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LEAA
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration

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An LEAA News Feature

Crimes committed by women will probably continue to increase because the female working force continues to grow, a Federal study says.

"I don't see a ceiling yet," Professor Rita J. Simon, director of the Program in Law and Society at the University of Illinois, said. "As you have more and more women working outside the home, they are getting jobs that place them in a position to embezzle or steal. With this larger female working force, it is simply a question of the law of averages."

The study data are from the Prosecutor's Management Information System (PROMIS) operated by the Institute for Law and Social Research under a grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA).

Professor Simon constructed a national statistical profile for female crime from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports and then compared the national figures with detailed statistics of crime by women in Washington, D. C.

(MORE)

Nationally, women accounted for 16 percent of all persons arrested for crime in 1975, compared with 10.8 percent in 1953. In some categories -- economic crime, for example -- the percentage of women arrested rose 600 percent.

In 1953, 4.9 percent of the women arrested for serious crimes were charged with larceny-theft, and 1.1 percent with embezzlement and fraud. By 1975, the rates rose to 25.4 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively.

Some of the study's findings for Washington, D. C.:

--For violent offenses in 1974 and 1975, 82 percent of the women arrested attacked a person whom they knew. This compared with 65.5 percent of the men arrested in 1974, and 67.4 percent in 1975.

--Slightly more women than men used weapons when they committed violent acts -- 79.7 percent versus 78 percent in 1974, and 84 percent versus 78 percent in 1975.

--Women were less likely than men to use weapons in robberies -- 31 and 32 percent of the women in 1974 and 1975, compared with 50 percent and 46 percent of the men.

--More women than men who were arrested did not have prior arrest records. In 1974, 52.7 percent of the men arrested had prior arrest records against 39 percent of the women. In 1975, 50.3 percent of the men and 40.6 percent of the women had prior arrest records.

(MORE)

--The only offenses for which women were more likely than men to have prior arrests were for solicitation and prostitution.

--Women were less likely than men to be arrested on felony charges -- 50.7 percent to 35 percent in 1974, and 46.7 to 30.7 percent in 1975.

The study said that, in 1974 and 1975, women in Washington, D. C., accounted for more of the violent crime arrests and fewer of the property and economic crimes than did women in the rest of the country.

In Washington, 16.7 percent of those arrested for violent crimes in 1974 were women, compared with 14.1 percent nationally. The figures were 15.4 to 14 percent in 1975. In 1974, 25 percent of those arrested for economic crimes in Washington were women, compared with 30.4 percent nationally. The comparable figures for 1975 were 29.7 to 32.4 percent.

The study also found that women sentenced for crimes in Washington received substantially lighter sentences than did males convicted of similar offenses.

In 1974, 55 percent of the women convicted of robbery received probation, compared with 39.2 percent of the men. Ten percent of the women robbers were sentenced to two to 15 years, compared with 35.7 percent of the men. Ten percent of the women got one-to-three years terms, compared to 15.5 percent of the men.

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In all other crime categories studied in 1974, except victimless crimes, a larger percentage of women defendants than men received probation -- Property crimes, 78.8 (63.7); economic crimes, 90 (71); violent crimes, 70.6 (63.5); victimless crimes, 69.3 (72.4).

Professor Simon said the PROMIS data do not reveal the motivation for women receiving lighter sentences. But she speculated:

"From our observations of women defendants in other jurisdictions, our guess is that many of these women have young children and that fact influenced the judge's decision."

She also emphasized that the data show that fewer women have prior arrest records than men.

The study, "The Female Defendant in Washington, D. C.: 1974 and 1975," is one of 17 research projects the Institute is conducting for LEAA under a \$1.5 million, four-year grant. It has not yet been published but copies are available on loan from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, Maryland 20850.

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