Race and Women in Crime: A Longitudinal and Cross-Sectional Comparison of Arrests for Black and Latino Females with White Females

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ABSTRACT

Although women have made tremendous gains on men in criminal involvement in the last few decades, their involvement remains largely neglected in research. Most scholars choose instead to explore criminal behavior by the general population, juveniles, and men. This trend has left a major scholastic gap that the current study seeks to fill. The study analyzed the pattern of Black, Latino, and White female arrests in a mid-sized city in the United States from January 2001 through December 2005. The data ascertained that like males, female minorities are disproportionately represented in the arrest statistics, but linear regression analyses revealed a statistically significant decline in the arrest rates for Black and Latino females, while the change in the arrest rate for White females did not show statistical significance over the same period of time. In addition, while economic crimes explained the largest percentage of arrests for minority females, White females were arrested more commonly for public order offenses.

Key Words

Female Arrest; Female Crime; Race; Latino Arrest; Black Arrest; White Arrest.

Introduction

Literature is replete with studies on male, juvenile, and general population involvement in criminal behavior, but little is written exclusively about female involvement, especially with respect to racial disparities in their contact with law enforcement. Most of what a search on females and arrest yields is heavily skewed towards arrests for domestic violence, yet there is a factual female participation across the entire crime spectrum. This paucity of research in female criminal involvement is even more pronounced when the demographic characteristic of race is considered. An almost ubiquitous finding is that racial minority population groups are more represented in the arrest statistics than the white population

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(see Blumstein, 1982; Cureton, 2000; Novak, et al., 2002; D'Alessio & Stolzenberg, 2003; Mbuba, 2005; Mbuba & Grenier 2008; Becket, Nyrop & Pfingst, 2006). But whether the same could be said of minority females specifically remains largely unknown. In order to bridge this gap, there is a need to address a racially defined female component in arrest patterns. This study aimed at resolving three main issues: first, to establish whether the reported overrepresentation of racial minority groups in the arrest statistics also pertains to female minorities in isolation of male arrests; secondly, to establish the trend of female arrests over the five year study period and to compare those trends between the racial minority groups and the White majority; and, thirdly, to find out the common crimes that account for most of the female arrests, disaggregated by race.

Literature review

As already noted, there is a general scarcity of literature about female involvement in crime, at least when compared to male and juvenile involvement, but available studies provide a substantial amount of evidence that compared to men, there has been a significant increase in female crime in the last few decades (Miller, 2001; Steffensmeier et al., 2006; Pollock, 2006; Schwartz, 2006; Lee & Stevenson, 2006; DeLeon-Granados, Wells, & Binsbacher, 2006; Muftic, 2007). According to Steffensmeier et al. (2006), "from 1980 to 2003, the female percentage of all arrests increased from one fifth to one third for simple or misdemeanor assault, from one sixth to one fourth for aggravated or felony assault, and from one tenth to one fifth for the Violent Crime Index (sum of homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault arrests)." The most crucial factors associated with this female awakening in crime are identified as higher levels of freedom, increased stress, greater role strain, changing gender role expectations, and breakdown in social control mechanisms, all of which together more strongly affect marginalized populations of females especially minorities and low income earners (Steffensmeier et al., 2006).

Moreover, there are increasingly more female arrest cases that result from domestic or intimate violence, involving either spouses or parents and siblings, in spite of the fact that women are by far more victimized by personal violence than men (Miller, 2001; Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Muftic, 2007). But a cross-sectional finding among most gender-related studies of violence is that women get involved in violence as a corollary to initial male involvement, implying that female violence is seldom an act of initial aggression but is often occasioned by male attacks (see Miller, 2001; Lee and Stevenson, 2006; Geiger, 2006). The finding that involvement of women in violence is a result of initial violence by a partner also implies that most acts of violence by women are home-based or domestic in nature. One of the most significant works in this regard is a study by DeLeon-Granados et al. (2006) on the unintended consequences in the war on violence against women. The authors found the main latent consequence of the "war" to be an increase in female arrest for domestic violence, a finding that seemingly questions the relevance of dual arrest laws in policies that aim at helping domestic violence victims. Finally, studies have pointed to certain underlying patterns that see African American females being arrested more for violence than females from other racial backgrounds (Mann, 1990; Verona & Carbonell, 2000; Brown, 2005; Chappell, Mcdonald, and Manz, 2006; Pollock, 2006), and the current study expounds on this assertion with the use of available data.

Data description

This study utilized gender and racially disaggregated arrest data that includes information on Latina population. Data for this study were obtained from a medium-sized Midwestern city in Indiana, whose racial population distribution, according to the 2000 national population census, was 5.8 percent Latino, 17.4 percent Black, and 75.5 per cent White. The entire count of 13,519 female arrests made by the city police department from January 2001 through December 2005 was examined. The relevant variables in the data included date of birth, sex, race, arrest date, offense type, and offense charges. The disposition outcome was not used in this study, as the primary focus was on arrests irrespective of whether they led to conviction or not. Two other important variables were created from the available information, namely, age at arrest, and the various sub-categories of offense type. The age at arrest was used to delineate juvenile arrests from adult arrests. It was derived as the difference between the arrest date and the date of birth. Three main racial groups were entered for the analyses, namely, Black, Latino, and White. Blacks included all females with African origin while Latinos comprised Hispanics, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, and other Latino races. Whites comprised all non-Latino white populations.

The available arrest data reported charges only as criminal codes. In order to make sense of the codes, the Indiana Criminal Law and Motor Vehicle Handbook was widely consulted. Names of all charge codes were thus identified. Indiana law classifies felonies and misdemeanors into classes "A" through "D" but that depth of classification was not used in the analysis of this study as wider categories were found to be more parsimonious and therefore preferred.

In order to test whether or not there was an overrepresentation of minority females in the total female arrest statistics, the arrest rates for the minorities were computed and compared with the White female arrest rate. In addition to the data obtained from the city police department, it was necessary to obtain the city population totals for the various racial sub-groups. Although the city population would not be obtained to the nearest one person for each sub-group per year for the five-year study period, the best available information was used – the most recent U.S. national census, conducted in 2000. Based on that census in which the percentage of women was reported as 51.6, the best approximation of racial female composition was made. There were 80,099 White American females, 18,448 African American females, and 6,132 Latino American females. It was recognized that the population size might have changed over the study period, even if minimally, but these figures were used, nonetheless, not only because it was the best approximation of the actual numbers, but also because any changes that could have occurred were assumed to be pro rata for all the racial groups. This assumption holds particularly true because there are no documented major racial population events that could have introduced a change in one population group in isolation of the other groups.

Data analyses

From the available arrest data, all female cases were isolated and the total arrests for each racial group established for individual study years. Given the variation in population sizes among the three racial groups, it was imperative that the arrests be standardized in order to validate the comparisons. This was achieved by dividing the number of arrests by the respective female population sizes and multiplying the quotient by 100,000, which is a common population standardization multiplier at least in national databanks. Total female

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arrests for all types of offenses were examined jointly and the rates for individual racial groups examined across the five year study period. The results are available in Table 1.

Table 1
A Longitudinal Comparison of Total Female Arrests by Race from 2001 to 2005

Race	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Blacks	1,285	1,275	1,169	1,088	1,171
	(6,966)	(6,911)	(6,337)	(5,898)	(6,348)
Latinos	146	121	120	104	102
	(2,381)	(1,973)	(1,957)	(1,696)	(1,663)
Whites	1,464	1,531	1,527	1,385	1,477
	(1,828)	(1,911)	(1,906)	(1,729)	(1,844)
Other	18	20	22	20	19
	(1,220)	(1,355)	(1,492)	(1,355)	(1,288)
Total	2,913	2,947	2,838	2,597	2,769
	(2,724)	(2,776)	(2,673)	(2,446)	(2,608)

Arrests per 100,000 population are shown in parentheses

In order to test for the changes in the arrest rates over the five year period, ordinary least squares regression analyses were ran for the arrests per 100,000 for each of the racial groups. Partial results are shown on Table 2.

Table 2
Partial OLS Regression Output for Arrest Rates From 2001 To 2005

Race	β	Std error	t	Sig	R^2
Black	–224.9	98.663	–2.279	.099	.634
Latino	–171.3	35.827	-4.781	.017	.844
White	–15.0	25.536	-.587	.598	.321
Other	23.6	39.016	.605	.588	.109
All females	–56.2	33.452	–1.689	.192	.485

These analyses revealed a statistically significant decline for Black and Latino female arrests, with Black female arrests declining by 225 per 100,000 population each year and Latino females by 171 per 100,000 population per year. The White female arrest rate declined by only 15 per 100,000 population each year, a change that did not rise to statistical significance. The change in all the other racial groups was also not statistically significant (Other β = 24), neither was the change in all female arrests when considered together (Total arrests β = –56). During the five year study period, the average female arrest rate was 2,645 per 100,000.

The second stage of the analysis involved a cross–sectional examination of the types of offenses accounting for the largest percentage of arrests for the various racial groups. All the female arrests that occurred during the five year study period were disaggregated and regrouped into three main categories, namely, economic crimes, violent crimes, and public order crimes. Economic crimes included criminal acts that had financial gain as the

driving force. The economic crimes that recorded the highest number of arrests included criminal conversion, which, in Indiana, includes shop-lifting, minor theft and other kinds of disowning; larceny-theft; burglary; drug-related offenses; and prostitution. The distribution of the total arrests as a result of these crimes is reproduced in Table 3.

Table 3
Cross-sectional Comparison of Female Arrests for the Major Economic Crimes

Race	Criminal conversion	Theft plus auto-theft	Burglary	Drug offenses	Prostitu-tion
Blacks	1,173	121	17	597	98
	(6,358)	(656)	(92)	(3,236)	(531)
Latinos	167	6	2	27	1
	(2,723)	(98)	(33)	(440)	(16)
Whites	1,500	103	23	762	63
	(1,873)	(129)	(29)	(951)	(79)
Other	29	0	0	3	2
	(1,965)	(0)	(0)	(203)	(266)
Total	2,869	230	42	1,389	164
	(2,703)	(217)	(40)	(1,308)	(154)

Arrests per 100,000 population are shown in parentheses

It is apparent that with respect to absolute numbers, White female arrests exceeded Black and Latino arrests in most of these crimes. Yet, relative to the racial population sizes, Black females experienced the highest arrest rate of all three groups for all the economic crimes. Crimes that are conventionally classified as violent and also referred to as crimes against the person are those that involve physical confrontations with a wide variation of reasons. Typical examples include assault, battery, rape, homicide, and robbery, among others. Robbery, however, has the distinction of being the only type of crime that involves both the use of violence and a definite financial gain. In this study, the crimes that accounted for the largest volume of arrests among violent crimes were battery – both simple and aggravated; domestic battery; and robbery. The racial distribution of arrests resulting from violent crimes is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Cross-sectional Comparison of Female Arrests for Most Common Violent Crimes

Race	Battery	Domestic Battery	Robbery
Blacks	357 (6,358)	288 (656)	10 (54)
Latinos	21 (2,723)	25 (98)	1 (16)
Whites	237 (1,873)	323 (129)	3 (4)
Other	3 (1,965)	3 (0)	0 (0)
Total	2,869 (2,703)	230 (217)	14 (13)

Arrests per 100,000 population are shown in parentheses

Among the arrests for violent crimes, White females experience more arrests, in absolute terms, than Black and Latino females for the crime of domestic battery. Black

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females saw more arrests for battery and robbery. In relative terms, Latino female arrests far exceeded White female arrests for battery. The third category of offenses accounting for a large number of arrests for all three racial groups included offenses routinely referred to as victimless crimes. Common examples of victimless crimes are public intoxication/drunkenness, disorderly conduct, gambling violations, and loitering, among others. They also include running away from home among juveniles. In this study, all these crimes were grouped together under public order offenses. Offenses in this category that saw the highest number of arrests include public intoxication, drunk driving, disorderly conduct, driving violations, and running away. The results of their racial distribution are reproduced in Table 5.

Table 5
Cross-sectional Comparison of Female Arrests for Most Common Public Order Offenses

Race	Public Intoxication	Drunk Driving	Disorderly Conduct	Driving Violations	Runaway
Blacks	266	525	332	489	356
	(1,442)	(2,846)	(1,800)	(2,651)	(1,930)
Latinos	21	58	19	66	73
	(342)	(946)	(310)	(1,076)	(1,190)
Whites	528	1,656	142	305	432
	(659)	(2,067)	(177)	(381)	(539)
Other	7	12	1	4	10
	(474)	(813)	(68)	(271)	(678)
Total	782	2,251	494	864	871
	(737)	(2,120)	(465)	(814)	(820)

Arrests per 100,000 population are shown in parentheses

According to these results, Black females experienced the highest per capita arrest rate for all offenses listed as public order, but it should not be gainsaid that White female arrests either more than tripled or definitively exceeded the Black averages in raw numbers. In comparative terms, Latino females had a higher per capita arrest rate than White females for disorderly conduct, driving violations, and running away from home among the juveniles. Non-typical crimes including homicide, arson, abduction, rape, and child molestation yielded hardly any female arrests for most of the study years. When all these crimes were considered together, there were five Black female arrests (27 per 100,000), one Latino female arrest (16 per 100,000), and four White female arrests (5 per 100,000).

Summary and conclusion

The analyses in this study yielded four main findings. First, although raw data show more White female arrests than minority female arrests for many offense types, female minorities are clearly overrepresented in the arrest statistics when the various racial population sizes are considered, which is consistent with the reported general minority arrest patterns. This is true for all offense types.

Secondly, disaggregated offense types showed that the specific offenses for which White females were most often arrested include, domestic violence, public intoxication, drunk

driving, criminal conversion, and, among female juveniles, runaway charges. Black females, on the other hand, were commonly arrested for driving violations, disorderly conduct, theft, battery, and robbery. Latino females did not show any conspicuous lead in arrests for any one type of offense, but they were fairly represented in criminal conversion, drunk driving, driving violations especially unlicensed driving, and runaways.

Thirdly, the female arrests follow the conventional crime curve with few arrest cases occurring as a result of the most serious crimes (felonies) and equally few cases resulting from the least serious offenses (infractions and local ordinance violations) while a concentration of arrest cases falls around the mean (misdemeanor offenses). Fourthly, the findings of this study affirm that minority females, like minority males per extant literature, continue to witness a disproportionate representation in arrests statistics compared to the white population. However, this overrepresentation is declining, although an extrapolation would not bear any evidence that the rate will be in tandem for all population groups any time soon.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. On the face value, it can be argued that the age-old law enforcement practices that derived from a prima facie assumption that members of racial minority groups were more criminogenic than their white counterparts are gradually losing support among law enforcement practitioners, which could explain the witnessed decline in the representation of minorities in the arrests records. From another dimension, there could be a fair amount of likelihood that arrests for all female population groups have been constant, but the current mandatory arrest laws, especially dual arrest law that requires arrest of both parties in the event of domestic violence may have altered the balance to adversely affect White females, who have been cited in research as witnessing more domestic violence than female minorities (see DeLeon-Granados et al., 2006). However, since the difference between Black female and White female arrests for domestic violence was not significant, both in absolute and in comparative terms (see Table 3), the failure to maintain a pro rata decline for White females may not be explained by the domestic violence dual arrest policies.

Finally, while additional research in the area of arrest rates among various racially defined populations is necessary, these findings may be generalized to other cities that are inhabited by multiple racial groups, especially because the racial population sizes in this study were standardized. There is no doubt, however, that longitudinal comparisons of similarly generated data that go beyond five years are important and warranted.

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