

**CRIMINOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE
OFFENDERS WHO COMMIT SEXUAL CRIMES AGAINST
CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEANIZATION
OF UKRAINE'S LEGAL POLICY**

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In the current context of societal transformation and the European integration process in Ukraine, the adaptation of national legal policy to European Union standards in the sphere of child protection is particularly relevant.

One of the most pressing and debated issues related to unlawful behavior against minors is sexual criminal offenses. Traditionally, such offenses have been predominantly associated with men; however, statistical data and scholarly research indicate that women are increasingly becoming perpetrators of these crimes. This development significantly complicates the prevention, detection, and mitigation of such offenses.

The criminological profile of women who commit sexual criminal offenses against minors is the subject of interdisciplinary study, encompassing criminology, psychology, forensic medicine, psychiatry, and selected social sciences. In the context of harmonizing Ukrainian legislation with the EU acquis, the implementation of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to studying the offender's personality is of particular importance. Such an approach should take into account not only legal aspects but also socio-demographic, psychological, and behavioral characteristics. European standards in the field of child protection emphasize the need to consider gender-specific aspects of criminality, overcome social stereotypes, and enhance the effectiveness of early risk detection mechanisms.

In light of the above, it is particularly relevant to develop a criminological profile of women who commit sexual offenses against children, as this allows for a deeper understanding of the determinants of their unlawful behavior and contributes to the improvement of national legal policy in accordance with European approaches.

An integral part of overall criminality is female criminality, which occurs significantly less frequently than male criminality. Recent criminological studies indicate that women constitute approximately 11–12% of all convicted

offenders in recent years, reflecting certain stability in the gender structure of crime in Ukraine. The most common offenses committed by women are property crimes (e.g., theft) and crimes related to the illegal circulation of narcotic substances¹.

Criminological analysis of various aspects of female criminality demonstrates that it exhibits specific patterns influenced not only by socio-economic conditions but also by traditional gender roles and social expectations.

Pedophilia, defined as a sexual interest in children, and the corresponding criminal offenses against minors represent one of the most severe categories of criminal behavior. According to Ukrainian studies, sexual violence is typically perpetrated by men (96.3%), while women account for 3.7% of cases².

According to European researchers, the study of female offenders of this type, as well as the women themselves, is particularly challenging because it remains a social taboo. Even professionals in healthcare or justice systems often respond inadequately to cases of child sexual abuse committed by women³. In many cases, reports by minors regarding inappropriate sexual actions by women are dismissed as childish fantasies or met with distrust. As a result, the offenders gain the opportunity to approach potential victims without obstruction and establish contact with them.

According to sample-based studies, the average age of female offenders ranges from 26 to 36 years⁴. For example, researcher K. Faller reports a sample of 40 individuals with an average age of 26,1 years⁵. He also reports another sample of 72 female offenders with an average age of 28 years⁶.

International studies indicate that female offenders often have a low socio-economic status and limited professional qualifications⁷. These women are predominantly socially vulnerable, often have a low level of material resources, and typically work in fields involving children.

¹ Khashev V., Chorna A. (2021). Some issues of criminological characteristics of female crime in Ukraine. *Scientific Bulletin of Dnipropetrovsk State University of Internal Affairs*, Special Issue 1 (113), 130–136. URL: <https://er.dpuv.edu.ua/bitstream/123456789/15676/1/24.pdf>

² Romantsova, S. V. (2018). *Prevention of sexual violence against children in Ukraine* (PhD dissertation in Law). Lviv, 94.

³ Mellor D., Deering R. (2010). Professional response and attitudes toward female-perpetrated child sexual abuse. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 16, 415–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160902776850>

⁴ Faller K. C. (1995). A clinical sample of women who have sexually abused children. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 4, 13–30. https://doi.org/10.1300/J070v04n03_02

⁵ Faller K. C. (1987). Women who sexually abuse children. *Violence and Victims*, 2(4), 263–276. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.2.4.263>

⁶ Faller K. C. (1995).

⁷ Nathan P., Ward T. (2001). Females who sexually abuse children. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 8, 44–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13218710109525003>

As a rule, female sexual offenders find their victims within their immediate social circle. They are often the victims' caregivers, such as mothers, other relatives, or **childcare providers**⁸. According to research by W. Berner, P. Briken, and A. Hill, more than 50% of female offenders had themselves experienced sexual and/or physical abuse in the past⁹.

This category of individuals is characterized by mental health issues, including substance abuse, as well as personality disorders (predominantly of passive and/or dependent types), often accompanied by low self-esteem¹⁰.

When constructing a psychological profile of this category of female offenders, emotional instability and high impulsivity are observed, along with low or absent empathy and a tendency toward manipulation. This profile aligns with findings on the general psychological characteristics of women who commit violent crimes, which more frequently include anxiety, depression, and heightened stress reactivity. Researchers also note a low level of self-regulation among these individuals. In adulthood, most of these women either do not have stable intimate relationships or experience violence within relationships.

Thus, the criminological profile of women who commit sexual offenses against children indicates that this phenomenon is neither random nor isolated, but represents a specific, largely latent component of sexual criminality. Its insufficient representation in criminological research highlights the need to reconsider traditional approaches to analyzing the offender's personality and to take into account gender-specific aspects of illegal behavior.

Such offenses most often occur within the child's immediate social environment, where the woman serves as a mother, relative, guardian, or caregiver. The combination of trust, control, and emotional attachment creates favorable conditions for the perpetration of unlawful behavior, which typically unfolds gradually, involves the development of psychological dependence in the victim, and relies on manipulative forms of influence rather than overt violence.

Thus, the further development of criminological research on female sexual offending should be carried out in accordance with European standards, which entails the improvement of criminal law policy, the expansion of interagency cooperation, the implementation of modern early risk detection mechanisms, and the development of effective prevention strategies focused on safeguarding the best interests of the child.

⁸ Faller K. C. (1995).

⁹ Berner W., Briken P., Hill A. (2009). Female sexual offenders. In: Saleh F. M. et al. (eds.). *Sex offenders*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Hunter J. A., Mathews R. (1997). Sexual deviance in females. In: Laws D. R., O'Donohue W. T. (eds.). *Sexual deviance*. New York: Guilford Press, 465–480.