

Life Course Criminology

Life Course Approach

- Age distribution of crime is not invariant
- Age has an indirect effect on crime
- Age is correlated with important events or factors, which are highly related to crime
- No matter what age a person's crime peaks at, they all decrease with age

Important Terms

- **Onset**, (age of first offending) **frequency** (amount of offending) and **desistance** (age at which offending stopped) of crime
 - **Persisters**- there is no age of desistance; chronic offenders, commit for basically their entire life
- People and events change over the life course
 - **Transitions** (life events), **turning points** (change in the life course), **trajectories** (pathway of development (long))
- Context of behavior over time
 - Qualitative and quantitative

Compared to G&H's Claims

- Is criminal propensity set by age 8 (Gottfredson and Hirschi- self-control theory), ...or are later life transitions and processes important?
- If latter is true, what transitions and processes matter to adult offending?
- Does age have a direct influence on crime?
- If not, what is the influence of age on crime?

Warr's (1993) Age, Peers, and Delinquency

- Does age have a direct impact on crime?
- Age → Peers → Delinquency

Differential Association Theory

Warr examined whether there were age differences in...

1. Exposure to delinquent peers
2. Time spent with peers
3. Importance of delinquent peers
4. Person's commitment or loyalty to peers

- Found that age does not have an impact on delinquency once peer influence are controlled for
- Delinquency examples: marijuana use, cheating, petty theft, alcohol use

Findings:

- At age 11, 95% of persons report no delinquent peers
- At age 16, percentage dropped 40 points
- By age of 18, only 25% of peers were not delinquent

Laub and Sampson's (1993) Life Course Study of Criminal Offending:

- Separate from early childhood experiences, can a person become a criminal in adulthood?
- Quality of social bonds influences social control (especially informal controls), which explains the onset of, persistence of, and desistance from criminal behavior
- **Social capital:** resources gained through quality social relationships

The Study: Early Origins (1930s and 1940s)

- *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency: Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck 1950*
- Case control design
 - 500 delinquent males
 - 500 non-delinquents from the same low-income neighborhoods
- Matched on age, ethnicity, and IQ
 - 3 waves –ages 14, 25, and 31
 - Extensive data on boys, their families, early work, and educational, occupational, and relationship histories

Adult Social Capital- attachment to labor force and cohesive marriage

Turning Points:

- Positive (meaningful work)
- Negative: heavy drinking, job instability

Findings:

- Social capital and turning points are important concepts in understanding adult criminality
- Among the delinquents, those persons high on social capital, low criminal activity
- Among non-delinquents, those persons low on social capital, high crime activity (freer to commit deviant acts)

Key Concepts

- **Trajectories**
 - Sequences of roles/ experiences
- **Transitions in Roles**
 - Leaving home, starting work, becoming a parent
- **Turning Points**
 - Experiences associated with lasting shifts in trajectories

Life Course Approach

- Multiple traits, including social, psychological, and economic ones
- People change over the life course (dynamic)
- Events and turning points are age-graded such as family, job, peer-influenced behavior, military, marriage, school