10th MRIC
8-9th October, 2025
(Multidisciplinary Research International Conference)
University of Wah

Exploring Gendered Pathways Theory: Trajectories to Crime and Reintegration Challenges for Female Ex-Convicts from Adiala Jail, Pakistan

Fida Muhammad khan[1] (Corresponding Author) Zainab Fatima[2]

PIDE School of Policy, Development and Governance.

Women Aid Trust (WAT), Pakistan

Fida@pide.org.pk

Zainab.sosun.7512@gmail.com

This paper employs Gendered Pathways Theory (GPT) within feminist criminology to examine how trauma, domestic abuse, poverty, and coercive relationships shape the criminal trajectories and reintegration challenges of female ex-convicts in Pakistan's patriarchal society, where societal stigma and limited support systems exacerbate post-incarceration difficulties. Utilizing an Interpretivist approach and narrative analysis of in-depth interviews with former inmates from Adiala Jail, it explores cases of women whose crimes were driven by survival needs, such as escaping prolonged abuse or navigating economic dependency, revealing systemic failures like inadequate legal protections and social abandonment. These narratives highlight the trauma-to-prison pipeline and reintegration barriers, including social ostracism, financial instability, and mental health struggles, the paper recommends an urgent need for gender-responsive policies that incorporate trauma-informed rehabilitation and support for dependents to challenge male-centric criminological models and promote equitable reintegration in Pakistan's justice system.

[1] Assistant Professor PIDE School of Policy, Development and Governance.

[2] Research officer/volunteer at Women Aid Trust (WAT), Pakistan

Keywords: Gendered Pathways Theory Feminist Criminology, Female Ex-Convicts, Adiala Jail

Reintegration Challenges, Trauma-to-Prison Pipeline

Introduction

Zahida made curry out of the meager ingredients in her kitchen. She fed her children and asked them to prepare their beds and go to sleep. Sitting on her bed, she contemplated the horrific act she was about to commit. She unwrapped a knife, sharpened earlier at the local market, from a piece of newspaper. As her children slept, Zahida sat in the darkness, convinced that the knife was her only escape. Hours later, a man entered her home using a spare key. Her heart pounded with each of his footsteps, bringing her worst nightmare closer. It was her husband, a man who treated her as his property for over 20 years. That night, Zahida decided she would no longer be enslaved. As he began his usual drunken abuse, culminating in an attempt to choke her, Zahida stabbed him in the abdomen. His scream of pain marked her declaration of freedom.

While Zahida's act is a crime under the law, what factors drove her to this extreme? What role did her family, friends, cousins, and society play? Was her crime simply being born a woman in a society that often marginalizes her? Scholarly literature, through the lens of gendered pathways theory (GPT), posits that women's routes to crime differ significantly from men's, shaped by gendered life experiences such as trauma, abuse, poverty, and coercive relationships. This study analyzes Zahida's journey from a middle-class woman to a convicted criminal, using GPT to explore how gendered experiences lead to crime and how female ex-convicts navigate reintegration in Pakistan's post-colonial, patriarchal context.

Gendered Pathways Theory: A Framework

Gendered pathways theory (GPT) argues that women's criminality is influenced by their gendered life experiences, distinct from men's trajectories. In societies like Pakistan, where women are often labeled as subordinate from birth, societal perceptions create inequalities in opportunities, discrimination, and, in some settings, dehumanization. GPT posits that women's crimes—often property offenses, fraud, or, in rare cases, violent acts like murder—are frequently driven by survival needs, histories of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, poverty, homelessness, or coercive relationships (Daly, 1992; Chesney-Lind, 2006). Unlike men, whose pathways may involve peer influence or opportunity-driven crime, women's motivations are often rooted in trauma or economic dependence (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

Women in prison are reported to have histories of marginalization resulting from abuse or mental health challenges caused by intersection of their marginalized identities of gender, class and race (Muthee 2020). In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, there are amplified chances of women committing crime due to their vulnerabilities, like Zahida committed a crime to avoid or escape an abusive environment. GPT also acknowledges that while some women may follow traditional antisocial pathways, survival-driven motivations are more prevalent (Salisbury et al., 2009).

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist approach to explore how are he pathways to crime gendered? And how do the female ex-convicts in Pakistan experience reintegration into society. Following Guba and Lincoln (1994), the research is grounded in constructivist ontology, viewing reality as shaped by human experiences, relationships, and interactions. This perspective is critical for understanding the personal

realities of incarcerated women, whose stories cannot be reduced to statistics (Neumann, 1997). The epistemology aligns with interpretivism, prioritizing the women's own narratives to capture how they make sense of their lives before, during, and after prison (Guba & Lincoln, 1993).

Narrative analysis was chosen as the method to allow participants to share their journeys in their own words. In-depth interviews were conducted with former female prisoners of Adiala Jail, with some recorded (with consent) and supplemented by field notes and diaries to capture emotions and non-verbal cues. Data was analyzed through iterative cycles of reading, coding, and thematic analysis, revealing patterns in the complex, often painful process of reintegration shaped by societal stigma, family dynamics, and personal resilience.

Review of Literature: Gendered Pathways Theory in Criminology

Gendered pathways theory (GPT) transforms our understanding of women's criminality by focusing on how gendered experiences—like abuse, poverty, and oppressive relationships—shape their paths to crime, distinct from men's, which often involve peer influences or criminal opportunities (Daly, 1992; Chesney-Lind, 2006). Traditional theories that overlook gender as a factor behind a crime are challenged by the feminist criminology framework. Feminist criminology and supporting theories reveal that why a woman like Zahida attacks her husband after being abused for 20 years, had no other strategy but a crime to save herself from violence. Gendered pathways Theory explains how a criminal behavior is driven by gendered realities in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, and how it impacts reintegration. Backed by Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) work on intersectionality of marginalization, Gendered Pathways Theory shows different identities of a woman (including class, ethnicity, etc.) create a layered and complex challenges for women like Zahida. This review uncovers the deep impact of marginalization by connecting the qualitative work on female ex-convicts from Adiala Jail with these theories.

Theoretical Foundations

It is often ignored by traditional theories of criminology such as Strain Theory or Social Learning Theory that how the life of a woman is shaped by her gender roles Daly, 1994). Gendered Pathways Theory and Feminist criminology shows that crimes committed by women usually stem from abusive relationships, trauma or economic hardship, hence countering traditional criminology (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). The violent act committed by Zahida was a response to escape years of abuse and humiliation, which reflects a pathway driven from survival, which is common among women (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

Zahida's story explains Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality framework that she was not just suffering for being a woman, rather she was suffering because of her other identities attached with gender, like her responsibility and love for children as a mother, as a daughter she wanted to protect the owner and peace of her maternal family, upon that being financially dependent on her husband made her an obedient wife that couldn't speak on injustice, or react, or respond to the violence as it could have resulted in divorce which would have cost homelessness and her children getting vulnerable to society and other circumstance resulting from poverty. Zahida represents a huge percentage of women in our patriarchal society, that lacks power, agency and limits the access of women towards safety, institutions and freedom. This intersectional lens reveals why Zahida's options were constrained, pushing her toward crime, and why reintegration after prison—facing stigma and lack of support—is so hard (Tariq, 2020). Feminist criminology uses intersectionality to argue that these overlapping oppressions shape women's pathways to crime and their struggles to rebuild their lives (Burgess-Proctor, 2012).

Covington's (1998) relational theory complements this, highlighting how women's relationships, often abusive, drive criminal behavior. For Zahida, her marriage was a trap of violence and control, leading to

her crime as a way to break free. Covington and Bloom (2006) note that women often cope with such trauma through substance abuse or desperate acts, a pattern evident in Zahida's story and the narratives of other ex-convicts in this study.

Empirical Evidence

Qualitative research, like the narrative analysis in this study, brings women's voices to the forefront. Burgess-Proctor's (2012) ethnographies show how abused women, like Zahida, face gendered expectations to endure violence, limiting their options until crime becomes a way out. Byrne and Trew's (2008) narrative studies reveal that women's crimes often stem from trauma or economic dependence, unlike men's peer-driven paths, echoing the personal stories of Adiala Jail ex-convicts. In Pakistan, Tariq's (2020) study highlight how patriarchal norms and lack of support push women toward survival crimes, as seen in Zahida's case.

Quantitative studies reinforce these insights. Salisbury et al. (2009) identified three pathways for women: childhood abuse leading to mental health issues and substance abuse, dysfunctional relationships causing adult victimization, and lack of education or support increasing crime. Zahida's story fits the first two, as her prolonged abuse and isolation drove her to violence. Holtfreter et al. (2004) found that education and job training cut female recidivism by 83%, a vital lesson for Pakistan, where such resources are scarce for women like Zahida.

The above findings are deepened by applying the concept of intersectionality of marginalization. According to Crenshaw (1991), women who are marginalized—whether they are poor, members of a minority group, or, in Pakistan, face caste or regional inequalities—face greater obstacles. According to Rubino et al. (2020), underprivileged girls experience harsher criticism and less opportunities—a dynamic that is pertinent to Pakistan's varied population. In line with Tariq's (2020) research on compounded vulnerabilities, Zahida's capacity to flee abuse was hampered by her status as a woman in a patriarchal society, which may have been exacerbated by financial difficulties. According to Kruttschnitt et al. (2014), gender-responsive programs frequently fall short when they overlook intersecting identities, highlighting the necessity of specialized assistance.

Global Perspectives on Reintegration

Gender-responsive reintegration techniques missing in Pakistan when compared to global model, call for attention. Programs such as "Creating Choices" in Canada addresses the special needs of women by providing trauma-informed therapy and cultural healing environments, such as Indigenous lodges (CSC, 2014). The German system acknowledges the negative effects of severing family ties and supports mothers with mother-child units and family interaction (Coyle, 2002). Women like Zahida, on the other hand, face stigma, social boycotts, and restricted rehabilitation due to Pakistan's gender-neutral system (Tariq, 2020). According to feminist criminology, marginalized women, as Crenshaw (1991) explains, have greater difficulties reintegrating because of mental health conditions like PTSD or depression that are made worse by social rejection or guilt about having children (Fash, 2018; Booth, 2021). For Zahida, concerns about her children's future likely deepen her struggles, especially without mental health support.

This study's narrative analysis, capturing the stories of women like Zahida, aligns with GPT and Crenshaw's intersectionality. Zahida's crime reflects the relational and victimization pathways (Salisbury et al., 2009), driven by abuse and societal failure to intervene. Crenshaw's (1991) framework explains how her gender, combined with potential economic or social marginalization, trapped her in violence and complicates her reintegration. The experiences of ex-offenders in Adiala Jail are consistent with Khan et

al.'s (2023) study on dehumanization in Pakistan's patriarchal society and Tariq's (2020) findings on stigma. By concentrating on women's stories, this research aligns with the qualitative breadth of Byrne and Trew (2008) and Burgess-Proctor (2006), connecting Zahida's story to broader trends of intersectional and gendered marginalization.

Gaps in Literature and Future Directions

Although intersectionality and GPT shed light on women's paths, disparities still exist. Because masculinity also influences crime, there are few studies that compare the paths of men and women (Byrne and Trew 2008). Despite their richness, mixed-methods research is necessary to supplement qualitative methods in order to gain broader insights (Fedock & Covington, 2020). Since there are few localized studies on female ex-offenders in Pakistan, it is necessary to conduct research that takes into account cultural quirks, as suggested by Crenshaw's (1991) framework for examining caste or ethnicity (Tariq, 2020). Understanding trauma or gendered risk-taking could be enhanced by combining GPT with behavioral economics or public health (Hammarström et al., 2018). These guidelines would guide the development of policies that would assist underprivileged women like Zahida and attend to their particular needs within Pakistan's legal system.

This comprehensive literature review frames Zahida's story and the difficulties faced by female ex-offenders in Pakistan during their reintegration by utilizing GPT and Crenshaw's intersectionality. It advocates for gender-responsive reforms that respect women's complex, intersectional experiences by tying local and international research to the study's qualitative narratives.

Findings:

Gender Pathways theory explains that women pathways towards crime are different from men mostly determined by factors like gender-based experiences, domestic violence, sexual and psychological abuse, societal expectations and poverty (Barlow 2014). Studies suggest that out of four women involved in criminal behavior three were previously victims of abuse, sexual violence, and injustice(Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004). Feminist criminology critiques traditional ways of criminal justice system where a woman’s factors behind a crime are neglected and women are treated with same procedures and kept in same environment designed for men (Barlow 2014; Muthee 2020). These theories emphasize to study the circumstances in which the women lived before committing a crime and what were the factors that led her to take such an action, because as per Gender strain theory women are less violent and less involved in criminal activities than men and when they commit a crime, they are mostly driven by gender based violence or stress related to their gender roles (Barlow 2014). When these lenses are combined, they make the narratives of ex-convicts not just a confession or stories but a reflection on systemic failure, survival tactics and gender trauma.

Zahida’s Narrative:

Zahida, a 56-year-old woman, convicted for murdering her husband, shared that she experienced domestic and sexual violence for more than twenty years in her marriage. She also shared that she asked for help from her family members and community and after listening to her and accepting her as victim of domestic and sexual violence, they asked her husband to stop this behavior or else leave her. Her husband didn't agree to leave her and took her to an area far away from her family and that community. She was advised to leave him, but she feared if she got divorced, her children would suffer. So she went with her husband but her husband continued the violence to a point where she says that her patience ended and at first she decided to commit suicide but thinking of her daughters who were her husband's next target as her daughters told her that they were being verbally and sexually harassed by their own biological father, she said she decided to take the step, which she confessed was not right in her eyes, but she claimed that she had no other option. She couldn't report her case to the police as there were her husband's friends in Police, and there is a stigma attached to reporting and going to the police station that she wanted to avoid. To defend herself and to save her children from violence, she killed her husband. She narrated,

He beat me—so much that I lost count. One day, he dragged me away to the house of my uncle's sons. When we arrived, they told him, "To hit a woman is like striking the earth—it is sacred. We cannot allow you to live in our home and abuse our daughter like this. Either divorce her and hand her over to us, we will raise the children or leave."

But he replied, "No, I won't let her go. I'll scar her with iron and devour her—but I won't leave her."

"After that, when we moved to a rented house, he felt completely free to do as he pleased. He beats me every day. He would drag me by my hair down the stairs while the women in the neighborhood watched me like I was a spectacle. After beating me, he would say, "Go ask your mother if she will still agree to my brother's marriage to your younger sister."

I used to sit outside, gather myself, and return home silently—just so my mother wouldn't worry. But every night, it was the same horror, worse than the last. Every day, a new depth of pain.

He would tell me, "You're too deep. No one will ever know anything." The night before I killed him, he stripped me of my clothes and forced me to sit on the open staircase that led to the street. We lived in the upper portion. I sat there for over an hour, naked,

exposed. A sweater lay that we used for mopping the floor. I pulled it over myself and sat in silence. A small boy passed by and stared hard at me, confused. I stayed frozen there. After some time, he opened the door, I went upstairs, put on my clothes, only to be beaten again.

That staircase was open to the alley. Everyone could see. There was no shame left to lose.
He then grabbed my hair and said, "How much patience do you have?"
I replied, "As deep as the sea. You've tested my patience—but you've never seen my anger."
I thought, 'you've humiliated me to my core. I will not let you go unpunished.'
The next night, he beat me with a plastic pipe. Then he grabbed a shoe and began hitting me with that too. My young son grabbed his waist and cried, "Abu, please, don't be so cruel!"
But I had no strength left—not even to stand, let alone fight back.
The next morning, he left the house.

I went to the market and bought a knife. I had both sides sharpened.
I told myself, Tonight, I will use this. I will strike so hard, no one will ever believe a woman could do this.

My daughter was with me. She asked, "What will you do with this?"
I said, "It's the time of Eid of sacrifice. I will use it to cut meat."
That evening, he returned to Maghrib and beat me mercilessly again. He even called my mother. I was in such a condition I could not stand. He had taken a green plastic pipe, cut it to one and a half yards, doubled it, and used it to hit me. He grabbed my hair and kicked me in the stomach so hard that the marks remained for a year and a half.

That night, I struck.

He came to kill me—but I reached first. I grabbed the knife. He didn't know I had it. I stood silently against the wall. As he approached, I slashed him—right across the stomach. I didn't spare a single spot. He pleaded, but I didn't stop. These drug-addicted men—they only know how to talk. They can't act. He couldn't even defend himself.

I kept stabbing him until he stopped breathing.

Then I gathered my children and returned to my uncle's house. I told them everything.

No one said a word to me, because everyone already knew."

Zahida's husband's words ***"No, I won't let her go. I'll scar her with iron and devour her—but I won't leave her"*** reflect the audacity of a man who openly threatens his wife in front of society, while no one is able to take any meaningful action against him. He beat her, threatened her daily, and when she complained, he repeated those threats publicly. Yet, the only response from others was to try to talk to him and persuade him to stop the violence.

This situation clearly highlights the absence of effective structures for women's safety and security within marriage. Domestic violence is still seen as a private matter, where the husband holds complete agency, while women remain docile, vulnerable, and marginalized. If there had been an institutional system where Zahida could file a complaint and seek protection, she would have accessed it—because no one willingly endures years of abuse.

It also exposes the weakness of institutions such as the police. These incidents often go unreported because when the police visit a household, the family faces social boycott. Society attaches shame to homes visited by law enforcement, and rumors can easily tarnish a woman's character. In a culture where men are readily defended and women are forced to prove their morality to survive, the existing police and complaint mechanisms become ineffective.

Zahida's story is an example of dependency and domestic violence showing that a woman tries not to get involve in violent crimes, but when her dignity and survival gets hit again and again, and she has nowhere to go and asking for help get so difficult, she reacts(Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004). As her word say, "***No one said a word to me, because everyone already knew*"**, shows criminal negligence from our society when it comes to a matter of husband and wife, they often refuse to get involve and if they do, like her cousins, they can do nothing to keep her safe, they sent her with him despite knowing how ruthless he was with her. It's a lifetime of trauma, that a woman experiences, first at her home, then in prison and after that living with the titles like 'murderer' and 'ex-convict'.

Recalling the incident,

> *"He would tell me, "You're too deep. No one will ever know anything." The night before I killed him, he stripped me of my clothes and forced me to sit on the open staircase that led to the street. We lived in the upper portion. I sat there for over an hour, naked, exposed. A sweater we used for mopping the floor lay nearby. I pulled it over myself and sat in silence. A small boy passed by and stared at me, confused. I stayed frozen. After some time, he opened the door. I went upstairs, put on my clothes, only to be beaten again."*

The Gendered Pathways theory, which maintains that women almost never commit crimes without being driven by a combination of abuse, trauma, and systemic oppression, is highlighted by this horrible incident. Until circumstances force them to choose between committing a crime and continuing to live with injustices, women often endure violence in silence. She remained silent for more than two decades, driven by a deep sense of helplessness in a patriarchal system that offered no assistance, as well as a desire to protect her honor and the lives of her children. But her endurance peaked the night she made the decision to act. Her dignity had been completely undermined after being stripped, humiliated, and beaten once more. When her husband started abusing their daughters, the violence spread beyond her, and she had no other option—moral, emotional, or social.

Her murder was the result of desperation brought on by institutional weakness, structural neglect, and ongoing domestic abuse rather than innate criminal intent. This aligns with the Gendered Pathways perspective, which emphasizes that women's criminality is often a last resort, shaped by survival, oppression, and the absence of avenues for protection or justice.

Nargis' Narrative:

Zahida's story shows a woman pain and struggle to deal with domestic violence on daily basis, **Nargis,** story shows a different but equally disturbing scenario, where she was constantly being harassed and stalked by a young boy in her in-laws, her age was thirty years at that time and she had 5 children, she told her husband and her father-in-law about the young man stalking and harassing her, but they neglected it as it was the matter of intimate family and they consider him young and non-serious, thinking he won't do anything. She kept avoiding him, he used to come to

their house with his mother, used to call her through different mobile numbers and when he finally broke into her house when she was alone and tried to impose his will on her, by showing her the gun and saying he will kill himself if she doesn't agree to be with him. She tried to stop him and in doing so the gun fired, and he was killed accidently. But who would have believed her? She was defending herself, and her dignity but everything got ruined for someone else's forced lust and will. She said,

"He used to follow me. He would call me from different numbers and say things like, "I've fallen in love with you. Leave your children and come with me."

"I hinted to my husband about what was happening, but he just laughed it off, saying, "He's just a kid. Don't overthink it."

"I became very cautious. He had been coming to our house since childhood. The day it happened; he came over with his mother. She had to leave briefly for an errand, and he entered my room while I was alone. He tried to force himself on me. When I resisted, he pulled out a pistol.
In that moment, all I could think was: If he kills himself in our home, how will I ever live down the shame? What will people say? They'll blame me. They'll say I must have encouraged him somehow. After all, no one becomes obsessed with a woman like that without a reason—right?"

"He pointed the gun at his own head. I tried to stop him. I tried to snatch the pistol away. In that struggle, the gun went off. He died right there in front of me."
"I went to jail. Our honor in society was destroyed. My husband distanced himself from me.
My children were neglected. And for what?
What did I gain from all of this?
What was my fault? That I didn't walk the wrong path? That I refused him?
Even today, my eldest son hates me. I cannot live freely, and I cannot die peacefully. I am trapped between guilt I don't deserve and a truth no one wants to hear."

For a person living peacefully, minding their own business, an accident if gets them into a prison and changes their life trajectory, it ruins every bit of their life, from their routines to their relations

and belonging. Nargis told that ***"I used to think why it happened to me, I was living peacefully, I never had bad intentions for anyone, neither for that guy (who blackmailed her), I had children, I had a home, I was busy with them. Then Why it happened to me? Then I thought may be its destiny, but it still hurts. It ruined my whole life, only God and I know what I endured in those 5 ½ years, completely abandoned."***

Nargis is 42 years old now, she shared that she lost precious years of her life in prison, she lost her peaceful home and a settled life, she still suffers, and all of this is for saying 'NO' to a guy, who claimed to love her and wanted her at any cost. She said she never wanted to be with him; she was happily living in her home with her children. She refused to get engaged in an extra-marital relationship and she faced humiliation, stigma, a tag of 'murderer' and got imprisoned just for a man's ego. When someone doesn't intend to commit a crime and ends up in prison. Its hard to imagine their pain and suffering and especially when they are women.

Gendered Pathways Theory (GPT) contends that women's involvement in crime frequently results from situations of coercion, victimization, and a lack of institutional support. Nargis's story provides a compelling illustration of how gendered vulnerabilities intersect with crime. Traditionally supposed to be a place of safety, Nargis's home ended up being the exact location where she was attacked and cornered. Her husband rejected her attempt to tell him, illustrating how patriarchal family structures frequently minimize women's concerns. This emphasizes a fundamental finding of GPT: settings that normalize male dominance and silence female voices make women vulnerable.

Her dread at that vital moment was not just violence, but also social disgrace. She imagined the community blaming her rather than her harasser, a reality firmly ingrained in traditional expectations of female dignity. Reporting to the police was never an option—a visit from law enforcement would result in the devastation of her reputation, community ostracism, and rumors that could permanently harm her and her children's life. This demonstrates how structural and cultural barriers trap women in silence and suffering. Nargis never intended to harm anyone. However, by refusing coercion and attempting to prevent a suicide in her house, she found herself criminalized. Her journey exemplifies GPT's contention that women are frequently brought into the criminal justice system not via conscious lawbreaking, but by circumstances influenced by abuse, compulsion, and survival tactics.

Nargis was subjected to both institutional and social punishment following the tragedy. Her spouse left, her children were ignored, and her eldest son still holds bitterness years later. This demonstrates how women in such cases not only face official sanctions, but also lose their families, communities, and identities, trapping them in cycles of humiliation and marginalization long after their legal sentence is completed. Nargis' example shows the false choice that many women face: acquiesce to exploitation or resist, risking disastrous repercussions. Her decision to resist resulted in her loss of honor, family, and freedom, demonstrating how the court system and society standards fail to protect women who oppose violence.

Nargis' experience reveals that women are unsafe even in their own homes, and when they try to seek help, their voices are muted by family, society, and institutions. Her criminalization stemmed from patriarchal systems, cultural stigma, and systematic neglect, not misbehavior. Her trajectory, consistent with Gendered Pathways Theory, emphasizes how women's involvement in crime is inextricably linked to histories of abuse, gendered power imbalances, and a lack of genuine avenues for justice.

Fakhra's Narrative:

Feminist criminology suggests that it is important to consider gender-based experiences and circumstances of women involved in criminal activities before punishing them and their treatment in criminal justice system should be different from men. Fakhra's case is an example of a woman entangled in a web of relationship with husband and children, being uneducated and unskilled, she was more dependent on her husband, and her husband accidently killed her owner's wife, their owner was a very influential person and when her mother and relatives refused to support her, she said she had no other option but to live with him to support her children by hiding his crime.

She told her story as,

"My husband and I were working as house help at an influential person's residence. We used to live in their servant quarters. At that time, we had 3 children. The wife of our owner was very strict; she used to taunt and criticize over little things. One day my husband was working in their garden with sickle. The lady (owner's wife) came furious, she started yelling at my husband

that you guys are careless, you don't know how to work, your guys have no class and manner, you come from small places and forget your worth. My husband told me that she was humiliating him, and out of anger my husband threw that sickle on the wall, but it hit her. She was alive when my husband came to me in a hurry and said, 'just leave this place, I have hurt the lady, her husband won't leave us. We will be ruined; our children will suffer.' I couldn't comprehend anything at that time; I just did what he said. We ran from there without any luggage. We went to my mother's she refused to keep us or help us as they knew our owner wouldn't leave anyone assisting us. We changed the city, we kept running and hiding for 10 years, I gave birth to two more children during that time. I always thought about my children, because I knew they would suffer the most. When the police caught us, they came to our home and took everything with them, in front of our eyes, I had a glass in which I used to collect money, they took that while I was standing there, and upon asking they said, it happens like that in investigation, they took our television and other luggage of daily use at the moment, and when I got released from prison, we had to start from the scratch.

When we got arrested, we came to know that our owner's wife died the day we left, but the news that she was murdered by the bullets, shook me to the core, my husband had just a sickle in his hands when he came to me, and I didn't hear any firing. It was later discovered that our owner had some enemies in the village, and he had some land issues with him, and he got the land in return for getting the FIR back against them and put everything on my husband. I am not defending my husband here, he also did wrong and when I assisted him, I did wrong too. But should a person murdering someone and the person living with them and hiding the truth get the equal sentence? Is it fair? Shouldn't they see I had 5 children. How could I leave their father? I admit that I should have gathered the courage to leave him, but who would have supported me and my children? I was not educated or skilled to support them. My parents refused to support me. They still avoid me. What could I possibly do at that time? I just stayed with him, and I got death sentence (imprisonment for 25 years) which later got reduced to 12 years. My children were kept in Edhi Home. Wasn't that punishment enough for me? My little child started working at a shop when he was 4 years old.

It was my fault to hide my husband's crime and to live with him, if someone accompanies a criminal, hides the truth or ask someone to commit a crime, they are responsible, and law gives them equal punishment. I admit that I did wrong, but I was given sentence of 25 years, which is

given to someone who attempts a murders, I lost everything, I had to handover my children to unknown people, 3 of them were girls and you know what society does to unattended girls, although Allah saved them and I will always be thankful to Edhi Sir who took special care of my children. Sometimes I think if I had to suffer this much, I should have done something. Why was I given this punishment, why did my children have to suffer?"

No one can imagine what I suffered. I sometimes thought that it would have been better if I had been there after doing something. I was imprisoned for 12 years, with an added punishment for my children living in shelter homes, without any help. The thought of their food and safety couldn't let me sleep for days in a row. I developed heart issues out of this tension. I got TB in prison. I used to work in prison even when I had TB and doctors suggested bed rest. I went through hell. For what? For just trying to survive? Was It fair? Even the guy divorced me for living in prison. It was his fault that made us all suffer and in the end he also left. My children lived unattended, I thank Edhi Sir and will pray for him until I die, if he wouldn't have been kind, my children would have suffered more, which I imagined daily in my fears. My daughters were living with strangers, the thought that what if something happens to them killed me every day. Wasn't that obvious, why didn't the people giving verdicts think about it? Was it fair to me and my children? This incident snatched all my hope from the system. I started from scratch; my children suffered the most and they still are suffering. We didn't get any help or support from the government. The day I left prison, no one cared how I was living. The government should have supported me. They knew my situation. We started renting one room and my sons started working as daily wagers at some shops. There were days we had nothing to eat; we used to sleep empty stomachs. It took almost 5 years to live a simple basic life, yet we struggle to fulfil our expenses. My sons couldn't get enough education as they had to work. One of my sons knows the skills of magicians, but he hasn't enough money to start his work, whatever he earns most of the money goes for paying the rent for the things he required to prepare a set. We are still struggling to settle in our lives. I need support and help from the government, even if we could get some loans, my children will pay back that money, but we need financial assistance to start our own work. I request the government through your work to help those who leave prison, as they need help the most. We as women suffer more, we cannot stand at our own."

GPT emphasizes that women's pathways into crime often begin with **victimization and dependence**. In this case, the narrator's "crime" was not a premeditated act of violence but her **decision to remain with and support her husband**, even after his actions implicated them in a murder case. She openly acknowledges that she hid his crime out of helplessness, not criminal intent. She had five children, no education, no skills, and no family support—leaving her with little to no choice but to follow her husband. Her trajectory into the justice system thus stemmed from **familial loyalty, economic dependence, and social isolation**, all of which align with gendered pathways identified in criminological research.

The narrator repeatedly highlights her lack of options: her parents refused to shelter her, she had no independent means to provide for her children, and society stigmatized women raising children alone. These pressures are part of the **gendered control mechanisms** that force women into complicity with male partners. GPT argues that women's crimes often reflect survival strategies under patriarchal oppression rather than active criminality. Here, her "complicity" was an act of survival, not choice.

Her narrative powerfully raises the issue of **sentencing disparities**. She received the same punishment (initially 25 years, reduced to 12) as someone directly committing murder. This raises a central critique consistent with GPT: the justice system often fails to account for **gendered contexts of crime**—such as coercion, victimization, motherhood, and lack of agency. Instead, women are punished as if they acted with the same autonomy and intent as men.

Her children were taken to Edhi Homes, and she bore the **double punishment** of imprisonment and maternal separation. Her punishment goes beyond the law because of her children's sufferings compelled them to work as children, girls raised in strangers' homes. This supports GPT's focus on the interrelated personal, familial, and social repercussions that female offenders face, which are generally different from those faced by male offenders.

She suffered from heart problems, forced labor despite medical advice, tuberculosis, and total neglect by prison officials during her incarceration. According to GPT research, women in prison frequently bear the weight of trauma and health problems, but they are further marginalized by the lack of proper support networks. Her divorce while incarcerated emphasizes even more how women are left behind by their families, while male inmates frequently continue to receive support from their spouses or other family members.

She talks about beginning life after being released, including renting a room, going hungry, and her kids quitting school to make ends meet. The absence of government support reflects the **systemic failure to rehabilitate or reintegrate women prisoners**. GPT asserts that reentry is especially difficult for women because they face compounded stigma: as ex-prisoners, as mothers who "failed" their children, and as women judged by rigid notions of morality. Her request for small-scale financial assistance highlights how modest interventions—like microloans, training, or reintegration programs—could drastically change life outcomes, yet such systems are absent.

Her concluding reflection, "We as women suffer more, we cannot stand at our own"—points to the essence of Gendered Pathways Theory. Women in patriarchal societies often carry the **gendered burden of family survival**. Unlike many male offenders, her "crime" was bound to her role as wife and mother. Her loyalty and dependence were criminalized, and her motherhood became the site of her deepest punishment.

Fakhra's story is an example or representation of women who do not involve in a crime by their actions but due to their intimate partners. There could be any reasons, in her case she was dependent on her husband and couldn't take the risk of leaving him as she could have foreseen that her children would suffer the most, which they did. In other cases, it could be blackmailing, emotional dependency, financial need or any other

circumstance that link them to crime, they should be treated different, as Fakhra said she knew she did wrong, but she didn't deserve the death sentence for her mistake, when she had 5 children to take care. She said if she had been earning, she would never support her husband in hiding what he did. Similarly circumstances and lack of education and awareness lead most of the people to manipulation and which later results in imprisonment.

Conclusion

The stories of Zahida, Nargis, and Fakhra together illuminate how women's involvement in crime is rarely the result of deliberate criminal intent, but rather the product of **long-term victimization, structural inequalities, and the absence of protective institutions.** After two decades of domestic abuse, Zahida was forced to defend herself due to her husband's increasing violence. After a tragic act of self-defense, Nargis was criminalized for resisting harassment and coercion. Despite having little agency, being financially dependent, and having five children, Fakhra received the same harsh punishment as her husband. This shows how justice systems do not distinguish between those who commit crimes and those who are victims of their circumstances.

When taken as a whole, these stories support the central claim of the gendered pathways theory, which holds that gendered experiences of poverty, coercion, abuse, and helplessness have a significant influence on women's paths into crime. These women were survivors navigating difficult decisions in situations that provided no true protection, dignity, or alternatives; they were not criminals in the traditional sense.

References:

Belknap, J. (2007). *The invisible woman: Gender, crime, and justice* (3rd ed.). Wadsworth.

Bloom, B., Owen, B., & Covington, S. (2003). Gender-responsive strategies: Research, practice, and guiding principles for women offenders. *National Institute of Corrections*. https://nicic.gov/gender-responsive-strategies-research-practice-and-guiding-principles-women-offenders

Bloom, B., Owen, B., & Covington, S. (2004). Women offenders and the gendered effects of public policy. *Review of Policy Research, 21*(1), 31–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.2004.00056.x

Broidy, L. M., & Agnew, R. (1997). Gender and crime: A general strain theory perspective. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 34*(3), 275–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427897034003001

Burgess-Proctor, A. (2012). *Pathways of Victimization and Resistance: Toward a Feminist Theory of Battered Women's Help-Seeking*. **Justice Quarterly**, 29(3), 309–346. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.553727

Byrne, C. F., & Trew, K. J. (2008). *Pathways through crime: The development of crime and desistance in the accounts of men and women offenders.* **The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice**, 47(3), 238–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2008.00520.x

Chesney-Lind, M. (2006). Patriarchy, crime, and justice: Feminist criminology in an era of backlash. *Feminist Criminology, 1*(1), 6–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085105282893

Chesney-Lind, M., & Pasko, L. (2013). *The female offender: Girls, women, and crime* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Chesney-Lind, M., & Shelden, R. G. (2014). *Girls, delinquency, and juvenile justice* (4th ed.). Wiley.

Covington, S. S. (2008). Women and addiction: A trauma-informed approach. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 40*(sup5), 377–385. https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2008.10400665

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1), 139–167.

Coyle, A. (2002). *A human rights approach to prison management: Handbook for prison staff*. International Centre for Prison Studies.

Correctional Service Canada (CSC). (2014). *Creating Choices: The report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. Ottawa, Canada: Correctional Service Canada. Retrieved from https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca

Daly, K. (1992). Women's pathways to felony court: Feminist theories of lawbreaking and problems of representation. *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies, 2*(1), 11–52.

Daly, K. (1994). *Gender, crime, and punishment*. Yale University Press.

DeHart, D. D. (2008). Pathways to prison: Impact of victimization in the lives of incarcerated women. *Violence Against Women, 14*(12), 1362–1381. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801208327018

Eriksson, M., Ghazinour, M., & Hammarström, A. (2018). *Different uses of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in public mental health research: What is their value for guiding public mental health policy and practice?* **Social Theory & Health, 16**(4), 414–433. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41285-018-0065-6

Enarson, E. (2000). Gender and natural disasters. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters, 18*(3), 405–426.

Farley, M., & Barkan, H. (1998). Prostitution, violence, and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Women & Health, 27*(3), 37–49. https://doi.org/10.1300/J013v27n03_03

Ferraro, K. J., & Moe, A. M. (2003). Mothering, crime, and incarceration. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 32*(1), 9–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241602238937

Holtfreter, K., Reisig, M. D., & Morash, M. (2004). *Poverty, state capital, and recidivism among women offenders*. **Criminology & Public Policy**, **3**(2), 185–208. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2004.tb00035.x

Giordano, P. C., Cernkovich, S. A., & Rudolph, J. L. (2002). Gender, crime, and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation. *American Journal of Sociology, 107*(4), 990–1064. https://doi.org/10.1086/343191

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 4(2), 97–128.

Neuman, W. L. (1997). Workbook for social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. Allyn and Bacon.

Khalid, A., & Khan, N. (2013). Pathways of women prisoners to jail in Pakistan. *Health promotion perspectives*, *3*(1), 31–35.DOI:10.5681/hpp.2013.004

Leverentz, A. M. (2014). *The ex-prisoner's dilemma: How women negotiate competing narratives of reentry and desistance*. Rutgers University Press.

Maher, L. (1997). *Sexed work: Gender, race, and resistance in a Brooklyn drug market*. Oxford University Press.

McClanahan, S. F., McClelland, G. M., Abram, K. M., & Teplin, L. A. (1999). Pathways into prostitution among female jail detainees. *Journal of Social Issues, 55*(2), 349–364. DOI: 10.1176/ps.50.12.1606

Morash, M., & Schram, P. J. (2002). *The prison experience: Special issues of women in prison*. Waveland Press.

National Research Council. (2014). *Estimating the incidence of rape and sexual assault*. Panel on Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault in Bureau of Justice Statistics Household Surveys (C. Kruttschnitt, W. D. Kalsbeek, & C. C. House, Eds.). Committee on National Statistics, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/18605

Owen, B., & Bloom, B. (1995). Profiling women prisoners: Findings from national surveys and a California sample. *The Prison Journal, 75*(2), 165–185. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032855595075002003

Reisig, M. D., Holtfreter, K., & Morash, M. (2006). Assessing recidivism risk across female pathways to crime. *Justice Quarterly, 23*(3), 384–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820600869152

Richie, B. E. (1996). *Compelled to crime: The gender entrapment of battered Black women*. Routledge.

Richie, B. E. (2012). *Arrested justice: Black women, violence, and America's prison nation*. NYU Press.

Rubino, F., Puhl, R. M., Cummings, D. E., Eckel, R. H., Ryan, D. H., Mechanick, J. I., Nadglowski, J., Ramos Salas, X., Schauer, P. R., Twenefour, D., Apovian, C. M., Aronne, L. J., Batterham, R. L., Berthoud, H. R., Boza, C., Busetto, L., Dicker, D., De Groot, M., Eisenberg, D., … Dixon, J. B. (2020). *Joint international consensus statement for ending stigma of obesity*. **Nature Medicine, 26**(4), 485–497. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0803-x

Rosen, E., & Venkatesh, S. A. (2008). A "perverse" incentive structure: Sex work and the production of violence. *Social Problems, 55*(3), 349–372. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2008.55.3.349

Pratt, J. (2008). Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part I: The nature and roots of Scandinavian exceptionalism. *British Journal of Criminology, 48*(2), 119–137. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azm072

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2020). *Handbook on women and imprisonment: Second edition with reference to the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of*

Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules). Vienna: United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org

Salisbury, E. J., & Van Voorhis, P. (2009). Gendered pathways: A quantitative investigation of women probationers' paths to incarceration. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 36*(6), 541–566. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854809334076.

Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1993). *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Harvard University Press. DOI:10.2307/3340743

Van Voorhis, P., Wright, E. M., Salisbury, E., & Bauman, A. (2010). Women's risk factors and their contributions to existing risk/needs assessment: The current status of a gender-responsive supplement. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 37*(3), 261–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854809357442

Widom, C. S. (1989). The cycle of violence. *Science, 244*(4901), 160–166. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.2704995

Zafar, A., Asim, M., Malik, N., & Zafar, M. I. (2013). Socio-culture factors responsible for crimes committed by females of Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. *Academic Research International, 4*(1), 345–351. DOI:10.5901/ajis.2013.2n1p373