

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF WOMEN CONVICTED AND PRISONERS UNDER-TRIAL OF THE SPECIAL PRISONS FOR WOMEN – TAMIL NADU**

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**ABSTRACT**

In India, woman is considered to be a modest version of humankind, yet unfortunately both the ancient and contemporary socio-economic, environmental factors have churned them to become a partner of crime and consequently driven her to the prisons. The socio-economic and psychological status of an individual plays a significant role in the formulation of one's attitude and opinion about that individual. Therefore, the information about the socio-economic profile of women prisoners facilitates to put forward the reasons which forced the women to commit crimes. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to understand the distinct facts about the socio-economic and social status of women prisoners convicted and under-trial. An intensive interview was conducted among 50 convicts and 50 under-trial of Puzhal, Vellore and Trichy Special Prisons for Women, Tamil Nadu, using a semi-structured interview schedule in Tamil. The ages of women ranged from 21 to 70 years and information about the women prisoners' level of education, family socio-economic status, marital status, employment status, deviant thinking patterns, present mental status and the motive behind the crime was collected. A percentage analysis was done with the data obtained and the findings inferred that the percentage of illiteracy was higher among the women prisoners under-trial than the convicted. Most of the women prisoners under-trial are from a very low socio-economic status than that of the convicted. More unmarried women are imprisoned among the under-trial prisoners than the convicted. Most of the women prisoners under-trial are unemployed compared to that of the convicted. Deviant thinking patterns, present mental status and the motive of crime of the under-trial and the convicted women prisoners. Hence this study is initiated to emphasize the importance of the personal and situational factors encountered by women to commit a crime.

**Keywords:** Women prisoners, Crime, Convicted, Under-trial, Special Prisons for Women, Tamil Nadu

## **INTRODUCTION**

India is complex and diverse in its social, cultural, religious and ethnic history. Such complexity gives rise to difference in perception of what amounts to a crime and has its impact in the making of women criminals besides women empowerment. However, it is alarming to see that women's achievement is also getting extended towards criminality in the same social, cultural, economic and political milieu of India according to Mili, Perumal and Cherian (2015). The contributors to crime in India among women are predominantly poverty, illiteracy, gender-inequality and the legal systems at large. Kumari (2009). The prevalence of poverty and its consequences is a fall out on crime especially among the economically marginalized, which is a matter of great concern. The foremost factors contributing to female criminality are poverty and illiteracy says Dahiya (2002) in her study on Female Criminality in Haryana.

The causes of female criminality are personal, family and social causes says Meixiang (2012). The personal causes are issues like the low level of education among women in general. When compared to male offenders, the female offenders are on a low level of education and most of the female offenders are illiterate or semi-literate hence the social knowledge and experience becomes inadequate. This ignorance witnessed among the women deteriorates the survival skills and analytical skills of a women making them inept to deal with day to day problems. When they encounter trials or enticed by others, they are easily coerced or deceived, go astray, and begin their life of crime. It is also because of the low level of education, their knowledge on legal issues are relatively weak. Some of the women become victims of domestic violence, because they do not know how to use the law to protect them. They begin to fight violence with violence says Halder and Jaishankar (2007)

The family causes are the imbalances of the family structure and the family tensions that lead to the occurrence of crimes. According to Bhandari (2018), family life and marriage are often considered to be an important lever for criminal desistance. The breakdown of the marriage relationship is a serious psychological blow to women, and had this psychological crisis not dealt properly, some women will commit crimes, Mishra (2013). Yet another factor like extramarital affairs among women and relationship problems with their spouse triggers women to commit crimes like violence affairs and sex murder. Thus Ahuja (1986) in a study has stated that female criminality has been affected to a greater extent by maladjustment in the family.

The social causes are the influences of unhealthy social phenomenon, unhealthy trends, such as mistresses, extramarital affairs, illegal cohabitation, which is on gradual increase are contributors to the rise of crime among women. Very few women have a well-balanced mentality and this makes the female crime have considerable space.

Crime among women is therefore from being an individual affair more often than not, is the frustrating outcome of the adverse family and social situations which instigates her to different types of criminal behavior. Thus it is important to understand that women have to be empowered in educational and economically along with upright law and order situation which ensures women to stay away from crime and behavior that leads to crime. Therefore, the present study is conducted to understand the profile of the women prisoners confined in the Special Prisons for Women of Tamil Nadu with the following objective.

### **OBJECTIVE**

To compare the Socio-demographic profile of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial of the Special Prisons for Women of Tamil Nadu.

### **METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

#### **Sample**

To comply with the objective of the present study, 50 women convicts and 50 women prisoners under-trial of Puzhal, Vellore and Trichy Special Prison for Women (SPW) of Tamil Nadu aged between 21 to 70 years, were selected.

#### **Procedure**

A total no of 50 women convicts and 50 women prisoners under-trial from Puzhal, Vellore and Trichy Special Prison for Women, Tamil Nadu, were interviewed, of which 15 were convicts and 21 were women prisoners under-trial from SPW – Puzhal, 18 convicts and 14 women prisoners under-trial from SPW – Vellore and 17 women who were convicts and 15 prisoners under-trial from SPW – Trichy were selected for the study after getting their consent. A semi-structured interview schedule of 36 questions in Tamil language was prepared after detail discussions with the three SPW Superintendents and the Prison Psychologists.

At the outset, the short-term and long-term convicts were interviewed individually, following the Lifers. Out of 50 women who were convicted, 10 were short-term convicts, 11 were long-term convicts and 24 were life convicts. The different crimes committed by the women prisoners among the convicted and the under-trial were Theft, Cheating, Drug-Trafficking, Human-Trafficking, Homicide and Murder. The women imprisoned for theft ranged between the age group of 23 to 40 years, cheating cases ranged between the age group of 39 to 50 years, drug-trafficking cases between the age group of 21 to 40 years. The women imprisoned for Human-Trafficking ranged between the age group of 21 to 45 years and imprisoned for Murder ranged

between the age group of 28 to 65 years. The interviews were conducted in the Special Prison for Women at Puzhal, Vellore and Trichy, Tamil Nadu over a period of 4 months. Data was collected regarding the women prisoners level of education, family socio-economic status, marital status, employment status, deviant thinking patterns, present mental status and the motive behind the crime. Percentage analysis was done and a comparative report of the Socio-demographic profile of the women prisoners the convicted and the under-trial was inferred from the data collected which is presented in a tabular format and graphical interpretation followed by the discussions accordingly.

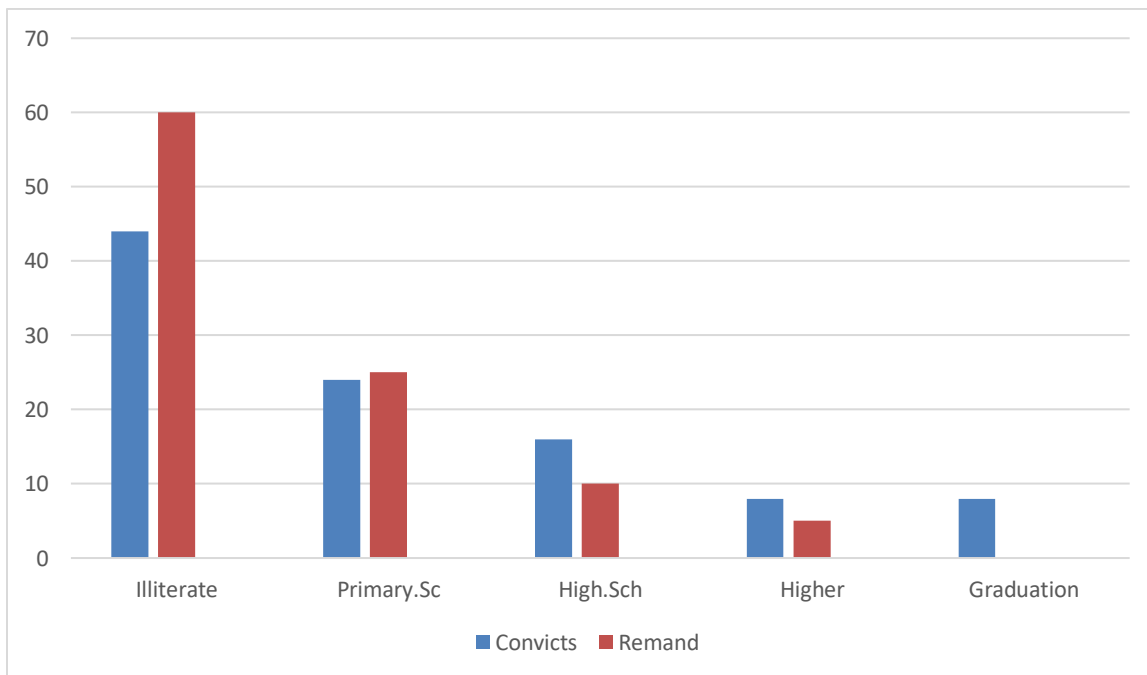
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN CONVICTS AND PRISONERS UNDER-TRIAL

|                                     | CONVICTS (IN %) | PRISONERS UNDER-TRIAL (IN %) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Level of Education</b>           |                 |                              |
| Illiterate                          | 44              | 60                           |
| Primary School                      | 24              | 25                           |
| High School                         | 16              | 10                           |
| Higher Secondary                    | 8               | 5                            |
| Graduate                            | 8               | Nil                          |
| Post Graduate                       | Nil             | Nil                          |
| Others                              | Nil             | Nil                          |
| <b>Family Socio-Economic Status</b> |                 |                              |
| Low                                 | 80              | 100                          |
| Middle                              | 14              | Nil                          |
| High                                | 6               | Nil                          |
| <b>Marital Status</b>               |                 |                              |
| Unmarried                           | 4               | 10                           |
| Married                             | 61              | 65                           |
| Separated                           | 16              | 15                           |
| Widow                               | 19              | 10                           |
| <b>Employment Status</b>            |                 |                              |
| Unemployed                          | 76              | 90                           |
| Employed                            | 6               | Nil                          |
| Self-Employed                       | 18              | 10                           |

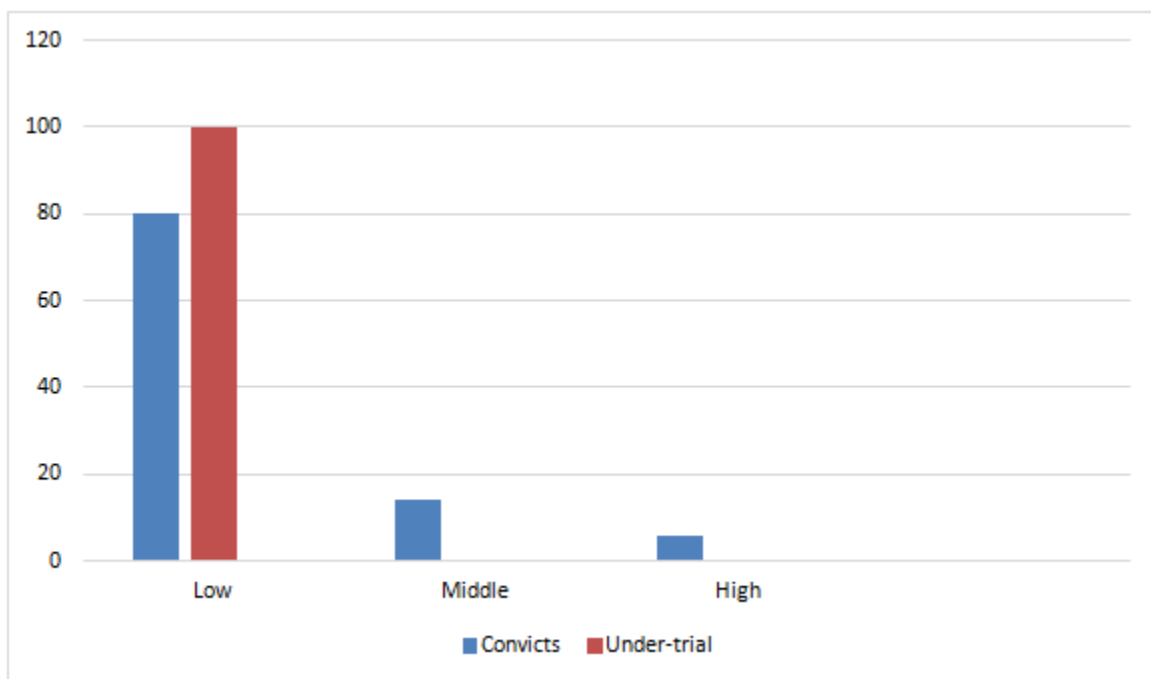
**PSYCHOLOGICAL STATUS OF WOMEN CONVICTS AND PRISONERS UNDER-TRIAL**

|                                 | CONVICTS | UNDER-TRIAL |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <b>Deviant Thinking Pattern</b> |          |             |
| Suicidal Ideation               | 94       | 95          |
| Suicidal Attempt                | 70       | 45          |
| <b>Present Mental Status</b>    |          |             |
| Sad                             | 20       | 15          |
| Anxious                         | 40       | 20          |
| Fear                            | 10       | 40          |
| Depressed                       | 30       | 25          |
| <b>Motive behind the Crime</b>  |          |             |
| Economic Crises                 | 22       | 100         |
| Infidelity                      | 42       | Nil         |
| Anger                           | 28       | Nil         |
| Revenge                         | 8        | Nil         |



**Fig 1: Level of Education of Women Convicted and prisoners Under-Trial**

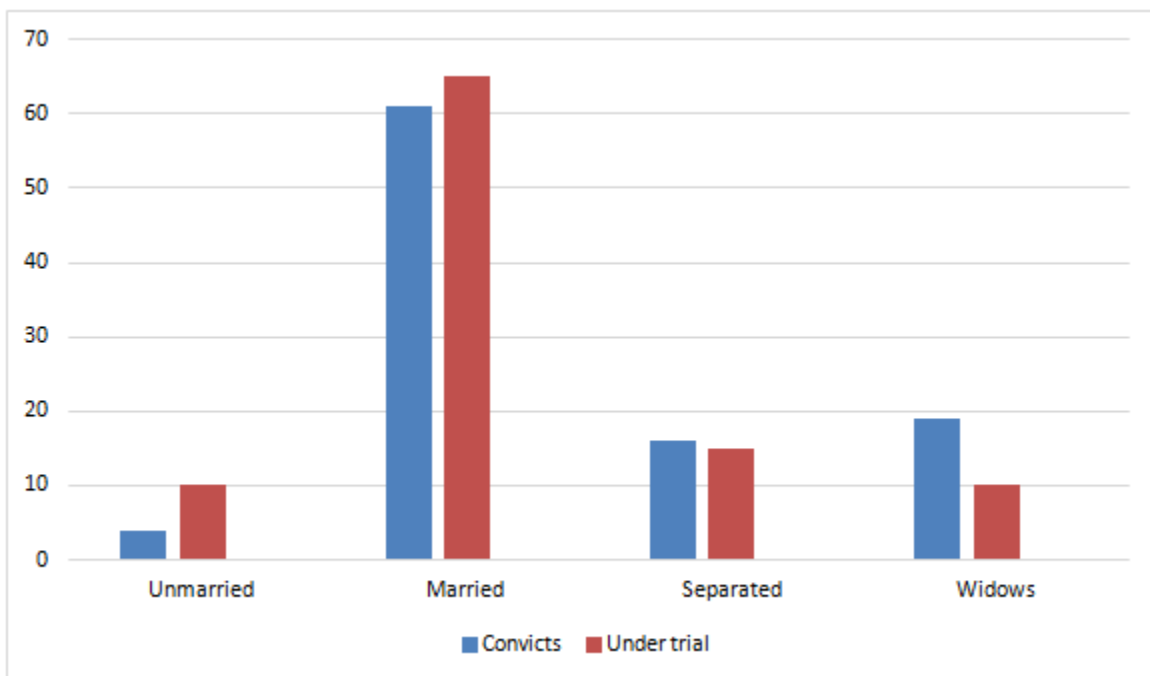
From Figure 1 it is evident that predominantly the level of education among the women prisoners convicted and under-trial was low but comparatively the percentage of illiteracy was slightly higher among the women prisoners under-trial (60%) than the women convicted (44%). This was because most of the women prisoners, were born and brought up in villages among many children and their parents were also illiterates working for daily wages which was not insufficient even to feed the family for a day. It was also observed that most of the women prisoners under trial were school dropouts and were not educated beyond primary schooling. They also reported that because of the lack of education they were not aware of their strengths and weakness and were not vigilant of the consequences of committing a crime. The literacy rate among the women convicts was slightly higher than the women prisoners under-trial because some of them were city dwellers and belonged to a lower middle class family and their parents were also literates who had the capacity and knew importance of providing the basic education to their daughters. It was reported that there were a handful of women who graduates (8 %) among the women convicts. These women prisoners were city dwellers who hailed from a good family background and employed in government firms, but had been sentenced for murder, forgery and fraudulent offences.



**Fig 2: Family Socio-Economic Status of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial**

Figure 2 indicates that all women prisoners under-trial (100%) was from low socio-economic status than that of the women convicted (80%). Most of the women prisoners were, married and

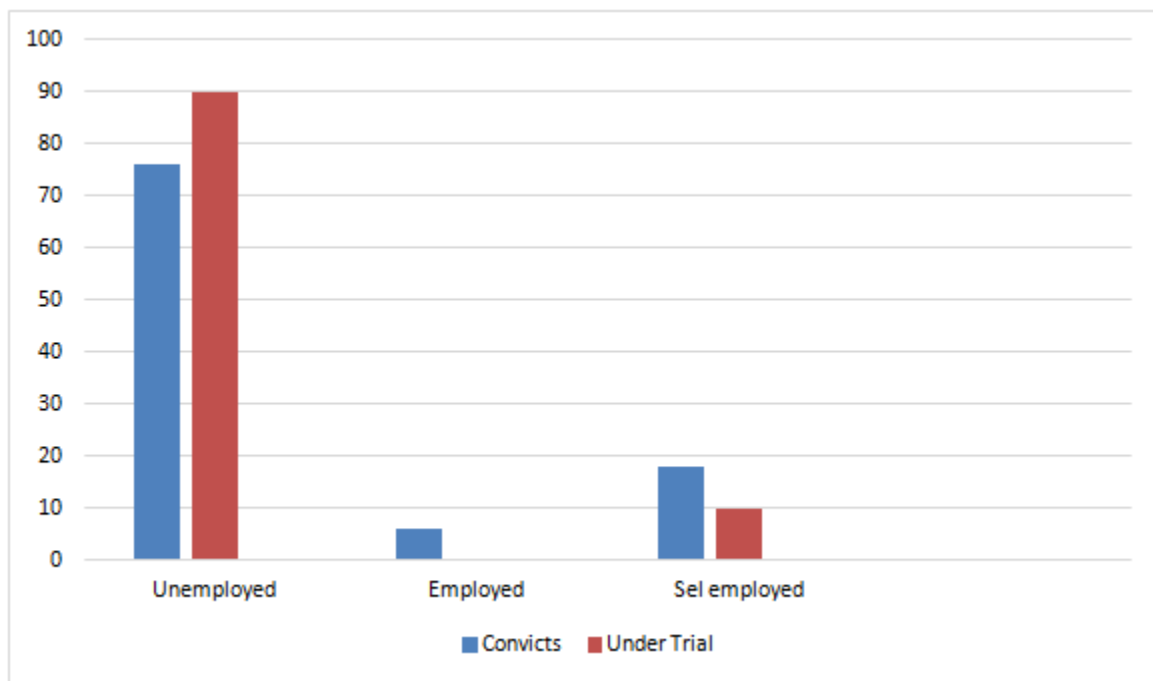
were mothers at a very young age and were un-employed or employed for meagre wages. They were not equipped to face the challenges and problems of day to day life. Most of them considered themselves as ineffective and worn out because of degraded and untiring lifestyle. A few of the women offenders under-trial reported that they felt more a victim than an offender and some stated that the crime was a put up case for the second time because of their previous records in the local police station. It was also reported that they resort to criminal offenses because they could not meet the demands of daily living and their day to day survival was extremely difficult and challenging, because they were abandoned by their husbands and their extended family members and were not supported financially and emotionally. Most of the prisoners' under-trial were unemployed comparatively to the women convicts, and most of them who were self-employed committed crime like theft at their work place. It was observed that a few women convicts were from middle and high socio- economic status because some of them were educated and employed or self-employed.



**Fig 3: Marital Status of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial**

Figure 3 indicates that there were more unmarried young girls among the prisoners' under-trial, who were mostly school drop-outs, imprisoned for offences like alcohol, drug trafficking and human trafficking. It was reported by the women prisoners that, because of the lack of education, therefore unemployed, incorrect guidance by precedents, effortless means of quick earning, faulty role model by parents and other family members, ignorance of the consequences of the

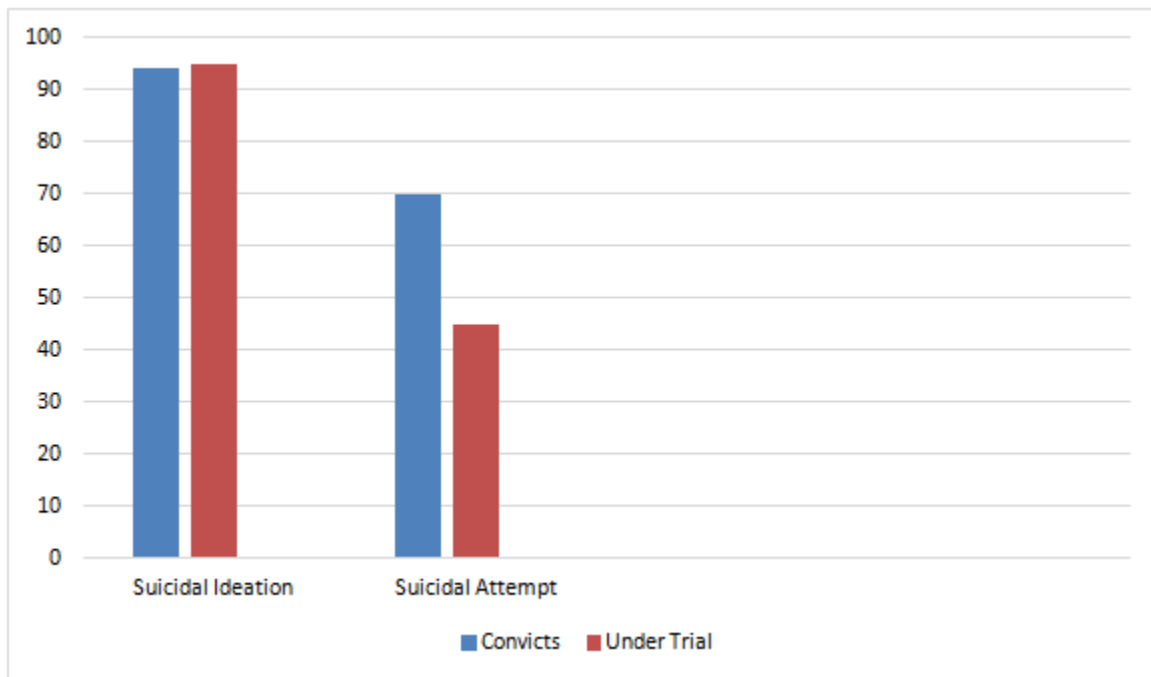
crime and the need for existence, they were driven to commit offences. Crimes like theft and cheating was committed by married women and majority of them were un-employed or employed for meagre wages at the time of committing the crime. It was reported that most of the women convicts were married, separated and widows comparatively to that of the prisoners' under-trial and they were convicted for crimes like murder and homicide. This was due to emotional instability and insecurity which the women experienced due to relationship problems and broken marriages which resulted in extra-marital affairs leading to crime.



**Fig 4: Employment Status of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial**

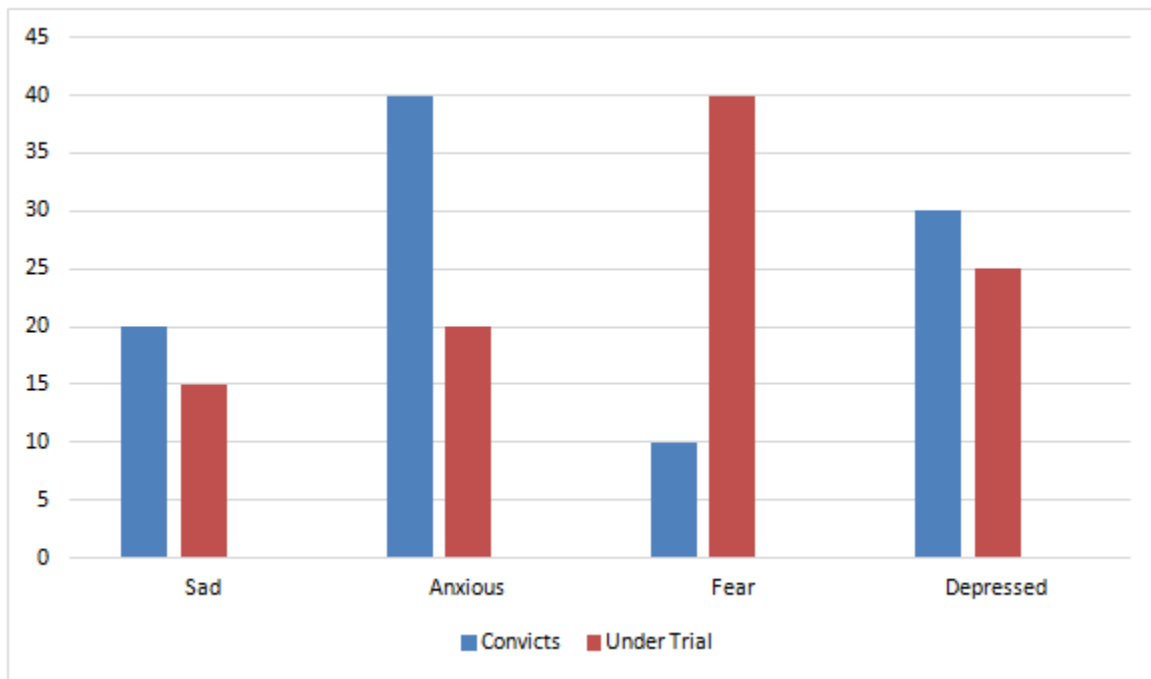
Figure 4 indicates that comparatively to the convicted women most of the women prisoners under-trial were unemployed and some of them were self-employed like tailors and house aids at the at the time of imprisonment. The reason could be the effect of illiteracy, very low socio-economic background, loaded with responsibilities and burdened with family chores.





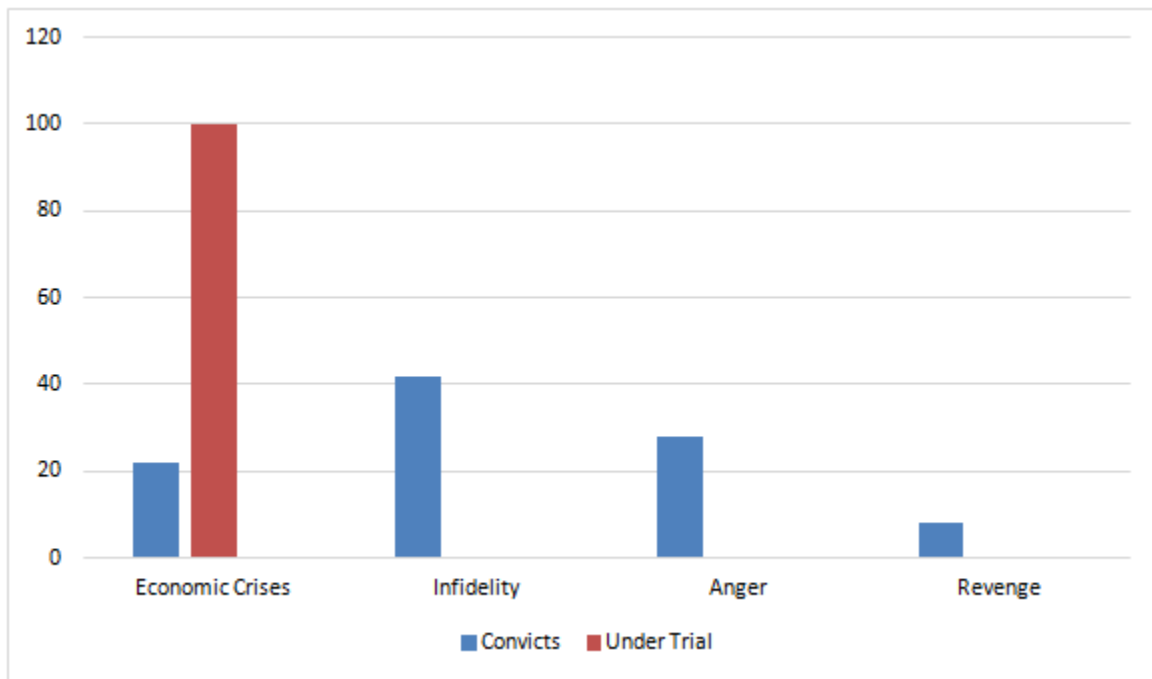
**Fig 5: Deviant thinking pattern of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial**

Figure 5 indicates that both the women convicted and prisoners under-trial experienced suicidal ideation and suicidal attempt was more among the convicted compared to that of the women prisoners under-trial. The women prisoners experienced suicidal ideation due to daily family struggles, particularly of the difficulties faced due to economic crises and emotional imbalance. Many of the women convicts reported to have attempted suicide outside and inside the prison due to the inadequate emotional support from the husband and the family members intensely after marriage and also due to financial instability. It was also reported that the solitude they experience inside the prison of being away from the near and dear ones was tormenting and depressing which persuaded them to commit suicide inside the prison. It was also reported by the convicted prisoners that the uncertainty of their release also provokes them attempt suicide when they are inside the prison.



**Fig 6: Present Mental Status of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial**

From figure 6, it is evident that women convicts experienced more sadness, anxiety and depression and less fear compared to the prisoners' under-trial. This may be, because the women who are convicted for long years inside the prison are apprehensive about their release and are worried about their family members, particularly their children and elderly parents who were living in crises and facing a lot of difficulty outside the prison because of their conviction. The remand prisoners comparatively were less sad, anxious or depressed compared to the women convicts because their anxiety was only about getting a bail and they are very sure of their release. It was reported that most of the women prisoners under-trial expressed fear of being arrested again by the police in the future. They are also worried about the "labelling" that they have visited the prison and because of which they don't find a job to make a modest living and in turn resort to committing a crime. Hiring a genuine lawyer to acquiring their bail plea also induces fear among the women prisoners in general and paying their exorbitant fees is a major distress among the prisoners' under-trial and the convicted as well.



**Fig 7: Motive behind the Crime of Women Convicted and Prisoners Under-Trial**

Figure 7 indicates that the motive behind the crime of the women prisoners under-trial was only economic crises due to employment set-back, but the motive of the women convicted for the crime are Infidelity, Anger and Revenge. Most of the women reported that they have committed crimes like murder because they had affairs outside their marriage due to various reasons like the husband had deprived emotional support and there was strained sexual intimacy. In some cases, the husband abandons the family and to make the ends meet the women sought out a bread winner to fulfill her social, financial, emotional and sexual needs. In some cases, it was reported that due to emotional instability the women lost control of her emotions and resorted to violent crimes like murder.

### CONCLUSION

The rise of female criminality indicates a rise that is both alarming and poor reflection on the life of citizens, especially the women in this country. Some of the crime causation of women may be related to the social causes, economic compulsions, broken family relations, social environment, negative attitude of society towards female, police complicity and connection, poverty, unemployment, dependency on male members of the family, dowry etc., This area requires a deep and incisive study and requires a multi-dimensional approach to understand the triggers and underlying causes of women resorting to crime and off course the impact. This will enable the designing and implementation of various mitigation programs so that we can control the situation

and improve it in the long run. If the situation is left unattended to and without affirmative and real mitigation efforts, it may have a far reaching consequences on the welfare of this nation.

### **LIMITATIONS**

1. Information about the women prisoner's family and children could have been included.
2. Women prisoners from other Special Prisons for Women from Coimbatore and Madurai could have been also included in the study

### **IMPLICATIONS**

1. The Prison department can evaluate the findings of the study and examine the issues pertaining to Female Criminality.
2. The Government can take protective measures to control the issues contributing to the rise of crime among women.
3. The Legal system and Legal Acts pertaining to women can be amended to preserve women in the families and society at large.

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