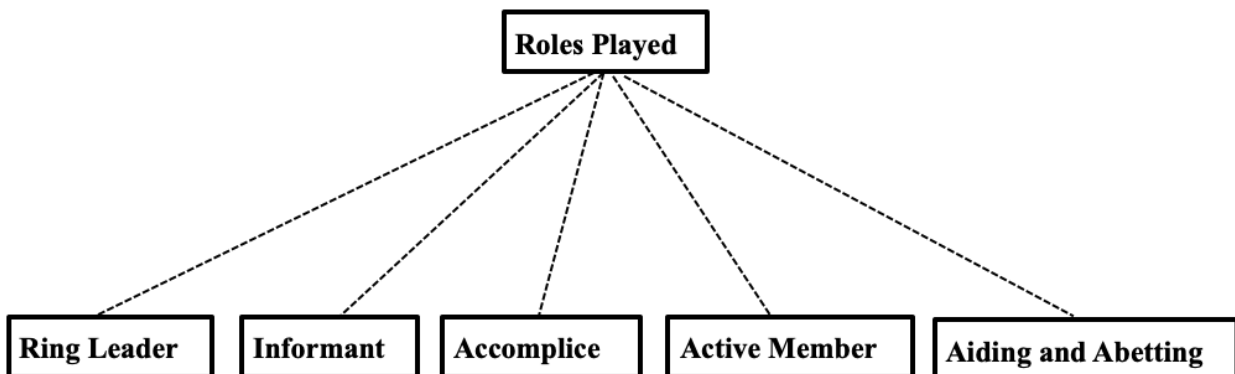
Some were active members who went with other gang members for operations. Some were accomplice who collaborated with armed robbers in carrying out a particular operation, these were not members per se, they only played their roles in the operation in order to get their own share. Three of them were ring leaders in their various gangs, they planned, recruited, and determined the roles each of the members played in their various operations.

I was an active member carrying gun in operations. *IDI_Female_28_Kirikiri*

I was asked to lead my white boyfriend to a designated point on the road and then excuse myself to want to urinate at a particular spot. Then the other members rushed into the car and beat me and the boy asking us to go to a designated place where the operation was successfully carried out. I followed the plan as it was laid down. *IDI_Female_26_Kirikiri*

As a female I played the role of the gang leader, selection of who become a member, initiator, arms buyer and custodian. The other females I recruited into the gang are used for transportation of the arms to the operation sites hours before the boys get there. They also clean, count and ensure that the number of arms taken out is the same with the number of arms returned. I also used them to survey the target area for weeks before the operation. *IDI_Female_50_Agodi Ibadan (1)*

Figure 1: Roles Played by the Participants in their Various Armed Robbery Gangs



Source: Field Survey (2022)

Weapons used by the Participants

The fewer female armed robbers, who directly participated in physical operation, did not usually operate with lethal weapons like guns, except few ones in a mixed gang. The data revealed that, mostly, they used crude weapons like knives or garden scissors.

I was an active member carrying gun in operations. *IDI_Female_28_Kirikiri Lagos*

Garden scissors and gun. *IDI_Female_28_Kirikiri Lagos*

I use to go on a bike with the rider who is my gang member when we see somebody we want to rob, we will park at a distance while I walk to meet the victim collect what he has with him at this time the bike would have moved close to me and I jump back on the bike and it zooms off. Other times, I will move close to the victim and press a knife against her stomach by the side, ask her to hand over what she has, collect it and then jump back on the bike and zooms off. *IDI_Female_30_Kirikiri Lagos (2)*

I used knife. *IDI_Female_33_Kirikiri Lagos*

I used guns, knives, clubs, axe, chemicals such as acid. *IDI_Female_50_Agodi Ibadan (1)*

Discussion

This study supports the existing literature that females in armed robbery are mostly between the ages of late teens and early adulthood (Aborisade/ Oni 2020; Alker 2022; Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016), however, contradicts the findings that females age-crime peaks at late teens (Steffensmeier et al. 2017), because it shows that females of over 50 years actively participated in armed robbery in

Nigeria. This study corroborates Aborisade's and Oni's (2020) findings at Kirikiri Lagos, found the majority of their samples were between the ages of 18-25 years and the mean age was 22 years. Steffensmeier et al. (2017) worked on the age-crime thesis among males and females in the United States of America and Taiwan and found that the age-crime invariance for robbery and theft offenders in both countries peaked early and declined quickly while other offenses were contrary to the invariance thesis. The finding of this study is in tandem with the age-crime thesis found in Taiwan where the ages of offenders cover all age categories unlike that of the US that peaks at late teens. Here also the ages of these female armed robbery convicts spread across all ages that is, from 21 to 65 years. This shows that females in their youthful, middle age and the elderly get involved in armed robbery in Nigeria as revealed in this study. Just as was revealed in this study also some elderly females, who are considered senior citizens, also encouraged and sponsored females in armed robbery as well as other crimes and they also searched for legal assistance for their members where getting them released on bail proved difficult and impossible.

As revealed in this study, the influence of educational qualification on females' involvements in armed robbery appeared to vary in two dimensions in this study. Low level of education was a major determinant of females' participation in armed robbery corroborating Aborisade/ Oni (2020) and Umar (2015). At the same time high level of education and position held at the workplace was a major determinant of females' involvement in armed robbery contradicting Umar (2015) because some of the female convicts had tertiary education, were gainfully employed and earned high wages before their arrest and conviction for armed robbery. This indicates that the higher the educational qualification and position occupied by females at the work place the higher the level and role played by females in armed robbery as revealed in this study. Hence it corroborates Abdul-Rasheed et al. (2016) and Schwartz/ Steffensmeier (2016) studies, where they suggested that the more females gain enter into the labor force occupying top managerial positions and occupying same positions with males, the narrower the gap between male and female crime committal. It also supports the assertion that there is a correlation between level of education among females and the types of crimes perpetrated by females (Abdul-Rasheed et al. 2016).

This study also revealed that females in armed robbery were majorly single. Looking at the data on females that have never been married before but are with children and the divorced /separated females in this study totalling 13.1 and singles representing 52.5 per cent shows that majority (65.6%) of females in armed robbery in the three discussed Federal States of Southwestern Nigeria were single. Even though a large number of these convicted female armed

robbers were married they were married to armed robbers (34.4 per cent). This contradicts Aslimoski's and Stanojoska's (2015) findings, that females tend to retire from crimes when they find love or are faced with marriageable partners/proposals, instead this study showed that the majority of females in armed robbery found themselves in armed robbery, assisted and continued in it to sustain their love affairs with their lovers because they were married to them or had promises to get married in the nearest future (Jefferies et al. 2019; Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016).

The modes of operation of female armed robbers were also identified in their various forms which includes: pretending to be mad/insane, pretending to be caring for mad people, using beggars as informants between them and their gang members, surveillance of the proposed crime sites before operation is carried out, luring men to be robbed and mostly used as informants, accessories, get away drivers and passengers in commercial vehicles amongst others, which included sharpshooters, gang leaders, arms transporters, wives, physicians, and legal supporters. This indicates that the modes of operations of female armed robbers are guided by the needed skills required in the robbery operations (Schwartz/ Steffensmeier (2016). Hence it supports the findings of Alker (2022), Miller (1998) and Brookman et al. (2007) that females seldom run after their victims, apply minimum force to rob them and when they have to rob males they go for total strangers and in company of males or when they are incapacitated. It also goes to show that females often offer supportive (marginal) roles even in armed robbery as suggested by Schwartz/ Steffensmeier (2016). That is the reason why some scholars have tied females' involvements in crime to their male partners because they believe that females cannot act alone in criminal operations especially when it involves complicated and serious crimes such as armed robbery (Schwartz/ Steffensmeier 2016).

This study also revealed a few females of managerial level in the bank that organized their male gang members to rob the bank where they worked while it showed another female bank manager that planned with her friend to rob her bank of 3million naira, she bought a toy gun, gave to her friend to carry out the operation. This corroborates Schwartz/ Steffensmeier (2016) suggestion that one's position at the workplace may influence criminal involvements as a co-offender or recruiter of co-offenders.

Conclusion

This study in three Federal States of Southwestern Nigeria concluded that female armed robbers were mostly between the age of 21-40 years even though there

were a few within 41-70 years. This indicates that female armed robbers cut across youths and the elderly. They are educated, a few had tertiary education and the majority of them were single, while the married ones amongst them were married to armed robbers. Four female-only gangs were found amongst female armed robbers in this study, while 57 operated in mixed gangs. This study also concluded that female armed robbers tended to operate at random, did not have specific targets, were mostly opportunists who targeted night clubbers, drunken men, commuters and sex buyers.

The study also concluded that there are great differences and slight similarities in the modes of operation of female armed robbers with that of the males. The similarities stemmed from females only gangs where they had to carry guns, went on operations and at the forefront of the act just like the males. While the differences are based on females' involvements in armed robbery mostly on emotional attachments with their male associates, despising the high risks involved. The study also concluded that females mostly rendered supportive roles which to the males were perceived as insignificant in armed robbery operations, but as insignificant as it appeared, it negated the criminal codes, and they were convicted for it.

The modes of operation of female armed robbers included pretending to be mad while carrying weapons to designated locations, leading mad people for alms collection, pretending to want to offer sex for sale, pretending to be stranded on the highways, pretending to be passengers in commercial vehicles, transporting weapons to specific locations of operation, using beggars on the street as informants, keeping weapons in bags of garri amongst others. Therefore, the study concluded that female armed robbers used deception, lies, tricks, sexuality, professional status and help seeking behaviors as strategies to getting their victims.

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Interviews

Field Survey (2022): Results of interviews that were done by the researchers at three Correctional Centres in three Southwestern States in Nigeria for this study:

Female Custodial Centre, Kirikiri Lagos state

Correctional Centre Ibara, Ogun state

Correctional Centre Agodi, Oyo state

Questionnaire

Age

Education

Religion

Year of arrest

Charges/Offence

Court of trial

Conviction

Employment type prior to armed robbery involvement

Your Income level

Family size

Number in the family

Area of residence

Respondent's type of accommodation

Marital status

Spouse educational level

Spouse employment type
Spouse income level
Parental marital status
Parental educational level
Number of wives
Parental negative behavior
Father's income
Mother's income
Parental type of accommodation
Family communication level
Family conflict
Level of family affection
Is this the first time you are arrested/charged?
Why were you arrested or charged first?
Can you tell us the exact thing that attracted you to armed robbery?
Intimate partner
Financial pressure
Low income
Peer influence
Poverty; Hunger
Unemployment/retirement
Desolation
Accommodation issues
Life style (social status)
Can you please explain your mode of operation in armed robbery?
Is your gang an all-female gang?
How many were you in your gang?
Which role did you play?
How did you choose your targets?
Your common targets?
Why?
Weapon used?
Your areas of operation?
Did you go on operation with your gang?
Items stolen?
Estimate of loots per operation?