

# Women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda

Milliam Kiconco

## Abstract

According to the feminist pathways perspective, women's offending behaviour is largely attributed to their experiences of victimisation at the hands of male friends and relatives. Though there is considerable research, especially in the United States where the perspective originated, women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda are not yet known. Moreso, studies on female adult-onset offenders are lacking. Therefore, to fill the identified gap, I conducted a qualitative study with 30 women convicted of murder and investigated their pathways to homicide offending. The study was guided by phenomenological research. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were used to collect data while data analysis was done with the help of NVivo 12 software. Consistent with Western literature, this study found that victimisation was majorly responsible for the offending behaviour of women. The study identified four types of women's pathways to homicide offending which included; the intimate partner violence-related pathway, the protecting marriages and children pathway, the financial greed pathway and, the pathway to prison due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners. However, intimate partner violence-related pathway was responsible for the offending behaviour of most of the women (N=20). Implications of this study for policymakers and practitioners in the criminal justice system are discussed.

**Keywords:** *feminist pathways perspective, victimisation, women convicted of murder, qualitative study, phenomenology, Uganda*

## Article History:

*Received: April 26, 2024*

*Accepted: June 4, 2024*

*Revised: June 3, 2024*

*Published online: July 9, 2024*

## Suggested Citation:

Kiconco, M. (2024). Women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353076>

## About the author:

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Population Studies, Kyambogo University, P.O. Box 1, Kampala, Uganda. Contacts: [mkiconco@kyu.ac.ug](mailto:mkiconco@kyu.ac.ug), +256784389936

---

© The author (s). Published by Institute of Industry and Academic Research Incorporated.

This is an open-access article published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0)



license, which grants anyone to reproduce, redistribute and transform, commercially or non-commercially, with proper attribution. Read full license details here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## 1. Introduction

Traditional criminological theories had, exclusively, focused on men and ignored the experiences of women as offenders and victims in the criminal justice system (Holtfreter et al., 2022). Because of this lapse, as compared to male, research on female crime remains scanty (Leote de Carvalho et al., 2023). The situation is worse in most African countries. According to Artz and Rotmann (2015), there is no information about women's offending and imprisonment in all African countries. This is irrespective of the fact that of late, the number of girls and women in contact with the criminal justice system has increased more than that of boys and men (Freiburger, 2016). However, in recent decades, the feminist pathways perspective has been used to explain women's offending behaviour. This is especially so in the Western world such as the U.S. where the theory originated. The feminist pathways perspective aims to investigate the realities and challenges in the lives of female prisoners (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). The perspective takes a whole-life history approach to investigate how early life experiences affect the later life experiences of female offenders. The feminist pathways perspective emerged to provide an alternative to the male-based criminological theories in understanding women's offending behaviour (Holtfreter et al., 2022). The perspective introduced gendered risk factors to explain women's pathway to offending that was lacking in the traditional male-based theories. According to the feminist pathways perspective, gender shapes the risk factors for women's pathways to offending (Cruz et al., 2023). This perspective provides a better explanation for women's pathways to offending and imprisonment because it includes gender differences in risk factors and how the experiences of men and women are shaped differently in the criminal justice system (Holtfreter et al., 2022). The perspective is rooted in the understanding that the risk factors that women and girls are exposed to tend to be different from those of boys, and, that girls and women respond differently to the risk factors (Stanojoska, 2023).

The perspective, however, recognizes gender-neutral factors such as criminal networks, criminal history and education that are linked to both women's and men's offending behaviour, but, emphasizes the fact that there are gender-responsive factors that play more in the offending behaviour of women than men (Brennan et al., 2012). The perspective, specifically, pays attention to the long-term impact of early victimisation on the girls and women who come into contact with the criminal justice system (Belknap, 2014). It

holds that the offending behaviour of women can largely be attributed to the long-term impact of early victimisation on women manifested in different forms that include among others sexual, physical, psychological and controlling behaviour (Stanojoska, 2023). Accordingly, this victimisation stretches from childhood to adult relationships (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). To respond to different victimisation experiences, some women and girls develop coping mechanisms like drug abuse, running away and sex work all of which are criminalized (Gehring, 2018). In the end, the criminal behaviour of women accelerates due to factors like different forms of abuse and economic vulnerability (Becker & McCorkel, 2011).

Guided by the feminist pathways perspective, this paper intends to investigate women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda. The paper contributes to the body of knowledge on women's pathways to homicide offending and to the limited research on the subject matter specifically in Uganda and generally in Africa. Moreover, beyond Africa, there is a gap in the literature because studies on female-related homicide offending remain few (Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018). Theoretically, this paper contributes new knowledge for the development of southern criminology given the fact that the offending behaviour of women in the current study could not fit in the feminist pathways explanation. This is because, this study involves adult-onset offenders yet according to the feminist pathways perspective, women's offending behaviour begins in the adolescent stage as a response to multiple forms of victimisation (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). The current study shows that feminist theory is limited in explaining the unique situation of rural women in the southern hemisphere.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Earlier research on women's pathways to offending***

Present research on the feminist pathways perspective builds on the foundation that was established in the 1980s and 1990s beginning with the work of Chesney Lind (1989) who emphasized that major criminological theory could not sufficiently explain female crime (DeHart, 2018). Daly (1992) expounded on this work by documenting five pathways to New Haven courts in the United States. The first pathway (harmed and harming women) involved women who were victims of childhood physical and sexual violence and, thereby, ended up

abusing drugs and harming others. The second was composed of street women who escaped abusive homes and committed crimes like prostitution and drug abuse. The third pathway was that of battered women who experienced intimate partner violence and ended up offending their abusers. The fourth pathway was of drug-connected women who abused drugs due to association with male friends. The fifth pathway that Daly termed the "other," involved women who were first-time offenders, and had no history of violence and drug abuse but were motivated to offend by greed and economic situations.

Several studies after Daly employed the feminist pathways perspective to document circumstances that compel women into offending (see Gaarder & Belknap, 2004; Hillis et al., 2001; Owen et al., 2017; Siegel & Williams, 2003). These studies situate women's pathways to offending in the history of victimisation that stretches from childhood. For example, the qualitative study by Siegel and Williams (2003) documented a cycle of offending women that begins with child abuse followed by promiscuous behaviour and exposure to risky situations that culminate into adult victimisation. In their qualitative study of 22 imprisoned girls, Gaarder and Belknap (2004) found that these girls had experienced sexual victimisation before offending. In addition, there is evidence that links intimate partner violence (IPV) to women's offending behaviour.

### ***2.2 Intimate partner violence and women's pathways to homicide offending***

Intimate partner violence has been reported to be the most important factor that explains women's violent behaviour in intimate relations (Becker et al., 2024). Intimate partner violence is multidimensional and impacts on health, physical socio-economic, psychological and human rights aspects of individuals (Matias et al., 2020). Intimate partner violence involves any behaviour that results in physical, sexual and psychological harm in a relationship and, remains the common form of violence against women (Colagrossi et al., 2023). More so, it has been documented that IPV explains the majority of women in prison for murdering their abusive intimate partners (Walker et al., 2023). Estimates indicate that 67%–80% of intimate partner homicide involves abuse of a woman irrespective of who is killed (Matias et al., 2020). In this case, studies have shown that in most cases, women kill to defend themselves or to retaliate against their abusers (Enander et al., 2021). In a qualitative study that involved 40 female prisoners in Belgium, women reported being subjected to physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse by their partners before

offending (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2012). In an Australian study with 115 female intimate partner homicide offenders, it was found that women had been subjected to long periods of abuse by their victims (Voce & Bricknell, 2020). By using content analysis on 10 archival case files of American women who murdered their intimate partners between 1989 and 2016, Scott et al., (2023), found that eight women had experienced IPV before murdering. In Cambodia, a study by Jeffries and Chuenurah (2018) with a sample of 18 women imprisoned for homicide offending reported that women's pathways to offending were due to traumatic life history, victimisation at the hands of family members and marital abandonment among other factors. In Iran, a study with 23 female offenders found that families with domestic violence facilitated women's offending behaviour (Maghsoudi et al., 2018).

### ***2.3 Women's pathways to offending in Africa***

In Africa, few studies that have utilized feminist pathways perspective to investigate women's offending behaviour have reported victimisation as the central factor (Artz et al., 2012; Jeffries et al., 2019). For example, in their study with 55 South African female prisoners, Artz et al. (2012) reported that 38% were victims of childhood physical abuse while 29% were victims of childhood sexual abuse. In this study, women are said to have developed coping strategies like substance abuse and gambling in addition to being subjected to sexual abuse and controlling behaviour by their intimate partners (Artz et al., 2012). A qualitative study with 15 South African women imprisoned for killing their intimate partners found that 14 were victims of physical, verbal and emotional IPV (Hesselink & Dastile, 2015). In Uganda, a qualitative study that involved 66 women imprisoned for violent crimes like assault and murder with 55 having directed their violence on family members mostly men, women reported alcohol-perpetrated IPV at the hands of their intimate partners (Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1995).

### ***2.4 Contextualizing the study***

Uganda is dominated by patriarchal structures and is predominantly an agricultural economy in which land is the major factor of production. In Uganda's sociocultural, economic and political structures, women's position remains low. For example, the rights to land inheritance and ownership are vested in men while women can only access land through a male relative (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2019). In Uganda, women are

overrepresented in unpaid agricultural-related and non-market work (Theeuwens et al., 2021). There are also harmful cultural practices like early marriage and bride price that afflict women (Neema et al., 2021), Women's education levels are low compared to men's (Uganda Demographic Health Survey, 2016). In addition, violence against women (VAW) is widespread, accepted, and facilitated by gender norms (Bukuluki et al., 2023). It is estimated that 51 per cent of women between 15-49 years have ever been subjected to physical violence (UBOS & ICF, 2018). According to Devries et al. (2013), between 74 and 98 per cent of children have been subjected to physical, emotional and sexual violence by their caretakers.

It should be noted that the Ugandan government acknowledges that VAW is a public health concern. The government subscribes to different international conventions like The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention Against Torture among others. There are national laws and legislation intended to protect women against violence of all forms. Among these are the National Policy on the Elimination of Gender-based Violence, The 1995 Constitution of Uganda and the Domestic Violence Act of 2010. Despite the availability of formal laws, VAW has persisted with gender values and norms that oppress women, mainly, due to poor implementation of laws (New Vision, 2023). For example, according to the Uganda Police 2020 crime report, there was an increase in domestic violence-related cases from 12,541 in 2019 to 17,664 in 2020 and of 17,664 cases, 13,145 were adult women (Uganda Police Report, 2020). It is important to note that under the Ugandan judicial system, VAW cannot be used as a defence. Women who murder their abusive partners are, therefore, treated as offenders and may end up having death sentences if convicted according to the Ugandan penal code of 1951 (Peel, 2023).

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Research design***

The study used the qualitative tradition of phenomenology. This design was useful in helping the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of women victims of violence and their pathways to offending (Hourigan & Edgar, 2020). From their standpoint, this design empowered the participants to openly describe their personal experiences with homicide offending (Yang et al., 2022).

### *3.2 Sample and sampling strategy*

The site for this phenomenological study was one female prison not disclosed to protect the participants. The basis for choosing this prison was because most of the women imprisoned for murder are accommodated. The study involved a purposive sample of 30 women selected with the help of prison wardens. In qualitative research, scholars recommend the idea of a saturation sample attained at a point when no new information is being collected (Fofana et al., 2020). This is, usually, a small sample but big enough to offer rich data. However, there are other proposals such as one by Morse (1994) who proposes 30-50 participants for ethnography and grounded theory studies and Creswell and Poth (2018) who propose five to 25 for phenomenological studies. Following these guidelines, this phenomenological study targeted at least 25 women but, the saturation sample was reached at 30 women.

Female participants were purposively selected. Purposive sampling is central in qualitative studies because it is useful in selecting participants with qualities, which help to achieve the study's purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inclusion criteria were; Uganda women who were 18 years and above, convicted of murder, able to communicate in either English or "Luganda" (the local language widely spoken capital city) and able to give consent. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria include women with characteristics that could not allow them to be part of the study such as mental disorders that cannot allow them to give accurate data. The age range of women was 22-69. Illiteracy was high in that of the 30 women, only 3 had certificates attained after senior secondary education or form four. Eighteen women were primary school dropouts while nine women never went to school. Before committing murder, 27 women were married and three were divorced. Most of the women (N=17) were peasant farmers producing, mainly, for subsistence consumption. Only three women were employed in the formal sector. Two women reported being unemployed while the rest (N=8) were casual labourers. Of the 30 women, 28 were staying in rural settings while two were living in urban settings. All women were first-time offenders with no criminal and imprisonment history.

### ***3.3 Data collection***

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were used to collect data from research participants. With this method, rapport was created between the researcher and participants, participants were able to answer questions freely and the researcher took note of non-verbal communication (Yeo et al., 2014). This method was empowering for women and, they were able to freely narrate their pathways to homicide offending. I conducted interviews in “Luganda” a local language that every female participant could speak. Because researchers are not supposed to use voice recorders in Ugandan prisons, I used note-taking.

### ***3.4 Data analysis***

The process of data analysis was continuous and began at the time of data collection. Data was analyzed and managed using NVivo 12 software, which assisted in coming up with final narrative themes. I started the process by transferring interview notes to the software. The notes were read closely and, the software conducted an open coding structure and came up with a system of nodes. What followed were specific categories, which were created by axial coding through synthesizing and reorganizing interview notes. The specific categories created the narrative themes that form the discussion of this study (Marshal & Rosman, 2016).

### ***3.3 Ethical considerations***

City University of Hong Kong’s Research and Ethics Committee and Uganda Prison Service officials cleared the study. Officials at the Uganda Prison Service headquarters offered me a clearance letter, which I presented to the officer in charge of the female prison. The officer in charge of prisons, then, introduced me to female participants involved in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and all women provided consent. I assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. The names mentioned in this paper are not their real ones and were proposed by women.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

From the interviews with women, this study identified four pathways to homicide offending which included; the intimate partner violence-related pathway, the protecting marriages and children pathway, the financial greed pathway and, the pathway to prison due



to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners. Consistent with the pathway to offending literature that presents the history of female prisoners as one characterized by victimisation, findings indicated that 24 out of 30 women involved in this study experienced victimisation before committing murder. In effect, 24 out of 30 women reported being subjected to different forms of victimisation by, mainly, family members that included fathers, sisters-in-law and intimate partners. Of the 24 women, 12 experienced childhood victimisation, 21 experienced multiple forms of IPV while 17 women were psychologically and physically abused by criminal justice officials like the police and judges. However, one striking difference that this paper presents is findings from a sample of women who were adult-onset offenders with no criminal and imprisonment history and committed murder as their first offence. Relatively similar studies have been conducted in Belgium (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2012, 2016). These studies with forty-one women imprisoned for various offences found that only seven had, at least, offended once before the age of 18 years old. The current study is, therefore, unique in that it has a sample of women who are all adult-onset offenders. The findings of this study contradict women's pathways to offending literature that links adult offending to risky adolescent behaviours resulting from childhood victimisation. One possible explanation could be the role of tradition and extended family in preventing childhood and risky adolescent behaviours (Ssemogerere, 2011). Given the fact that women in this study were staying in rural areas, they may not have been exposed to criminal activities and delinquent peers common in urban areas (Gunnison & McCartan, 2010). According to Moffitt's (1993) dual taxonomy theory, adult-onset offenders must have been socially prevented from participating in delinquent activities as children and adolescents

#### ***4.1 Intimate partner violence-related pathway***

Majority of the women murdered due to the cumulative effect of IPV (N=20). These women suffered different forms of IPV that included; physical, sexual, psychological, controlling behaviour and economic violence. The experience of IPV according to women was repetitive and enduring (between 12 to 35 years). Of the 20 women, 14 murdered their abusive partners, three murdered their stepchildren, two murdered their fathers and one murdered her brother. Eight women murdered out of self-defence while 12 planned the action. It was, however, noted that even when some women killed their victims in self-defence out of provocation, the impact of cumulative experience of multiple forms of IPV

played a big role. Asked if there was any other factor that influenced their action apart from self-defence, eight women hinted at the desperate situation they were going through. They had before negotiated escape routes from IPV without success. They all expressed the sense of a desperate situation that was filled with accumulated anger and fear of getting killed at any time. For example, Abwori who murdered her partner after 29 years of suffering multiple forms of victimisation said that though she murdered out of self-defence, her enduring experience of victimisation without any solution was responsible for the anger that she used to murder her partner:

*I killed in response to the provocation from my partner. On the fateful day, he came back from the bar at 8:00 am which was his habit and started kicking me - ----- I responded by hitting him with an axe and he died. You can imagine the kind of anger that suffering without a solution brings. I think I harboured a lot of anger that burst the day I fought back and killed him (Abwori, 58 years old).*

Aryampurira said that by the time she responded in self-defence, with her four children, they were in fear that any time they would be killed;

*By the time I responded to defend myself against my abusive partner, with my four children, we had got engrossed in fear. I knew my partner was going to kill me any time. I think I killed him out of that fear, thinking that I was to be the first one to die (Aryampurira, 28-year jail sentence).*

Interviews with women who carefully planned to kill their abusive partners revealed that they did so to end abusive relationships, which they had endured for long without an escape route. Sarai, for example, planned with her two big children to kill her partner. According to her, children were part of the plan to kill because they were also victims of abuse for a long and were of seeing their mother being abused;

*-----For long a time, I tried to be a good woman, but this did not stop my partner from abusing me and my children. By the time I killed him, I had endured many years of suffering. My big children were also tired of being abused and seeing me go through all the abuse. This is the reason we conspired and hatched a plan to kill him (Sarai).*

Murder by women has been taken to be more likely in intimate (Spencer & Stith, 2020). It has been documented that majority of the women kill their intimate partners and other family members after they have been subjected to a long period of abuse by their

victims (Voce & Bricknell, 2020). What is common among researchers is that female-perpetrated homicide reflects an extreme outcome of IPV against women (Matias et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been acknowledged that before killing their abusive partners and other family members, in part, due to a range of difficulties and failure to get a safe exit, abused women chose to stay in abusive relationships until a time they responded to end abusive situations (Estrellado & Loh, 2019; Milliam, 2019).

Agumisiriza who killed her stepchild said that the victim child compounded her already existing multiple experiences of IPV. Agumisiriza said that she withstood physical, sexual, and psychological abuses and control for a long, but the situation became worse when her partner forced a child on her. She narrated that a two-year-old stepchild was brought and thrown into her compound by a woman who claimed that her partner was not providing any support. According to Agumisiriza, her partner not only forced her to look after the child but also abused her more because of the child. She thus said:

*I endured abuse from my partner without any other option at my disposal. I was shocked one evening when a woman came quarrelling and dumped a child in our compound claiming that my partner had failed to provide basic needs to him. -----my partner who had never disclosed to me that he had a child of this kind forced me to take care of the child. This child escalated the abuse. I remember one time my partner beat me seriously because he found a child just crying (Agumisiriza, 60 years old)*

It has been documented that extramarital affairs and polygamy condoned by most African cultures result in jealousy and insecurity among women, which compel them to kill (Bagala, 2016).

After separating from their abusive partners and going back to their parents' homes, the three women, two of whom killed their brothers and another one killed her father said that though they killed their relatives because of having no place to go, IPV experience they had just escaped played an indirect role. Rukundo, Owobusingye and Kihembo left their partners after being married for 17, 14 and 12, years respectively. Their parents paid back the bride price and gave the women land and shelter to settle and this positive gesture facilitated the separation. The arrangement of acquiring land at their home of birth did not go well with their big brothers who wanted to take away the land from the women. In the attempt to take

back land from these women, their fathers supported their sons' initiatives. In effect, women ended up killing their relatives over the matter of taking away land from them. The women's options to survive after divorce were limited because they only looked at the land and rightly so for survival. Their parents' homes also served as their valuable shelters so being chased from there meant becoming homeless. One of their extracts is stated:

*For attempting to snatch land away from me, I killed my brother because I had neither other option nor alternative means for survival. I had just left marriage on an unfortunate note, and I never intended to marry again. I still had fresh memories and scars from the abusive marriage. No one was willing to help me out of my predicament, including, my father of all people----- But in all this, I blame my former abusive partner. I would not have been at my parent's home had he not abused me (Kihembo, 28-year jail sentence).*

The women became victims of laws and customs that favour men when it comes to land inheritance in an agricultural economy of Uganda (Rugadya, 2010). What is not found in the literature is the adult women who kill their parents and siblings. In a study by Stevens (1999) with eighteen abused women who killed their abusers, two cases of 16- and 17-year-old women killed their parents. Stevens reports that the women had experienced life-long experiences of physical, sexual and psychological abuse at the hands of their victims. Contrary to such findings, women in this study had extended experience of IPV at the hands of their intimate partners, which experience they had just left but were compelled to kill their victims who threatened to take away the land they only saw as a source of livelihood.

#### ***4.2 Protecting marriages and children's pathway***

Uganda is a society contextualized by respectfulness accorded to women in a marriage relationship and with divorcees being stigmatized. This is in addition to children being, solely, under the care of women and the elder son, usually, being taken as the heir of his father's estate. With women, including, girl children playing a peripheral role in society, women may end up killing to protect their marriages and children. Such a situation was reflected in the pathway to murder of five women who were married and had several children at the time of murder and were not, necessarily, victims of IPV. Though three of the five women were victims of multiple forms of childhood victimisation, they said that their killing had nothing to do with the effect of childhood victimisation as stated in one extract:

*---I killed because I wanted to protect my marriage. I had already overcome the trauma faced during childhood. I wanted to guard my nine-year marriage. My partner was a very loving and caring man, but the problem was the extra-marital affair he was having with another woman. I feared that this woman was going to destroy my marriage and I had to kill her (Survivor).*

Forty-five-year-old Nehum, who was sentenced to 60 years for killing her step-child said that she killed because she wanted to protect her children from the competition over resources. Nehum who had three young boys at the time got scared and jittery when her partner brought a fifteen-year-old boy to her home. She imagined that her stepchild being the oldest son would automatically be the heir of his father's estate as by cultural norm established and so would take the biggest share of his father's resources to the detriment of her children. In her words:

*I only killed to protect my children. I was living peacefully with my partner for nine years but matters turned sour when the 15-year-old child born outside marriage came into our marital relations. At the time the boy came into our family, I had three younger boys one of who was rightly expected and destined to become an heir to my partner's estate. I kept imagining that this boy would be the heir and would take all the land since he was the eldest of all (Nehum).*

Contrary to the pathway to committing murder through victimisation, the role of culture was traced in the pathways to offending behaviour of these five women who killed to protect their marriages and children. Scholars have acknowledged the role of understanding the cultural and ethnic differences of women who murder (Ventura et al., 2022). This difference has been noted in Australia where the rates of indigenous women who kill their intimate partners are higher than those of non-indigenous women. An Australian study by Voce and Bricknell (2020) that involved 115 homicide offenders reported that indigenous women were more likely to kill their intimate partners than non-indigenous women. Voce and Bricknell note that the lives of indigenous women were characterized by unemployment, substance abuse and unstable accommodation. In Uganda, a woman is respected only in the confines of marriage, divorce is discouraged, and divorcees are stigmatized. Sons, especially, first sons are valued and are, always, the heirs to their fathers' estates (Archambault & Zoomers, 2015). Women in this situation may end up killing to protect their threatened

children from the competition, which was the case with the story of women who killed their stepsons.

### ***4.3 Financial greed pathway***

One woman mentioned prospects of financial gain as the reason for killing her partner. Murungi never reported any history of victimisation. Murungi said that her partner had a very big chunk of land from which much of the family wealth was produced. However, one part of this land was later to be the cause of offending. Murungi at one time wanted her partner to sell a small piece so that they get money to begin a business for their son who never had a job. Her partner rejected the idea of disposing of part of the land and, this refusal led to his death. Murungi is said to have hatched and connived with her son to kill her partner as described:

*I think I was just greedy for money. My partner was a peaceful man----- He had a lot of land to supply us with enough food. However, when my son finished college and failed to get a job, I suggested to him that we sell part of the land and have him start a business for his economic empowerment. I, in my imagination, hoped to get side income from the business my son was to start. My partner rejected the idea of selling part of the land. This infuriated my son and me and this is how we planned to kill him (Murungi, 48 years old).*

With no history of victimisation, Murunga's story was due lack of correct decision-making power in the affairs of a family estate that belonged to her family but was mediated through her partner. This finding contradicts the feminist pathways perspective that attributes women's offending behaviour to the experience of victimisation. Research has demonstrated that not all women who kill their intimate partners have experienced IPV and not all those who experience IPV kill their partners (Voce & Bricknell, 2020). Though women's pathways to committing murder through financial greed have been reported elsewhere, the experience of a woman in the current study reflects the Ugandan traditional customary practices that disadvantage women as compared to men in terms of land ownership. Patrilineal inheritance practised in most of the communities of Uganda hinders women from accessing and controlling land (Kabahinda, 2017). Customary land tenure is the common type of access to land with 80% of the land being administered customarily (Dieterle, 2021). This is the case in most African agricultural economies (Kameri-Mbote, 2005). This, however, has a negative

implication on the status of women. For example, Uganda being an agriculture-based economy, lack of land implies women's economic dependency on men.

#### ***4.4 Pathway to prison due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners***

This category had four women who, accordingly, never committed the crime but were in prison because of the crimes committed by their intimate partners. These women blamed poverty and the corrupt justice system for their conviction. Adroa, Hannah, Nakintu and Aryanzahura were imprisoned together with their partners. These women said that they were arrested and convicted with their partners. Adroa, for example, said that her culpability, according to police and judges, was because she never reported the offence of her partner to authorities. Adroa whose partner committed suicide inside the prison before trial was considered to be the number one suspect. She said she failed to get money to hire a private lawyer to represent her and ended up being convicted;

*I am here because of the crime that was committed by my partner. He killed his friend in a fight inside our house. We were arrested and remanded together but he committed suicide before appearing in court. Without money to enlist the services of a private lawyer, I was left vulnerable. The presiding judge treated me as the number one suspect and convicted me to life imprisonment (Adroa).*

Literature in non-western countries has documented how women's pathway to prison is impacted by inadequate access to legal representation and corruption in the criminal justice system (Jeffries et al., 2019). In Kenya, for example, a study with forty-nine women found that twelve of them were wrongly imprisoned due to guilt of association and being framed by others but were unable to explain themselves in courts of law because of limited access to justice (Jeffries et al., 2019). The qualitative study by Fox (2018) in the US documented stories of five women who were convicted of murder and were serving sentences due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners. With one of them being convicted for the death of her child murdered by her abusive husband who happened to be the biological father, Fox argues that women are, always, wrongfully convicted for violating criminal code and standards of appropriate womanhood and motherhood. This is based on the view that the victim woman was blamed for failing to protect her child against the abusive intimate partner (Fox, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study are somewhat consistent with the existing feminist pathways perspective literature on role victimisation in the offending behaviour of women. In particular, the study extends the pathway perspective to an African context and adds to non-Western research that has utilized the feminist pathways perspective. This study, however, breaks the ground by presenting a group of female adult-onset offenders whose offending behaviour cannot be fully explained using the feminist pathways perspective as advanced and used in Western literature. In the current study, childhood victimisation did not influence adolescent and adult offending behaviours as advanced in the Western pathway literature. Instead, for the majority of the women, homicide offending was a response to multiple forms of IPV. As Nuytiens and Christiaens (2016) argue, female adult-onset offending could present an important angle to study and challenge the pathway perspective that was developed and tested in the United States. In this case, the findings of this study contribute to the development of southern criminology (Carrington et al., 2016); existing criminological theories may not be sufficient in explaining the dynamics of crime in the southern context and so, there is a need for adding new knowledge and perspectives to the existing theories. More so, it has been argued that the feminist perspective may not fully explain the unique experience of rural marginalized women in the southern hemisphere (Potter, 2015). However, this study is without limitations. For example, the study used purposive sampling with a focus on female participants who meet a certain criterion and this did not capture the experiences of others in the same setting and is limited in terms of in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Also, this study required women to reconstruct their past and most had spent many years in prison, it is possible that some may not have fully revealed their past experiences. It is, therefore, acknowledged that some stories could have been either missed or misconstrued.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that victimisation within adult relationships has a significant influence on the offending behaviour of women in Uganda. Findings reveal that victimisation during intimate relations explains the pathway to homicide offending of the majority of women. This suggests that paying attention to the experience of women in adult intimate relations is important in understanding factors that compel them to murder in Uganda. This study's findings have implications for practice, policy and future



directions for research. In the area of practice, the findings of this study have implications for different professionals. The prior experience of imprisoned women that is characterized by poverty, unemployment/underemployment, low education, and a history of victimisation, all require that practitioners in the criminal justice system understand this history and treat female offenders and prisoners accordingly. Practitioners in this case such as police, judicial officers, prison guards, social workers and counsellors need to gain an understanding of issues affecting female prisoners. It is only by understanding of circumstances surrounding women's offending behaviour that officials such as police and judges can handle female offenders and prisoners in an empathetic and responsible manner by considering their special problems and needs. In order to determine the services and resources that women and girls need across their life spans, there is a need for gaining knowledge about the risks, vulnerabilities and forces that they face. Given the cultural and social forces surrounding violence against girls and women in Uganda as identified in this study, efforts need to involve different stakeholders including the public, and cultural and religious leaders among others. Efforts to educate the public about the dangers of VAW could involve the whole community at all levels. In terms of future research, emphasis should be put on widening the understanding of the interplay between social-cultural factors and intimate partner violence in explaining women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

**Funding**

This work was part of the author's PhD, which was funded by the City University of Hong Kong.

**ORCID**

Milliam Kiconco - <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8639-3332>

## References

- Archambault, C. S. & Zoomers, A. (2015). *Global trends in land reform. Gender impacts*. New York, Routledge.
- Artz, L., Hoffman-Wanderer, Y. & Moulton, K. (2012). *Hard time(s): Women's pathways to crime and incarceration*. Cape Town, University of Cape Town.
- Artz, L. & Rotmann, B. (2015). Taking a count of women in prison. *Agenda*, 29(4), 3-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2015.1129091>
- Bagala, A. (2016). *Jealousy drives woman to kill co-wife*. Daily Monitor, Kampala, Uganda.
- Becker, P., Miller, S. L. & Iovanni, L. (2024). Pathways to resistance: Theorizing trauma and women's use of force in intimate relationships. *Violence Against Women*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012241233000>
- Becker, S. & McCorkel, J. A. (2011). The gender of criminal opportunity. The impact of male co-offenders on women's crime. *Feminist Criminology*, 6(2), 79-110 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085110396501>
- Belknap, J. (2014). *The invisible woman. Gender, crime and justice*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Stamford: CT. Wadsworth Publishing
- Brennan, T., Breitenbach, M., Dieterich, W., Salisbury, E., & Van Voorhis, P. (2012). Women's pathways to serious and habitual crime: A-person-centered analysis incorporating gender-responsive factors. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 39 (11), 1481-1508.
- Bukuluki, P., Kisaakye, P., Bulenzi-Gulere, G., Mulindwa, B., Bazira, D., Letiyo, E., Namirembe, H. N. L et al., (2023). Vulnerability to violence against women or girls during COVID-19 in Uganda. *BMC Public Health*, 23(33), 2-10 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14951-7>
- Carrington, K., Hogg, R. & Sozzo, M. (2016). Southern criminology. *British Journal of Criminology*, 56 (1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv083>

- Colagrossi, M., Deiana, C., Dragone, D., Geraci, A., Giua, L. & Iori, E. (2023). Intimate partner violence and help-seeking: The role of femicide news. *Journal of Health Economics*, 87, 1-22.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications Ltd.
- Cruz, B., Lukić, N. & Strand, S. (2023). Gender Perspective of Victimization, Crime and Penal Policy. In: Vujadinović, D. & Fröhlich, M., Giegerich, T. (eds) *Gender-Competent Legal Education*. Springer Textbooks in Law. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14360-1\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14360-1_14)
- Daly, K. (1992). Women's pathways to felony court: Feminist theories of law-breaking and problems of representation. *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies*, 2 (1), 11-52.
- DeHart, D. D. (2008). Pathways to prison: Impact of victimisation in the lives of incarcerated women. *Violence Against Women*, 14(12), 1362-1381. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012083270>
- DeHart, D. D. (2018). Women's pathways to crime. A heuristic typology of offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 45(10), 1461-1482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548187825>
- Dieterle, C. (2021). Global governance meets local land tenure: international codes of conduct for responsible land investments in Uganda. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 3 (58), 582-598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1983165>
- Enander, V., Krantz, G., Lövestad, S. & Örmon, K. (2021) The killing and thereafter: Intimate partner homicides in a process perspective, part II, *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 6(3): 501–517. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239868021X16317122802413>
- Estrellado, A. F. & Loh, J. M. (2019). To stay in or leave an abusive relationship: Losses and gains experienced by battered Filipino women. *Journal of International Violence*, 34 (9), 1843-1863. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516657912>

- Fofana, F., Bazeley, P. & Regnault, A. (2020). Applying a mixed methods design to test saturation for qualitative data in health outcomes research. *PLoS One*, 15(6), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234898>
- Fox, M. H. (2018). Women and wrongful conviction. How? who? why? In Sharp, S. F., Marcus-Mendoza, S., Cameron, K. A & Daniel-Roberson, E. S. (Eds), *Across the spectrum of women and crime. Theories, offending and the criminal justice system* (pp. 163-178). Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.
- Freiburger, T. L. (2016). Violent women. In Freiburger, T. L. & Marcum, C. D. (Eds), *Women in the criminal justice system. Tracking the journey of female and crime*, New York, Taylor and Francis, CRS Press, pp. 117-135.
- Gaarder, E. & Belknap, J. (2004). Little women: Girls in adult prison. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 15 (2), 51- 80. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J012v15n02\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J012v15n02_03)
- Gehring, K. S. (2018). A direct test of pathways theory. *Feminist Criminology*, 13 (2), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851166461>
- Gunnison, E. & McCartan, L. M. (2010). Persistent versus late onset among female offenders: A test of state dependent and population heterogeneity interpretations. *Western Criminology Review*, 11(3), 45- 62.
- Hesselink, A. & Dastile, P. (2015). A criminological assessment on South African women who murdered their intimate male partners. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 25(4), 335-344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2015.1078091>
- Hillis, S. D., Anda, R. F., Felitti, V. J. & Marchbanks, P. A. (2001). Adverse childhood experiences and sexual risk behaviors in women: A retrospective cohort study. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 33 (5), 206 - 211. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2673783>
- Holtfreter, K., Pusch, N. & Golladay, K. A. (2022). Evolution, evidence, and impact of the feminist pathways perspective. In *The Wiley Handbook on What Works with Girls and Women in Conflict with the Law: A Critical Review of Theory, Practice, and Policy* (pp. 13-23). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119874898.ch1>

- Hourigan, R. M. & Edgar, S. N. (2020). The foundations of phenomenology: Epistemology, methodology, and analysis in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: An Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research in American Music Education*, 1, 110.
- Jeffries, S. & Chuenurah, C. (2018). Pathways to prison in Cambodia for homicide offending. *South East Asia Research*, 6 (2), 109- 113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X18769223>
- Jeffries, S., Chuenurah, C., Raob. P. & Park, M. J. Y. (2019). Women's pathways to prison in Kenya: Violence, poverty, familial caretaking and barriers to justice. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 73, 50- 61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.02.003>
- Kabahinda, J. (2017). Culture and women's land rights on the ground in Uganda. *Development in Practice*, 27(6), 828-838 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2017.1343801>
- Kameri-Mbote, P. (2005). *The land has its owners! Gender issues in land tenure under customary law in Kenya*. Working Paper 9, Nairobi, International Environmental Law Resource Centre.
- Leote de Carvalho, M.J., Duarte, V. & Gomes, S. (2023). Female crime and delinquency: A kaleidoscope of changes at the intersection of gender and age. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 33 (4), 280-301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2021.1985044>
- Maghsoudi, A, Anaraki, N. R. & Boostani, D. (2018). Patriarchy as a contextual and gendered pathway to crime: A qualitative study of Iranian women offenders. *Quality and Quantity*, 52(1), 355-370. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0470-2>
- Marshal, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research*. London, New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- Matias, A., Gonçalves, M., Soeiro, C., & Matos, M. (2020). Intimate partner homicide: A meta-analysis of risk factors. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 50, 101358.
- Milliam, K. (2019). Physical violence against women in Uganda: The experience of 30 female prisoners convicted of murder. *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal - Gender and Women's Studies*, 1(1), 38-44.

- Moffitt, T. E. (1993). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behaviour: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review*, 100 (4), 674-701. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.100.4.674>
- Neema, S., Muhumuza, C., Nakigudde, R., Uldbjerg, C. S., Tagoola, F. M. & Muhwez, E. (2021). Trading daughters for livestock: An ethnographic study of facilitators of child marriage in Lira district, Northern Uganda. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 25 (3), 83-93. <https://doi.org/10.29063/ajrh2021/v25i3>
- New Vision, (2023). *Poor law implementation failing justice for sexual violence*. Kampala, Uganda [https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/news/poor-law-implementation-failing-justice-for-s-NV\\_166848](https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/news/poor-law-implementation-failing-justice-for-s-NV_166848)
- Nuytiens, A. & Christiaens, J. (2012). Female offenders' pathways to prison in Belgium. *Temida*, 15 (4), 7-22. <https://doi.org/10.2298/TEM1204007N>
- Nuytiens, A. & Christiaens, J. (2016). Female pathways to crime and prison: Challenging the (US) gendered pathways perspective. *European Journal of Criminology*, 13 (2), 195-213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370815608879>
- Owen, B., Wells, J. & Pollock, J. (2017). *In search of safety: Confronting inequality in women's imprisonment*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42 (5), 533-544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Peel, D. (2023). *Domestic violence and the death penalty in Uganda*. <https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/death-penalty-research-unit-blog/blog-post/2023/01/domestic-violence-and-death-penalty-uganda>
- Pelvin, H. (2019). The normal woman who kills: Representations of women's intimate partners homicide. *Feminist Criminology*, 14 (3), 349-370.
- Potter, H. (2015). *Intersectionality and criminology: Disrupting and revolutionizing studies of crime*. New York, NY, Routledge.

- Rugadya, M. (2010). *Women's land rights in Uganda: Status of implementation of policy and law on women's land rights for ECA*, ACGS Addis Ababa. Maastricht University.
- Scott, S., Geffner, R., Stolberg, R. & Sirikantraporn, S. (2023). Common characteristics of women who kill in the context of abuse: a content analysis of case files. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 32 (1-2), 15-33.
- Siegel, J. A. & Williams, M. (2003). The relationship between child sexual abuse and female delinquency and crime: A prospective study. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40 (1), 71-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427802239254>
- Spencer, C .M & Stith, S.M. (2020). Risk factors for male perpetration and female victimization of intimate partner homicide. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(3) 527-540. <https://doi.org/10.1177/152483801878110>
- Ssemogerere, G. N. (2011). *Cultural and social situation of the family today an African perspective with particular reference to Uganda* (Anthropological, legislative and political aspects). Round table presentation to the 20th plenary assembly of the pontifical council for the family Rome, Italy 9th November - 1st December 2011.
- Stanojoska, A. (2023). The feminist pathways perspective: The pathways to crime of female murderers in the Republic of North Macedonia. In Stanojoska, A., Dimovski, D. & Maksimova, E. (eds) *The Handbook on Female Criminality in the Former Yugoslav Countries*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27628-6\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27628-6_4)
- Stevens, D. J. (1999). Interviews with women convicted of murder: Battered women syndrome revisited. *International Review of Victimology*, 6, 117-135.
- Theeuwen, A., Duplat, V., Wickert, C. & Tjemkes, B. (2021). How do women overcome gender inequality by forming small-scale cooperatives? The case of the agricultural sector in Uganda. *Sustainability*, 13 (4), 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041797>
- Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, L. (1995). *Women's violent crime in Uganda. More sinned against than sinning*. Kampala, Fountain Publishers.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2019). *Statistical abstract*. Kampala, Uganda.

- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. & ICF. (2017). *Uganda demographic and health survey 2016: key indicators report*. Kampala, Uganda, UBOS and Rockville, Maryland, USA, UBOS and ICF.
- Ventura, M., Di Napoli, A., Petrelli, A., Pappagallo, M., Concetta Mirisola, C. & Frova, L. (2022). Male and female differences in homicide mortality. Results of an Italian longitudinal study, 2012-2018 *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10(9),1-9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.919335>
- Voce, I. & Bricknell, S. (2020). *Female perpetrated intimate partner homicide: Indigenous and non-indigenous offenders*. Statistical Report: Australian Institute of Criminology, <https://aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr20>
- Walker, L. E., Temares, A. E., Diaz, B. N. & Shapiro, D. L. (2023). women who kill, intimate partner violence, and forensic psychology. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 32 (1-2), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2023.2166440>
- Wattanaporn, K. & Holtfreter, K. (2014). The impact of feminist pathways research on gender-responsive policy and practice. *Feminist Criminology*, 9 (3), 191-207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851135194>
- Yang, H.Y., Yang, J. E. & Shin, Y. S. (2022). A phenomenological study of nurses' experience in caring for COVID-19 patients. *International Journal Environmental Research and Public Health*, 219 (5), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052924>
- Yeo, A., Legard, R., Keegan, J., Ward, K., Nicholls, C. M. & Lewis, J. (2014). In-depth interviews. In Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M. & Ormston, R (Eds), *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Sage Publications Ltd, pp.178-210.