



Women recidivism in North Macedonia (2017–2024)

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ABSTRACT

Female recidivism presents a growing challenge for the criminal justice system in North Macedonia and is shaped by socio-economic, psychological, and systemic factors. This article investigates women repeat offenders through the lens of Arnaudovski's (2007) theory and with the help of a mixed-methods approach, combining statistical analysis with qualitative data from case studies and interviews. Marital status, parental responsibilities, employment, type of prior offense, substance abuse, and sentencing are used to understand the recidivism rate among Macedonian female offenders, together with offense categories, motives behind initial crimes, and histories of trauma and victimization. Findings reveal that economic hardship, lack of support systems, unresolved trauma, and inadequate gender-sensitive rehabilitation increase the risk of reoffending. Stigma and systemic barriers hinder reintegration. Comprehensive, gender-responsive policies, including mental health services, childcare support, and targeted reintegration programs, can reduce female recidivism and promote successful societal reintegration.

Introduction

Addressing female recidivism requires understanding gender-specific risk factors and adopting responsive, community-centered strategies. Effective monitoring and tailored interventions are essential to breaking the cycle of reoffending. This article examines women recidivists in North Macedonia, focusing on the phenomenological and etiological characteristics between 2017 and 2024. It evaluates the state's readiness to respond with individualized strategies for resocialization and reintegration. The period 2017–2024 is particularly significant from a criminological perspective, since major social and economic disruptions shaped criminal behaviour and recidivism, especially among marginalized populations. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) exacerbated existing vulnerabilities—such as poverty, unemployment, and domestic instability—leading to increased pressure on at-risk women and contributing to new forms of offending and reoffending, including violations of health regulations, petty theft, and substance abuse-related offenses (Hoehn-Velasco, 2021). Digitalization also rapidly intensified, impacting female offenders, especially the ones who were emerging from prison and were powerless to face their new freedom (Blomberg, 2021). From a strain theory perspective, the pandemic and subsequent economic fallout widened the gap between socially accepted goals and legitimate means to achieve them (Agnew, 1992), pushing economically marginalized women toward repeat

criminal behaviour as a coping mechanism (Morash, 2022; Wikstrom, 2004). At the same time, feminist criminology suggests that gendered roles—particularly related to caregiving, economic dependency, and social isolation—amplified the impact of these strains, especially for single mothers, unemployed women, and ethnic minorities (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Daly, 1988). During this period, North Macedonia also registered limited institutional development of gender-sensitive rehabilitation programs, with many reintegration strategies remaining ill-adapted to the specific needs of women (Gruevska-Drakulevski, 2016; Nanev et al., 2019).

Addressing female recidivism requires understanding gender-specific risk factors and adopting responsive, community-centred strategies. Effective monitoring and tailored interventions are essential to breaking the cycle of reoffending. The central research questions guiding this study are: What are the key socio-economic, psychological, and systemic factors contributing to female recidivism in North Macedonia? Does Arnaudovski's theory of persistent female criminality remain relevant today? To what extent are the relevant stakeholders ready to respond? By analysing patterns of repeat offending among women, this study contributes to the growing field of gender-responsive criminology, offering evidence-based insights to improve rehabilitation policies and criminal justice reforms in transitional societies.

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