



## Incarceration, education and transition from delinquency

Thomas G. Blomberg <sup>a,\*</sup>, William D. Bales <sup>a</sup>, Karen Mann <sup>a</sup>, Alex R. Piquero <sup>b</sup>, Richard A. Berk <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Florida State University, United States

<sup>b</sup> University of Texas at Dallas, United States

<sup>c</sup> University of Pennsylvania, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

Available online 14 May 2011

### ABSTRACT

*Purpose:* Much of what is known regarding the transition away from crime is limited to young adulthood and specific life events and samples of non-serious offenders comprised mainly of white males.

*Methods:* The current study assesses the potential links between educational achievement, post-release schooling, and re-arrest for a cohort of 4,147 incarcerated youths drawn from 115 Florida juvenile institutions and followed for two years post-release.

*Results:* Incarcerated youths with higher levels of educational achievement are more likely to return to school after release, and those youths who returned to and attended school regularly were less likely to be rearrested within 12 and 24 months. Moreover, among youths who were rearrested, those youth who attended school regularly following release were arrested for significantly less serious offenses compared to youths who did not attend school or attended less regularly.

*Conclusions:* The study concludes with discussion of the importance of educational achievement as an important turning point for juvenile offenders as they transition into young adulthood.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

During the past two decades, a series of studies have contributed to a body of literature that has come to be named Developmental/Life-Course criminology (Farrington, 2003). Emerging from these efforts has been a focus on life events occurring during young adulthood that may lead to transition away from criminal behavior. For example, several studies have found that marriage, military experience, and employment contribute to transitions away from crime among some young adults (King et al., 2007; Laub et al., 1998; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Piquero et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998). Although important, the knowledge base regarding the relationship between life events and persistence/desistance remains limited largely because of the focus on only a few, select life events and the effect of these life events in young adulthood, and the inclusion of mainly samples of non-serious offenders comprised mostly of white males. Also absent from these studies has been an explicit focus on identifying those adolescent life events and associated experiences that may lead to transition from delinquency among serious youthful offenders (Mulvey et al., 2004), a highly relevant policy group for which limited knowledge exists regarding the correlates of persistence/desistance (Laub & Sampson, 2001).

Sampson and Laub (1993) have led the more general theoretical and empirical effort regarding the importance of studying life events, and have recently identified certain life events associated with incarceration and post release that may lead to a reduction in subsequent delinquency and crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003). One such life event is educational achievement. Prior research has shown that educational success can lead to a decreased likelihood of delinquency (Arum & Beattie, 1999; Foley, 2001), that the process of disengagement from school can begin as early as first grade (Finn, 1989; Ensminger & Slusarick, 1992; Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001), and that high school dropout (a type of educational “turning point”) has negligible effects on subsequent delinquency, once selection due to stable unobservable variables is taken into consideration (Sweeten, Bushway, & Paternoster, 2009).

At the same time, studies linking life transitions to persistence/desistance from offending have not paid specific attention to the potentially important turning point associated with academic achievement generally (Natsuaki et al., 2008), and post release schooling in particular. Further, most studies exploring the relationship between academic achievement and delinquency/crime have relied on normative samples of non-serious offenders. The present study responds to these research voids by assessing the impact of educational achievement during incarceration, post-release schooling, and subsequent re-arrest. Moreover, it examines this association among a very policy-relevant group, serious youthful offenders, for whom little is known regarding the factors that are associated with

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: tblomberg@fsu.edu (T.G. Blomberg).

transitions from crime generally (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Mulvey et al., 2004), and for whom the link between educational achievement and offending has not been systematically studied.

In this regard, it is important to recognize that many serious-offending (and incarcerated) youths exhibit a number of education-related disabilities and histories of poor school achievement (Gottfredson, 2001; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Payne et al., 2009). Specifically, they are characterized by disproportionate learning, behavioral, and cognitive disabilities, as compared to their non-delinquent counterparts in public schools. Incarcerated youths are typically several years behind their age appropriate grade level and have records of frequent school suspensions, expulsions, or dropout (Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program, 2004). For example, Wang et al. (2005) found that incarcerated youths were significantly more likely to have lower grade point averages (GPAs), lower attendance rates, and more school disciplinary actions than were a matched group of public school students. Additionally, these authors found that incarcerated youths were less likely to be promoted to the next grade level as compared to public school students. Using a sample of nearly 10,000 incarcerated youths in Florida, further analysis revealed that 43% were identified as having a disability, compared to only 15% of the youths in the state's public schools (Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program, 2004).

Despite these disproportionate educational deficiencies and histories of poor school achievement, school may potentially serve as one of the more positive and influential institutions for incarcerated youths. Moreover, in most instances, incarcerated youths must attend school, and suspension and expulsion are not imposed for school disciplinary problems. Further, incarcerated youths cannot elect to drop out of school. Consequently, and because of mandatory school attendance, a number of incarcerated youths experience regular and sustained school attendance for the very first time. And because school attendance and participation can increase the likelihood for educational achievement for these youths, educational achievement can help spur stronger attachment and emotional bonds to conventional institutions and behaviors, thereby facilitating the transition from crime. In sum, incarcerated youths who experience educational achievement may be expected to develop stronger school attachment and see the benefits of education and, therefore, be more likely to return to and stay in school following release and be more likely to transition from delinquency. It is this pattern of relationships that has been neglected in the extant literature—especially among serious youthful offenders—and to which we focus on in the current study.

## Prior literature

### *Developmental/life-course criminology*

In large part, data-driven, descriptive accounts of criminal careers (Blumstein et al., 1986; Piquero et al., 2003; Tracy et al., 1990; Wolfgang et al., 1972) helped spur Developmental/Life-Course criminology, and with it recognition of the link between past and future offending (Nagin & Paternoster, 1991), the differences between general, developmental, and typological explanations of criminal behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Paternoster et al., 1997; Sampson & Laub, 1993), and the analysis of the correlates of critical criminal career dimensions including onset, persistence, and desistance (Smith et al., 1991; Smith & Brame, 1994; Piquero, 2000). More recently, persistence versus desistance in criminal careers has received considerable attention (Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003), with one fundamental question at the fore of the discussion: why do some juvenile delinquents persist in crime as adults, while others transition out of and desist from crime during young adulthood?

One frequently reported finding is persistence or continuity in juvenile delinquency to criminal activity into adulthood. A series of studies have found that problem children tend to become delinquent

adolescents and adult criminals (West & Farrington, 1977; Huessman et al., 1984; Wolfgang et al., 1987; Nagin & Paternoster, 1991). Yet, not all juvenile delinquents 'graduate' to adult offenders such that there is change in the nature and type of offending from adolescence to young adulthood. Studies report that certain life events such as marriage, employment, or military service can lead to transition away from prior criminal activity (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Farrington & West, 1995; Laub et al., 1998; McGloin et al., 2007; Piquero et al., 2002; Warr, 1998; Uggen, 2000).

Sampson and Laub (1993:153–178) have helped unpack the underlying mechanisms linking life events to persistence/desistance from crime by highlighting how marriage in particular contributes to the transition from crime. They contend that strong spousal attachment and associated close emotional bonds can lead to transition from previous patterns of criminal offending, and importantly that, regardless of the differences in individual backgrounds and criminal histories, married young adults are less likely to commit crimes because of the substantial investment they have made to their marriages (Laub et al., 1998; Sampson et al., 2006). Warr (1998) further situates the role of marriage in the transition from crime by examining how marriage leads to an alteration in previous patterns of peer relations which, in turn, contribute to a transition from crime.

Sampson and Laub (1993) recommended that further inquiries should focus on the identification and assessment of potential life events and experiences occurring during adolescence that may lead to transitions from delinquency and later crime. Additionally, Farrington (2003) noted that researchers should investigate various developmental pathways to help understand and predict the likely trajectories of juvenile to adult criminal careers that can guide more effective interventions for thwarting progression of criminal trajectories. Relevant to the current investigation, Laub and Sampson's (2003) long-term follow-up of the Boston-area delinquents identified several different examples of incarcerated youths' experiences that appeared to contribute to post-release transition from delinquency. The authors report that for some youths, transition from delinquency was shaped by the discipline, structure, and rewards for tasks well-performed while incarcerated. For other youths, incarceration provided a deterrent to post-release behavior. Yet, the effect of education for the delinquents incarcerated in the Lynam School on post-release persistence/desistance received virtually no discussion in their quantitative analysis or qualitative interviews, but there is ample evidence that academic failure/educational achievement and delinquency are related (Hawkins et al., 1998) and that educational success may serve as a turning point from persistence in crime and lead toward desistance from crime (Shover & Thompson, 1992).

### *Education and delinquency studies*

Only a few studies have investigated the role of educational achievement on subsequent delinquency/crime among incarcerated youths. Moreover, these studies have been restricted to a small number of juvenile institutions with small sample sizes, and have not examined the relationship between educational achievement, post release schooling, and re-arrest among incarcerated youth. For example, several studies report that youths who earn a GED or high school diploma during incarceration generally have lower rates of re-arrest as compared to those youths who do not (Ambrose & Lester, 1988; Brier, 1994). Other studies however, report that most youths do not graduate from high school or earn a GED while incarcerated, thereby leaving past crime trajectories relatively unaltered (Foley, 2001; Haberman & Quinn, 1986; Leblanc & Pfannenstiel, 1991). In one early study employing two cohorts that totaled more than 10,000 youth released from all residential facilities in Florida, findings showed that only 7% had earned a GED or high school diploma prior to their release (JJEEP, 2005). Therefore, it is likely that other measures beyond GED or high school graduation will be useful in

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات