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Diederiks, Herman

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# Quality and Quantity in Historical Research in Criminality and Criminal Justice: The Case of Leiden in the 17th and 18th Centuries

#### Herman Diederiks\*

Abstract: The town of Leiden during the 17th century was one of the leading industrial towns in Europe. Around 1670 it had about 72,000 inhabitants of which half were employed in the textile industry. Around 1800 this population had dropped under the level of 30,000. For the analysis of the practice of criminal justice we have quantified and analysed a complete series of about 5,200 criminal sentences for the years 1601 to 1811. In this contribution the following theoretical points of departure are tested: the theory of the »modernisation« of crime patterns (the change from violence to property crime); the pacification or civilisation theory (criminal violence and violence as a means of punishment diminish as the process of state formation develops); and the theory that crime patterns are a reaction to economic developments. One of the conclusions of the article is that during the period of economic and demographic expansion in the 17th century a pattern of criminality of adjustment could be found implying more violence. whereas during the period of decay in the 18th century, economic distress might have determined criminal behaviour.

In this essay 1 would like to present some quantitative findings in regard to the pattern of criminality and criminal justice in a large industrial town in the Dutch Republic during the 17th and 18th centuries and to discuss the results of this historical research in regard to some theoretical issues related to the qualitative approach. In general we may say that the quantitative approach has taught us much about the development of crime patterns and the reactions of the authorities and society at large that was

<sup>\*</sup> Address all communications to Herman Diederiks, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Leiden, Doelensteeg 16, 2311 VL Leiden, The Netherlands.

hidden until now under layers of anecdotical evidenced 1) In regard to the Dutch Republic in the period of the 17th and 18th centuries a great number of studies containing quantitative data have been produced and analysed during the last decade. These studies always concern local jurisdictions largely because that was the way the judicial system was organised and subsequently the archival material was formed.(2)

In this paper I will analyse the judicial data for the town of Leiden. These data have been collected and published in a standardised format enabling computerisation.(3) More than 5000 sentences are brought forward by the Leiden court in the 17th and 18th centuries and these sentences concern the more serious crimes. The smaller offenses were dealt with by the bailiff on his own. In this paper these 'small' criminality will be left out of consideration.

#### Theoretical Observations

The models or general developments in criminality and criminal justice are more or less set on a national scale assuming that averages or modal figures represent the overall picture. These general developments are described among others as the modernisation of crime patterns, (4) the pacification of daily life under the influence of state formation, (5) and the development of the criminal justice system into an instrument of discipline used by the dominant classes to maintain their position.(6) The general pacification is supposed also to have influenced the ideas about punishment. The government's need to demonstrate publicly their power by public executions decreased and corporal inflictions of pain became disgusting for the public at large as well as for the elites in power. (7) These ' general processes are supposed to have followed a linear pattern from early to modern times, from a violent to a pacified society, from an undisciplined towards a disciplined society, and from a pattern of punishment by public executions implying infliction of physical, corporal pain to the introduction of the prison. Wider theoretical concepts include a prolétarisation involving 'survival strategies of the poor' and these strategies imply criminal behaviour.(8) The problem with these general, overall long-term conceptualisations is in their operationalisation, especially in the cases where the judicial system was locally organised. This was the case in all jurisdictions of the Dutch Republic and also for Leiden.(9) Looking for a model or theoretical approach we have to take the local situation and the local developments into our consideration. What happened in Leiden during the 17th and 18th centuries in regard of the population, the economy and the social and political structure? Which relationship existed between the local developments in Leiden and the more general, national economic, political and social changes? Answers to these questions provide the general framework for our description of the development of criminality and its repression.

In very general terms the economy in Leiden during the 17th and 18th centuries can be characterised as an economy dominated by one branch of industry - the textile industry - and this economy was organised in a capitalist way. The opposition of capital and labour was clearly present. The role of the city government was not onesided against the workers and with the entrepreneurs. The city fathers were aware of the fact that skilled labour was important for the city.(10) Especially during the 18th century when textile production declined dramatically and great numbers of skilled textile workers emigrated, every short recovery of the textile trade engendered a problem of demand for skilled labour.

On the national scale the modern character of Dutch society has to be taken into consideration. The town of Leiden was part of an urban system with the international metropolis of Amsterdam at the top of the hierarchy and several specialised industrial towns in its vicinity.(11) In Haarlem the linen bleaching industry was concentrated, in Delft pottery and in Gouda pipemaking. The (weak) central government had its residence in The Hague while during the 18th century Rotterdam started its growth as a harbour town in competition with the old metropolis Amsterdam. The specialised function of Leiden was the textile trade. The special role of the textile workers as determining the economic tide of the town of Leiden and reflecting that tide in their numbers and behaviour is the main subject of this paper. What were the crime patterns of male and female textile workers and how did the city authorities react to their criminal behaviour? Related questions are: did the textile workers have a different pattern of criminality than other citizens and did the city government react differently to the behaviour of the textile workers compared to the rest of the 'criminal' population?

The very general trend of the textile industry and the reflection of this trend in numbers of the population was: a sharp increase of production and population during the 17th century up to 1672, then a slow decline accelerating in the 1730's and 1740's. While Leiden had in 1672 an estimated population of 72.000, this number dropped to 37.000 in the middle of the 18th century and to under 30.000 in the beginning of the 19th century.(12) Given the well established fact that the economic and social structure of Leiden was a capitalistic one, and that the workers can be considered to have been proletarianized, can we say that there was a 'criminal class' of textile workers.(13) When we consider the dramatic decline of textile production that took place over these years, what kind of 'criminal' reaction can we expect of the impoverished population? Did the pattern of criminality change under the influence of the overall urban

changes? Analysis of labour conflicts informs us about an absence of wage problems leading up to large scale protest during the second half of the 18th century.(14) Can we expect reactions of another kind, e.g. 'survival strategies'? We may also take into our consideration the more general processes of decrease of violent crime and increase of property crime (the modernisation of the crime pattern). Answers to these questions lead us also to the problem of the 'pacification' of daily life in Leiden.

In order to place the data for the criminality of textile workers in perspective, we have to provide some general information on the proportion of the employed population working in that sector and changes in that took place in that part of the workforce. Around 1654, 37,650 men and women of a total population of about 70,000 were employed in the textile industry in Leiden.(15) While in the mid 17th century also more than half of the population was dependent on that sector, around 1750 this share had fallen to a third of all households.(16) Very roughly we can say that from 1650 up to 1750 there was a decrease of twenty percent. Analyzing the criminality of textile workers and the share of those workers in the total of sentenced persons, the diminishing number of those workers in general certainly has to be taken into consideration.

# The Criminal Sentences, 1601-1811

Before turning to more specific questions we have to turn to the development of criminality, measured by the number of sentences per year. Graph one provides the relative figures, i.e. per 10,000 inhabitants, for the period 1601-1811. The total number of 5200 sentences is unevenly distributed over the more than two centuries. As in the 17th as well in the 18th century the 25 years directly after the mid-century shows a relative low tide. Economic and political problems chase the relative figures to the highest score for the whole period under consideration during the first decade of the 19th century. The very heyday of the textile production - 1650-1675 - implied a low tide in criminal sentences. We may assume that the high figures for the first half of the 17th century have to be linked to the very rapid expansion of the textile industry and to the overall of the population.

The decline of the textile branch brought first of all an increase and later on a stability and even decline of the relative figures. It might be possible that emigration during the second quarter of the 18th century is related to the lowest score for the whole period during the years 1751-1775. After the mid -18th century, we see rising prices, especially of food, and we can relate this development to the rise of the crime figures after 1775. But, also the political disputes during the last two decades of the 18th century may have contributed to a higher score.(17)

In graph two the absolute figures are presented of persons sentenced in Leiden for the period from 1601 till 1811 divided into textile workers and non-textile workers. The latter category was in every period in absolute figures always greater. As has been said before around 1650 half of the Leiden population was employed in the textile industry, while around 1750 a third of the households were directly involved in textiles. Taking the absolute figures in graph two the expected share of sentences in regard of textile workers is only less then a third during the heyday of textile production - 1651-1700 - and in the years of real stagnation at the beginning of the 19th century.(18) The first half of the 17th century saw an over-representation of textile workers in the criminal records, during that period the textile workers did 'better' than the rest of the population. But after 1700 the share of the textile workers in the total population decreased, but it rose in regard to the 'criminal' textile workers until it was over half of all condemned persons. After 1775 again a decline of textile workers share started to end up under a third during the first decade of the 19th century. So, during half of the period under consideration the textile workers were more 'criminal' than the rest of the population. We will come back to this problem in our discussion of the sex ratio and the different types of crime.

# Gender (19)

In the textile branch a great number of female heads of households we reemployed as well as young girls and other dependent female personnel. Of all heads of households between 1749 and 1779, 2230 were female and of these 2230 (or 54.3) percent were employed in the textile industry. 813 of them were spinners, 109 were knitters and all had very small households or were living on their own. Of the spinners living without husband, 449 had one or more children and 364 were living alone.(20) In the census of 1808 we find a considerable decrease of the female share within the textile trade; by that time only 31.6 percent of the employed female workforce had a job in the textile branch.

Looking at graph three which presents the proportion of women per 100 men in the sentence books divided for textile and non-textile delinquents, we see that the non-textile delinquents had a rather stable sex ratio: around 50 women per 100 men. In the ratio for the sentenced textileworkers there was certainly a development of 'féminisation'. During most of the 18th century the sex-ratio was above 100, suggesting that impoverished spinners and other female workers turned to 'criminality' to solve their economic problems. We will come back to this problem, sometimes mentioned as 'survival strategies', in the section dealing with specific cri-

mes. We saw that the share of female workers dropped during the second half of the 18th century. The greater role of female textile workers in the criminal sentences implied indeed a much greater criminality of women registered as spinner.

First we will consider the problem of native and foreign born delinquents and relate the data to their occupations.(21) In graph four the percentages of male and female spinners and weavers are presented for those that were born in Leiden.

The general trend for all three categories is evident: more and more the delinquents appearing before the court of Leiden were natives. During the 17th century less than half of the sentenced textile workers were not born in Leiden, whereas the delinquents with an occupation in the textile trade became more and more native. There are, however differences between the three groups distinguished within the total group of textile workers. Comparison of the weavers, spinners and spinsters teaches us that until the beginning of the 18th century the cradle of the condemned weavers stood more often outside Leiden then that of spinners and spinsters. During the same period the spinsters were more often born in Leiden. Unfortunately we do not have data concerning the geographical origin of all textile workers. So we are not able to determine how well the growing share of condemned textile workers of native origin coincideds with that of all textile workers. We know that immigration dropped considerably after the end of the 17th century and even that in some periods there was a great emigration of textile workers. Such years were 1719, 1728/29 and 1737.(22) So the pattern of criminality as far as textile workers were involved became more 'feminine' and more 'local'.

Comparing the figures of the condemned textile workers with those of all condemned for the 18th century in general the textile workers were definitely more native. For the periods 1701-1725, 1726-1750, 1751-1775 and 1776= 1800 respectively, 47, 56, 66 and 78 percent of all delinquents were born in Leiden and during the first decade of the 19th century 60.(23)

# Some Categories of Crime

One of the assumptions for long-term developments in crime patterns concerns the trend from violent crimes towards crimes against property. This phenomenon has been called the modernisation of the crime pattern. (24) Graph five presents the absolute figures of male delinquents sentenced for homicide distinguished for textile and non textile workers. After 1750, there were no non-textile workers condemned for homicide in Leiden while the textile workers produced some cases. In general the textile workers were a bit more violent, measured on the basis of sentences containing homicide- compared to the non-textile delinquents.

In total, of all the sentences against textile workers in the period 1601-1811, 6.8 percent concerned homicide against 5.4 percent for the rest of the male delinquents. For women these percentages are respectively 1 and 0.5. So the female textile workers were double as violent as the others. But it needs to be kept in mind that of the ten cases of murder in Leiden committed by women, eight concerned infanticide.

To test the theory of the modernisation of crime we need to take also the figures for other forms of violent behaviour into consideration. Graph six enables us to compare the relative figures of sentences for less violent criminality amongst male textile workers and non-textile workers. For the whole period the shares of textile workers were more or less even: 8.2 percent for the textile workers and 8.5 percent for the others of the total numbers of crimes committed by both categories. We have noted that only during the greatest expansion of the textile industry the workers made up half of the population. During the other periods the share of textile workers of the total population was under this half. So, in general, we may conclude that as far as assault is concerned the textile workers were more violent. Looking at the different periods of 25 years, great differences can be pointed out. From 1625 until the middle of the 18th century the textile workers were much more sentenced for daily aggression than non-textile workers. After 1750 the aggression of the textile workers diminished and is totally absent in the sentence books for the first decade of the 19th century. In general we can say that textile workers and the others produced the same trend over the period of two hundred years. There was an increase of the share of daily aggression during the 17th century, then a decline followed until the mid-18th century which was followed by an increase until the end of the period.

During the first decade of the 19th century lesser violence did not lead to a sentence for textile workers. The aggression of the 17th century can be characterised as 'expansion' aggression while the aggression during the second half of the 18th century can be considered as 'crisis aggression', but the textile workers didn't participate in that. For an explanation of this phenomenon we might recall the role of the poor relief and the supervision of the ward masters. In Leiden there were 28 wards and the masters had among other duties the task of supervising poor relief.(25) Misbehaviour was a ground for being refused and the impoverishment of the textile workers may not have lead to a 'crisis aggression', but rather to more discipline. This observation is confirmed by the already mentioned absence of labour conflicts after 1750 involving textile workers. Many of these conflicts were settled in the pubs or inns of Leiden and a great amount of beer was drunk at those occasions with always a danger of violence breaking out.(26) In general the figures concerning lesser violence do not confirm the modernisation theory. In that view there would have be a linear decrease of violence. We have established two kinds of lesser violence: that connected to expansion and growth to be described as adjustment violence and that connected to economic problems which can be seen as crisis violence. The first was found during the 17th and the latter during the second half of the 18th century. So, in that sense there was no modernisation of crime. What about the other aspect of that theory, the growth of property crime?

## Property and Sexual Crimes

Comparing the share of property crime in the 17th with that during the 18th century, we see a decrease from 55 percent to 41 percent. But also the general level of violence lowered from 35 percent to 26 percent. In the 18th century there was, however, an increase of 'moral crimes', mainly prostitution. The share of persons condemned for a moral offense rose in the 18th century to 33 percent from only 10 percent in the preceding century.(27) Limiting ourselves to the property crimes of women in Leiden and comparing the share of this type of crime within the group of female textile workers and the others, we find in graph seven that the share of property crimes of female textile workers was greater in the period from 1650 until 1725 and during the first decade of the 19th century. The low figures in graph seven neither confirms the modernisation theory of criminality, nor provides indications for an existence of survival strategies. The first theory claims to predict an increase of property crime versus a decline of violent crime and according to the second theory especially small theft would increase. What kind of crimes did take the role of property crimes in the period of low tide of property crimes of the female textile workers? Graph eight provides the answer: during a low tide of property crimes the spinsters were sentenced for sexual crimes -implying mostly prostitution. We have found an increase of the participation of female textile workers in criminality during the second half of the 18th century and this increase was not due to more property crimes but, to sexual crimes.

Many sentences dealt with sexual 'crime'. Men and women were punished for adultery, prostitution and also homosexuality. Graph eight presents the development of the shares of sexual crime committed by women, specified for textile and non textile female workers. The general economic decline after 1675 certainly did raise the share of all women within and outside the textile trade. After 1775 women outside the textile trade showed higher shares than the spinsters. Most of the sexual crimes concerned prostitution and we can see that the decline of the textile trade during most of the 18th century pressed women in Leiden into prostitution, thus providing evidence for the existence of 'survival strategy'.

This part of the pattern of criminality certainly points in the direction of the existence of illlegal 'survival strategies' of spinsters and other hardly pressed women of Leiden. Of forty prostitutes and procuresses asked in the period 1760-1800 for their motives, a quarter answered that they entered prostitution for economic reasons. Prostitution in Leiden had apparently not developed into a professional, economic sector. This is an indication that we here are dealing with survival strategies.(28)

#### **Punishment**

In this article some traditional means of punishment will be briefly introduced. Can we assume that changes in the pattern of punishment are part of the general process pointed at before in this paper? Or, do we have to think of other developments in regard to changes in the way criminals were punished? One may consider the punishment of banishment as a very traditional penalty, becoming obsolete as state formation created wider and more strict frontiers. Usually banishment was combined with whipping, or a person would be banished after a prison penalty. Anyhow the sentence of banishment provided the bailiff or his assistants a motive to arrest someone returning too early to the town he or she was banished from. Breaking the ban was a new crime. When we find many of such crimes one may assume that the banished person had been unable to build up a new life outside his of her home town or that his or her roots were too strong in the home town. Is there a pattern to discover in the development of the use of this punishment in Leiden and are there differences in regard to textile and non textile workers?

Breaking the ban was in the series of sentences for Leiden in the 17th and 18th century often a cause for another banishment, or even harsher penalties. Banning a delinquent provided the authorities an instrument to get hold of somebody on a too early return. For the 17th and 18th century 12.3 percent of the textile workers were sentenced because of such a too early return after a sentence containing a banishment. Outside the textile trade, 9.6 percent of the male delinquents were sentenced for breaking the ban. So, we may assume that the textile workers had more roots in the urban community than other male delinquents, and this was especially the case during the first half of the 18th century. In graph 9 the percentage for women inside and outside the textile industry who were sentenced for breaking the ban are presented. Very high percentages of female textile workers are found in the periods 1626-1650 and 1776-1811. During the first period the textile industry was still booming and there might have been a positive pull of the economic situation, while during the period after 1776 it might have been the poorrelief that might driven back to Leiden convicted spinsters. Returning to Leiden during the period after 1776 might also have been due to the fact that more and more delinquents were born in Leiden.(29)

# The Punishments of Whipping and Exposure

The two main characteristics of punishment during the Ancien Regime were that punishment was public and physical. An increase of the use of punishment by imprisonment may indicate an aspect of the process of modernisation.30) The traditional features are of course linked up to the local character of the communities and of the social control. Deviant behaviour was dealt with in front of the local populace. Public whipping was one example. Graph ten presents the relative figures for the whipping of male spinners and weavers and for other male delinquents. In general we may conclude that spinners and weavers were more often sentenced to be whipped than other male 'criminals'; only during the period 1751-1775 was there an absence of spinners and a low percentage of weavers being punished in that way. We can only guess the reason why the authorities dealt with textile workers much more harshly than with the other male delinquents. One guess could be that the textile workers constituted a closed, rather homogeneous group and in front of this group the judges were eager to show their judicial power. One may wonder whether the group of sentenced persons from outside the textile trade was less proletarianized? This might have have been possible, but the differences must have been minimal. The whole group of condemned persons belonged for the most part to the urban proletariat. On the basis of the sentence registers this low class status of the delinquents can not be derived as such. We only know that the group of spinners and weavers were rather homogeneous and belonged to the lower strata. The same phenomenon might be seen with female delinquents punished with public exposure, (see graphs 11 and 12) In general the use of exposure diminished during the period under consideration, but female textile workers during most of that period had a greater chance to get that penalty than non textile female workers. The spinners and weavers were only punished with exposure up to 1725; after that time they disappeared from the lists with this penalty although we have seen them getting the very dishonouring punishment of public whipping until the very end of the period of study, 1811. There were great differences between male and female delinquents in respect to the penalty of exposure. While about 10 percent of the women got this penalty, the highest figure for men was 6.5 percent of the spinners during the period 1626-1650. During the period 1651-1675, more than 30 percent of the spinsters were punished by being put into the pillory.

#### Some Conclusions

What can we learn from this preliminary analysis of quantitative data concerning the textile town of Leiden during the 17th up into the 19th centuries? The relative criminality figures show a low tide in the middle of the 17th and of the 18th century. The first low tide might have been due to favourable economic conditions and the second to uncertainty, and dependence of the lower classes of the established ones because of poverty. The first half of the 17th century was characterised by an 'adjustment' criminality with many violent crimes. Around 1700 the end of the economic growth caused a second wave of high crime figures, whereas the poverty and political upheavals at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century caused a third wave of growing crime. During the more than two hundred years under consideration the group of delinquents employed in the textile trade became more female and more native. The growth of poverty during the second half of the 18th century is reflected in 'survival strategies', not as much in more property crimes as in more sexual crimes. The punishment of textile workers kept longer its traditional character; they were more likely to be whipped and especially the female textile workers were more publicly exposed. We have found on the local level traces of the procès of 'pacification': on one side lesser violence from below, and also less use of violence by the authorities although the textile workers profited later than other delinquents. The prolétarisation of large parts of the Leiden population, especially the textile workers is reflected in the 'survival strategies'. The prices of basic food stuffs increased since the middle of the 18th century and the textile trade was contracting. The pattern of criminality' certainly was determined by the unfavourable economic circumstances. The testing of the models of social change described as modernisation or pacification on the basis of the criminal sentence books is possible, but one has be warned that they only can provide part of the story.

#### Notes

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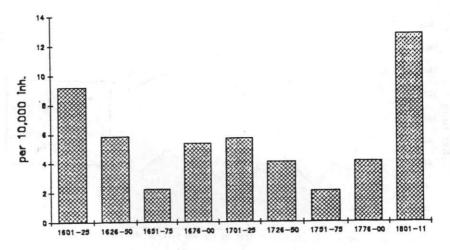
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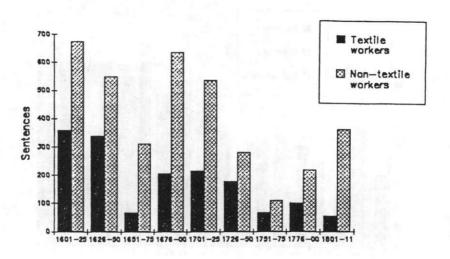
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- 21. H. Diederiks, »Stadt und Umland im Lichte der Herkunftorte der Kriminellen in Leiden im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert, « in H.K. Schulze, ed., Städtisches Um- und Hinterland in vorindustrieller Zeit (Köln/Wienk, 1985), 183-205.
- 22. CA. Davids, »De migratiebeweging in Leiden in de achttiende eeuw, « Armoede en Sociale Spanning, 148.
- 23. H.Diederiks, »Stadt und Umland, « 191.
- 24. Howard Zehr, Crime and the Development of Modern Society.

- 25. H.D. Tjalsma, »Een karakterisering van Leidwen in 1749,« in H.A. Diederiks, et.als, eds., Armoede en Sociale Spanning, 31-32.
- 26. Rudolf Dekker, »Arbeidsconflicten,« esp. 73.
- 27. H.Diederiks, »Stadt und Umland, « 197.
- 28. D.J. Noordam, »Uit armoede of door verleiding? de wereld van de Leidse prostitutuees in de achttiende eeuw,« in Armoede en Sociale Spanning, 112-113.
- 29. Els Kloek, Wie hij zij, man of wijz, vrouwengeschiedenis en de vroegmoderne tijd: drie Leidse studies (Hilversum, 1990), 142-145.
- 30. This is the main argument of Spierenburg in his The Spectacle of Suffering; See also Herman Franke, Twee eeuwen gevangen, misdaad en straf in Nederland (Utrecht, 1990).

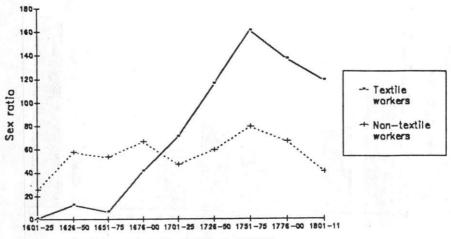
GRAPH J: Sentences per 10,000 inhabitants per 25-year periods in Leiden 1601-1811



GRAPH 2: Sentences in Leiden in absolute figures per 25-years of textile workers and non-textile workers

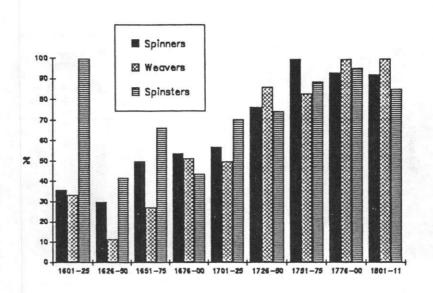


GRAPH 3: Sexratio: number of female delinquents per 100 male delinquents per 25-year period; textile and non-textile workers are distinguished

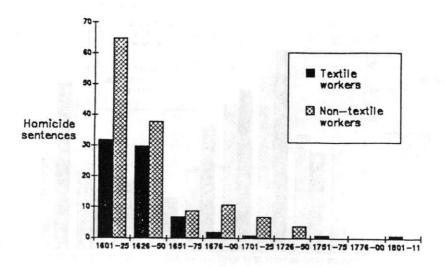


Non-textile delinquents: N = 2470(m); 1218(f): textile delinquents: N = 1094(m); 418(f):

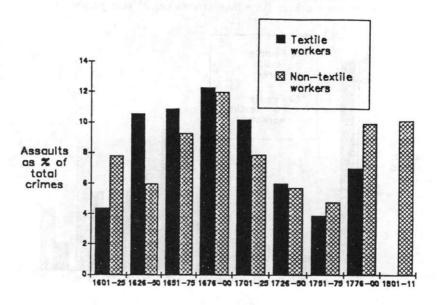
GRAPH 4: Percentage of spinners, weavers and spinsters in the criminal sentence books born in Leiden 1601-1811



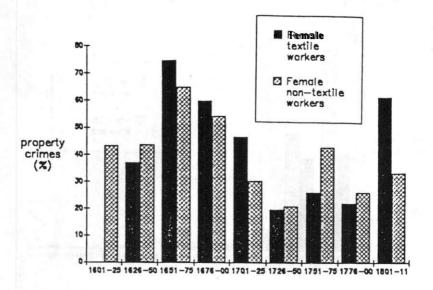
GRAPH 5: absolute figures of sentences for homicide in Leiden of textile and non-textile workers



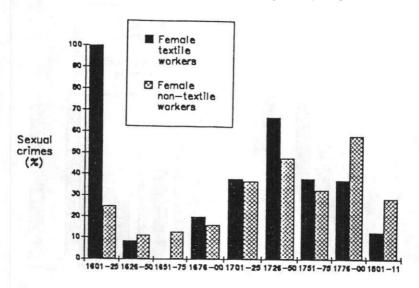
GRAPH 6: Percentage of assaults by textile and non-textile workers in Leiden 1601-1811; 100 = total number of crimes per 25 year period



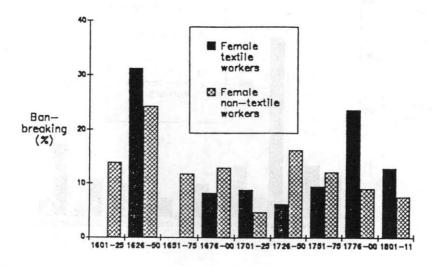
GRAPH 7: Share of property crimes of female textile workers and female non-textile workers; 100 = total number of crimes per 25 years



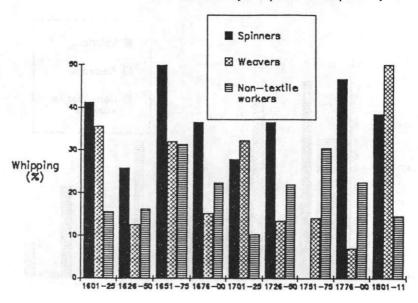
GRAPH 8: Percentage of sexual crimes of female textile workers and female non- textile workers 100= total crimes per 25 year period



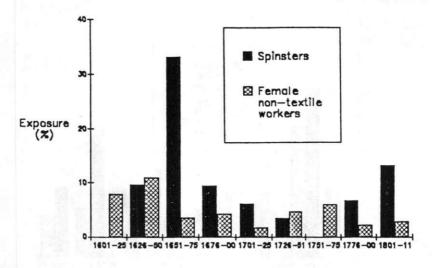
GRAPH 9: Share of the crime of breaking the ban by female non-textile workers and female textile workers in Leiden 1601-1811; 100\*total crimes per 25 years



GRAPH 10: Percentage of sentences with whipping for spinners, weavers and non-textile workers 100= all ways of punishment per 25 years



GRAPH 11: Share of sentences with exposure of spinsters and non-textile female delinquents 100 = all punishments per 25 years



GRAPH 12: Share of sentences with exposure for spinners, weavers and non textile workers 100 = total punishments per 25 years

