

# THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

## The Invisible Woman: Gender, Victimization and White-Collar Crime

**Certain areas in criminology have received less attention from researchers than others. Female involvement in crime has been studied less than male participation, white-collar crime less than street crime, and victims less than offenders.**

In terms of 'popularity' with researchers, then, there are two extremes: (1) male street criminals are 'most popular' (2) female victims of white-collar crime are 'least popular'. Thousands of studies exist on the first topic, but **we have been unable to find a single publication on the second.**

Whilst it is true that criminologists have acknowledged the existence of health problems related to the use of the Dalkon Shield, the Carpel Tunnel Syndrome experienced by typists, and cancer rates among female assembly line workers in California's Silicon Valley, *they have never focused on the fact that the victims are overwhelmingly female and that this fact might have important ramifications.*

For example, the leading texts in the field of white-collar crime discuss the Dalkon Shield controversy in some detail, but they do not have listings for 'women', 'gender' or 'females' in their indexes. Similarly, case studies often provide many details, but virtually ignore the fact that women are the victims (*an exception is Mintz, (1985) on the Dalkon Shield*).

**Such a slighting of women's victimisation in white-collar crime is consistent with the fact that their role in crime in general has been neglected by most researchers.** This tendency has manifested itself in many different ways.

For instance, as reported in the recent Criminal Justice Matters concerning 'Women and Crime' (*issue no. 5*), crime has been seen as an almost exclusively male phenomenon, so attention need not be devoted to research on female participation. If females are discussed, the emphasis has been tightly focused on traditional issues such as prostitution, rape and lately, domestic violence. Although the situation is improving, **there is no literature that deals specifically with female victimisation of white-collar crime**, although there are some studies that discuss this issue tangentially. For example, Vaughan and Carlo

(1975), in an early study of an unethical appliance repairman, found that a disproportionate number of victims (83%) were females. More importantly, two of five victims who were home alone when the repairman visited, felt that the visit would have been different had they not been alone; all of the respondents who said so were females.

There is impressionistic evidence that females are somewhat more likely to be victimised than males in some forms of white-collar crime. Ganzini and her associates (1990), show that 48% of the victims in a pyramid scheme they studied were female and concluded that such victims 'tend to be older, more affluent, and relatively more likely to be female.' (1990:61). Tracey and Fox (1989) found in a study of insurance fraud, that car repair businesses tended to give male drivers lower repair estimates than female drivers if the car was alleged to be *uninsured*. By implication, women would seem to be more likely to be victimised by deviant car repair businesses.

Along somewhat similar lines, **some researchers have looked at women's involvement in crime and delinquency in new ways, but have not concentrated on female victims of white-collar crime.** Daley (1989), for example, discussed gender and white-collar crime, but focussed on perpetrators rather than victims. Similarly, Simpson (1989) and Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988), analysed the relationship between feminism, crime and justice but focused almost exclusively on offences such as rape and assault in their discussions of female victimisation. Indeed, Simpson states that '*... the entire area of white-collar, corporate, and organisation crime has not been examined from a feminist perspective*' (1989:619).

### Conclusion

It is imperative that research on female victimisation of white-collar crime be conducted that builds upon the studies discussed above. We can only speculate as to why such research has not been conducted so far. One possible explanation can be found in the values of society and its world view.

Writing in very different context, Quinney (1972:322) speculated that:-

*'To regard the person who loses property as a victim is to value the sanctity of private property. To exclude the Vietnamese civilian suffering from criminal and war operations is to accept national military policies.'*

**We postulate that to ignore female victimisation of white-collar crime is**

**to accept the dominant world view which values men over women. Consequently women's victimisation is often overlooked.**

Stanko (1988) points out, for instance, that women's greater fear of crime, may stem not from greater physical vulnerability, but from the fact that their victimisation is much more likely to be missed than men's victimisation. Traditional crimes of violence against women often take place in the home in the form of domestic violence, whereas male victimisation is more likely to occur in public and thus is more visible.

Women's fear of crime may therefore be a rational response to high victimisation rates. Once again, male involvement in crime is visible and subject to study while female participation is not.

**It is conceivable that the same applies to white-collar crime.** Only research focusing on women as victims of white-collar crime will allow us to examine this possibility. Otherwise, women's invisibility will preclude further knowledge of the importance of gender as a variable in white-collar crime research.

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